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Burning Gabriel's Wings

Exploring the Soul's Movement towards God through the *Masnavi* of
Jalal al-Din Rumi

Henry Pearson Brefka

Religious Studies Senior Thesis
Skidmore College
May 10, 2017

I died to mineral, joined the realm of plants
I died to vegetable, joined animal
I died in the animal realm, became man
So why fear? When has dying made me less?
In turn again I'll die from human form
only to sprout an angel's head and wings
and then from angel-form I will ebb away
For "All things perish but the face of God"
And once I'm sacrificed from angel form
I'm what imagination can't contain.
So let me be naught! Naughtness, like an organ,
Sings to me: "We verily return to Him"¹

-Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi

¹ M 3: 3903-3908, translated by Franklin D. Lewis.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter I: The Author	8
Chapter II: The Text	22
Chapter III: Approaching God	37
Chapter IV: Annihilation and Subsistence	56
Chapter V: The Dropsical Lover	94
Conclusion	128
Bibliography	133
Appendices	136

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Introduction

The Qur'an is considered an eternal text, universally relevant, awaiting interpretation and reinterpretation. Its eternal nature is made all the more apparent through the ambiguity and multilayered meaning of the Arabic language, which affords every line applicability to multiple areas of thought, lived reality, and the attributes of God. Constant return to the Qur'an as a divine text allows for greater insight into not only the nature of the human self but also to the Universal Reality of God. Therefore, when Mawlana Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi's *Masnawi* is called the Qur'an in Persian, the full weight of that statement becomes apparent.

Born in Balkh, present day Afghanistan, on September 30, 1207, Mawlana Khodavandgar Jalal al-Din Mohammad b. Mohammad al-Balki al-Rumi² would grow to become one of the most influential Persian writers throughout history. His writings would live on past his death, to be translated into English, German, Italian, and countless other languages. In the United States, Coleman Barks has played an instrumental role in exposing English audiences to Rumi. Due in large part to Coleman Barks' blank verse interpretations of English translations of Rumi's writing, Rumi has become one of the bestselling poets in the United States. While these translations at times reflect the translator more than Rumi, Mawlana's ability to speak to the depths of the human condition with all its suffering and longing, joy and pain, remain the same. Even now, nine centuries later, Rumi's writing is still disseminated throughout the world because

² See Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2000), pages 9 and 10 for more information on Rumi's name. Rumi, as he will be referred to throughout this paper, is a toponym referring to *Rum*, or Rome and greater Anatolia. Muhammad was his given name at birth, a direct reference to the Prophet Muhammad, and his father gifted him the title of Jalal al-Din, or "The Splendor of the Faith." Mawlana, in its various forms, is a reference to Rumi and means "Our Master." Finally, al-Balkhi is a reference to the area of Balkh, where Rumi was born. As with many great writers, the West utilizes a simplified version of his name, which is perfectly acceptable so long as the entirety of his name is known. Rumi's name contains within it direct references to one of the most influential aspects of his identity: his Muslim faith.

of its ability to speak when other words fail, to articulate the elusive and often complex feelings that we cannot voice.

Beyond the accessibility of his writing, however, lurks a complex, nuanced Islamic theology brimming with Qur'anic commentary and reference, a synthesis of previous Muslim scholars, and Rumi's own mystic intimations. The mystical and religious aspects of Rumi's writing will be the primary focus of this paper, specifically analyzing the steps of the soul along the path towards union with God. Along the way, we will explore the structure of the *Masnavi*, purity of spirit, and annihilation and subsistence in God. My thesis will culminate with an analysis of a section of Rumi's story, "The Dropsical Lover," which can be read as a microcosmic expression of the soul's movement towards God. Drawing upon the paradox of union with God, Rumi consciously utilizes paradox as a rhetorical device within the *Masnavi* to convey the numinous experience of union to the reader. Rather than attempt to resolve the paradox of union with a timeless and all-encompassing Divine, Rumi expands upon it experientially in order to draw his readers into that paradox, thus directing them towards union.

The scholarly contributions of William C. Chittick, Annemarie Schimmel, Franklin D. Lewis, Rudolf Otto, Robert Orsi, and Michael Sells are invaluable to my analysis of Rumi. In order to read Rumi in English, I rely on both Robert Nicholson and Jawid Mojaddedi's translations of Rumi's *Masnavi*. Chittick, Schimmel, and Lewis are renowned within the field of Rumi studies, and are required reading for any serious student of Rumi. Chittick focuses primarily on the more philosophical aspects of Rumi's theology, fleshing out the intricacies of theory, practice, and attainment to God. To understand general principles of Rumi's theological world, I draw heavily on Chittick's book *The Sufi Path of Love*. Acting as a steady foundation upon which we may find our bearings, Chittick provides context for the philosophical concepts

within Rumi's *Masnavi*, such as *tawhīd*, or the unity of being of God, the attributes of God, and the role of humanity in relation to God. *The Sufi Path of Love* also acts as an index of important theological concepts. Chittick organizes his book into three philosophical categories, "Theory," "Practice," and "Attainment to God," balancing his own explanations with primary source citations of Rumi's works. While Chittick's writing is steeped in a deep understanding of medieval philosophy, Schimmel's writing is more personal and poetical. Schimmel's reader becomes immediately aware of the intimacy with which she approaches Rumi. Made possible only through lifelong devotion, Schimmel's words ring with his poetry and her analysis is both deeply moving and academically sharp. Schimmel's book, *The Triumphal Sun*, focuses on Rumi's imagery and theology, which aids in our analysis of images commonly employed by Rumi, like the moth and the candle that signifies the human soul's inclination towards God. Unlike Chittick who describes an aspect of Rumi's theology and then provides an extensive list of quotations plucked from sections of Rumi's writing, Schimmel integrates Rumi's writing into her discussion of Rumi's theology. Additionally, her writing is interspersed with references to Rumi's writing, either in the form of direct quotations or her own poetical allusions to specific verses.

While Schimmel and Chittick focus on the theology, philosophy, and imagery of Rumi's writing, Lewis provides a thorough and detailed background of Rumi. As a scholar of Persian literature, Lewis adds new translations of selected poems and verses that, for non-Persian readers, provide vital insight into the *Masnavi*. Comparing Lewis's limited translations to Nicholson and Mojaddedi's translations allows for a more critical analysis of Rumi's *Masnavi* through comparison. As an English speaker, I am reliant on the work of Persian translators to read and understand Rumi. Therefore, amassing multiple translations allows for comparison and,

through their difference, illumination of what Rumi might have intended the text to say. Finally, Lewis places Rumi in his rightful historical context, rectifying previous literature on Rumi's life, clarifying misunderstandings, and attempting to weigh all scholars' work before suggesting which sources are more reliable for history or hagiography.

Interspersed with these three titans in the field of Rumi scholarship I also rely heavily on additional secondary source articles. Of considerable mention are Farooq Hamid and Michael Sells. Hamid's article "Storytelling Techniques in the 'Maṣnavī-yi Ma'navī' of Mowlana Jalal Al-Din Rumi: Wayward Narrative or Logical Progression?" forms the backbone of my second chapter, which emphasizes the *Masnavi* as an intricate and complex text. Hamid highlights the importance of understanding the *Masnavi* from Rumi's perspective. Walking the reader through an interpretation of a story within the *Masnavi*, Hamid depicts Rumi's affinity for word play and explains important literary devices only recognizable to a Persian speaking reader. While the text itself appears disjointed and illogical to a Western audience, Rumi's multilayered storytelling actually contributes to the flow of the narrative in novel ways, rather than being an impediment. For a Western audience, however, paradox and confusion are often seen as a hindrance to a text's clarity. As such, confusion and paradox are often edited out of a text for fear that the reader might get lost in the flow of the narrative. Rumi intends for his readers to lose themselves within his writing, however, and views the movement of the audience through the text as a mirror of the human soul's movement along the Sufi path towards God. By embracing confusion, Rumi deploys paradox as a rhetorical strategy to convey the bewilderment of union and proximity to God.

Michael Sells' article "Bewildered Tongue: the Semantics of Mystical Union in Islam" approaches union from a literary perspective. Not only is this one of the few sources that I have

found which takes this approach, but through reading the article one becomes familiar with rhetorical devices that are most often lost in translation. Two important rhetorical devices for Sells are semantic fusion and the *coincidentia oppositorum*. Semantic fusion refers to the ambiguity of signifier and signified when pronouns are not capitalized. In English, capitalized pronouns often refer to God, but for Persian and Arabic speakers capitalization does not exist. Therefore, it is vital to remove capitalization from English translations of Persian and Arabic texts in order to engage fully with the ambiguity of a text and to read the text in a Persian or Arabic context. Sells depicts how the resulting tumult created by the interplay and ambiguity of subject and object, lover and Beloved, reflect the bewilderment that occurs during mystical union. Analyzing a text for instances of semantic fusion helps the reader to notice textual experiences of union. The confusion therein created further reflects the disorientation and bewilderment of union that Rumi is so fond of describing. Sells also discusses the *coincidentia oppositorum*, or the rapid oscillation between polar opposites, that occurs prior to union. Within a text, this occurs through the use of imagery that contradicts itself: solids and liquids being one, or nearness and farness occurring simultaneously. Like semantic fusion, instances of the *coincidentia oppositorum* act as waypoints for the reader along the path towards union. The more contradiction in a text's imagery, the closer the reader comes to a period of union within the text. Sells' article sharpens my reading of the *Masnavi*, depicting the rhetorical strategies employed by Rumi, which are vital to understanding his writing but which become muddled in the *Masnavi*'s translation into English.

Reading Rumi through various literary lenses is necessary because he is, first and foremost, a poet of prolific acclaim. That being said, Rumi's Islamic and Sufi background must not be forgotten; it is for this reason that I rely on Hamid and Sells. In order to grasp Rumi's

language of mysticism, however, we now turn to Rudolf Otto and his critic, Robert Orsi. Otto's vocabulary of mysticism allows us to shed light on the more amorphous aspects of mystical experience. Otto's definitions of the numen and the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* provide a lexicon of mysticism that allows us to characterize and categorize Rumi's conceptions of the Divine and his experiences in union. Otto's theoretical model has its limitations, however, and so we turn to Orsi to synthesize Otto's core ideas from a more modern and critical perspective. Orsi highlights that Otto's use of neologisms is a beneficial theoretical tool because "the feeling of the numinous is not like all the other emotions for which we have names, so we need a new vocabulary for it."³ Utilizing Otto's "new" vocabulary to accurately convey the "wholly other"⁴ that Rumi has experienced, and which Rumi attempts to convey to the reader, allows us to "rethink the holy"⁵ in all its varied forms. In turn, rethinking the holy contributes "to the recovery of experience as a key category after years of its displacement in religious studies, as in other disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, by language, social structure, and power."⁶ Prioritizing the experience of the holy, I explore the way in which the *Masnavi*, through Rumi's use of paradoxical language, attempts to convey experiential knowledge of the wholly Other through the limited medium of language. Furthermore, because language is limited in what it can convey, I believe that Rumi's use of paradox, violent imagery, and multivalent symbols in his *Masnavi* is an attempt to "kindle"⁷ the experience of the wholly Other within the heart of his reader.

³ Robert A. Orsi, "The Problem of the Holy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Robert A. Orsi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 94.

⁴ Ibid., 92.

⁵ Ibid., 86.

⁶ Ibid., 86.

⁷ Ibid., 94.

As anyone who has been moved by Rumi's writing knows, it is a disservice to reduce Rumi to any single identity or category. Similarly, to reduce his profuse writings to a single perspective or trait is to lose sight of all that Rumi has to offer. The serious student of Rumi is well aware that the local bookstore version of Rumi is one stripped of context, displaced from his personal cosmology and thrown into a modern world of spirituality without religion, a New Age realm of love and beauty devoid of heartache and suffering. If, however, we contextualize Rumi historically, embracing his Muslim identity and his medieval philosophical background, perhaps we can explore the confusion instead of explaining it away. If we read Rumi within his own context, we begin to realize that the most accurate understanding of Rumi comes from reading his own writing. Therefore, as scholars who study Rumi, we must always balance secondary source material with our own analysis of his poetry. Rumi's writing is Mawlana's definitive voice made eternal and it is our job as scholars to listen to what he has to say. Annemarie Schimmel writes that, "Mawlānā teaches us not to look at the face value of things, but rather to try and understand the deeper meaning of what happens. Grace can be hidden under wrath, and unhappiness can lurk at the bottom of happiness."⁸ Equipped with the tools of interpretation provided by previous scholars, the time has come for us to contemplate Rumi unveiled, to find the grace hidden in his wrath, the unhappiness in his joy.

⁸ Annemarie Schimmel, "Mawlānā Rūmī: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow," in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam; the Heritage of Rumi*, ed. Amin Banani et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 19.

Chapter I: The Author

At sunset on December 17, 1273, as Konya shook with earthquakes,⁹ Mawlana Jalal al-Din Mohammad Rumi left this world. Surrounded by his friends and family, Mawlana consoled them even as he was dying, “reminding them that death is not separation but liberation.”¹⁰ Rumi did not want grief. Instead, he wanted his would-be mourners to celebrate his now complete union with God, writing:

When you come to my tomb to visit me
Don't come without a drum to see my grave,
For at God's banquet mourners have no place...¹¹

And when he was finally buried, “his burial was attended by all communities of the province; Christians and Jews joined in the funeral prayers, each according to his own rite, for he has always been on good terms with the large non-Muslim population of the town.”¹² Sultan Valad, Rumi's eldest son, wrote of the state of Konya after Rumi's passing:

The people of the city, young and old
Were all lamenting, crying, sighing loud,
The villagers as well as Turks and Greeks,
They tore their shirts from grief for this great man.
“He was our Jesus!”—thus the Christians spoke.
“He was our Moses!” said the Jews of him...¹³

⁹ Annemarie Schimmel, *I Am Wind You are Fire; the Life and Work of Rumi*, (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1992), 30. The presence of earthquakes at Rumi's death is apocryphal.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹² Annemarie Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 2nd ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 36.

¹³ Sultan Valad quoted in Schimmel, *I Am Wind You are Fire*, 31.

After the wailing and lamenting, “after the funeral prayers were over, [the] *sama*’ and music went on for hours and hours.”¹⁴ The occasion, which marked the passing of one of the most prolific poets and Muslim mystics, was a fitting end to a tremendous life. And it is therefore appropriate that each year, as the days begin to shorten and the sun feels most distant, people remember Mawlana on his wedding night urging us to not fear, for “verily we return to Him.”¹⁵

A great many things can be divined from the way Rumi died. Yet it is paramount to understanding Rumi that the collective heartache of Konya and its surrounding provinces does not enchant us with a New Age conception of Rumi as universal or beyond religion. Instead, we must ground ourselves, as Rumi did, in his Muslim identity. For “Rumi did not come to his theology of tolerance and inclusive spirituality by turning away from traditional Islam or organized religion, but through an immersion in it; his spiritual yearning stemmed from a radical desire to follow the example of the Prophet Mohammad and actualize his potential as a perfect Muslim.”¹⁶ Fully embracing the fact that Rumi outlined a tolerant and inclusive spirituality, the fact remains that he derived these beliefs “from the Qur’an, the Hadith, Islamic theology and the works of Sunni mystics like Sanai, Attar and his own father, Baha al-Din Valad.”¹⁷ While his relationship to Islam, in all its intricacy and nuance, can and should be interrogated, stripping Rumi of his Muslim identity is not only factually incorrect but a disservice to Mawlana. Indeed, if there is any hope of approaching Rumi and his poetry, it must be done through the foundation of Islam. For Rumi’s poetry is made more beautiful when read in a context that understands his

¹⁴ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 36. The *sama*’ is a ritual form of *dhikr*, or remembrance, performed by the Sufis of Rumi’s order. Dervishes whirl about in concentric circles around a central, spinning *sheikh*, or master, in remembrance of God. Mirroring the movement of the planets, the dervishes whirling is meant to mimic not only the movement of the soul through the Ptolemaic universe, but also represent the need to turn inwardly in contemplation of God.

¹⁵ Sura 2: 156 in Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 417.

¹⁶ Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

many poignant allusions to Qur'an, *ḥadīth*, Persian literature, and folklore of the 13th century. Embedded within each reference lies an intimation, a quiet opening, so intimate and meaningful that the line or two of Qur'an becomes entirely new and fresh in the mind of the reader; the experience of the referent changes and a new message is conveyed.

Having seen Rumi die, let us now turn to how he lived. Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi was born in Balkh, present-day Afghanistan, on September 30, 1207.¹⁸ Born at an opportune time, in the right place, and within the right family, Rumi's life seemed destined from the outset to be one of mystical proficiency. Schimmel, describing the 13th century, writes that "strangely enough this period of the most terrible political disaster was, at the same time, a period of highest religious and mystical activity. It seems as though the complete darkness on the worldly plane was counteracted by a hitherto unknown brightness on the spiritual plane. The names of poets, scholars, calligraphers could be enumerated, but it is mainly the mystics who dominate this century."¹⁹ As will be discussed later, Rumi's authorship is not a miraculous occurrence but rather a focused creative work born out of the effects of previous mystics, like Sanai and Attar. The 13th century, with its emphasis on mysticism, seemed to set the groundwork for Rumi's own spiritual awakening. Furthermore, Rumi's education within the Hanafi School of Islamic law, which was born of diverse influences and which preserved "internal differences of opinion much more than the other three schools,"²⁰ situated Rumi temporally within a period primed for the mystical growth of Islam. This is not to underscore Rumi's conscious effort to participate in mysticism, but rather suggests that Rumi's upbringing adequately prepared him to contribute to the growth of Islamic mysticism. Additionally, Rumi's birth in the city of Balkh, at that time a

¹⁸ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 12.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁰ Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 15.

center of Islamic learning, played a role in furthering Rumi's exposure to mysticism as well as his study of Islamic law. But Balkh was not just concerned with Islam, for it also played "an important part during the formative period of Eastern Sufism and...it had formerly been a centre of Buddhism, [perhaps priming] its inhabitants—or its atmosphere—[to serve] as mediators of some Buddhist ideas which are reflected in early Sufi thought."²¹ Rumi's family would not remain in Balkh, however, and in 1212 Baha al-Din Valad, Rumi's father, left Balkh with his family and traveled to Samarqand, a city located in present-day Uzbekistan.²²

Later, in 1216, Rumi's family again set out, this time on pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina.²³ After so many years travelling, the Valad family eventually settled in Konya, Central Anatolia, where Baha al-Din taught jurisprudence for some time until his death in 1231.²⁴ Baha al-Din's wife, Mo'mene Khatun, had died sometime earlier while in Larende/Karaman and was buried there.²⁵ Left without a mother and now without a father, but still too young to inherit his father's position, Rumi called upon Borhan al-Din to mentor him as Rumi's father had.²⁶ Borhan, a disciple of Baha al-Din, agreed to take Rumi as a student but was hesitant to accept Baha al-Din's position in Konya, believing Rumi to be the rightful heir.²⁷ Shortly thereafter, Borhan sent Rumi "to be trained by the acknowledged legal and religious authorities of the day in Aleppo and Damascus. While there, Rumi pursued a traditional course of religious studies, including Hanafi law, Qur'an, Hadith and theology."²⁸ After studying in Syria, Rumi returned to Kayseri in 1237

²¹ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 13.

²² Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 272.

²³ *Ibid.*, 272.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 273.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 273.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 273.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 273.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 273.

to study under Borhan al-Din.²⁹ No longer in need of a mentor, Rumi then returned to Konya as a “spiritual preceptor and preacher to a community of piety-minded and mystically oriented disciples.”³⁰ Although scholars contest the validity of the many historical and biographical accounts of Rumi’s life, Lewis posits that Rumi’s popularity in Konya first began due to his skills as an orator and a “representative of an authentic and accessible mode of Islamic spirituality...[with] his lectures [being] attended by women as well as men, and a number of women [considering] themselves [his] disciples.”³¹ Set up comfortably as a professor within multiple *madrasas*,³² Rumi was well situated to lead the life of an academic Muslim theologian. However, on November 29, 1244, Shams al-Din Tabrizi arrived in Konya. The traveling mystic would go on to alter the path of Mawlana, transforming him from an austere academic into the Rumi we know today, overflowing with poetry of love and constant longing for the Eternal Sun.³³

Shams al-Din Tabrizi, or the Sun of the Religion, had a profound impact on Mawlana. Shams quickly developed a close relationship with Rumi, often going on retreats together. The ease with which Shams pulled Rumi away from his duties as an academic frightened many within Konya’s society, particularly Rumi’s disciples. Schimmel, quoting A. Gölpınarlı, describes their relationship as the sparking of a lamp. Gölpınarlı writes:

Mawlana was ready for the enthusiastic experience. He was, so to speak, a purified, cleaned lamp in which oil had been poured, the wick had been placed. To make this lamp burn, a fire, a spark was needed. And there was Shams to do this. But when the light of this candle[,] the oil of which does not end[,] became so

²⁹ Lewis, *Rumi - Past and Present, East and West*, 273.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 274.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 274.

³² *Ibid.*, 274.

³³ *Ibid.*, 274. *Madrasa* (مدرسه) is an Arabic word meaning “school.”

strong...[Shams] turned into a moth and went into the light, giving up his life...³⁴

Rumi, once the removed academic, was now lost in the ecstasy of Shams' presence. Spending more and more time together, Rumi began to embrace that which earlier in his life he had lectured against: music, dance, and poetry. Schimmel writes that, with the advent of Shams, Rumi's "whole being was transformed into poetry and music. Music became the only expression of his feelings; music, echoed in the enthusiastic words, vibrating in the rhythms of his lyrics."³⁵ But not all inhabitants of Konya found Shams to their taste. Many within Konya society believed that Rumi's newfound love of poetry and music had stripped their academic of his more tempered dignity. Some of those closest to Rumi were also the most antagonistic towards his new poetic disposition with "members of Rumi's own circle, both family and disciples, [objecting] to this behavior...[for it was] beneath the dignity of a preacher and jurisconsult, to say nothing of a professor in a college of law."³⁶ And so, with the ire of Rumi's disciples burdening the union of Shams and Rumi, Shams left Konya after little more than a year on March 11, 1246.³⁷ Rumi was immediately heartbroken and frantic, searching for Shams and confused as to how his beloved could leave him. After learning that Shams had fled to Damascus, "Rumi sent his son, Sultan Valad, to fetch Shams back to Konya"³⁸ and in April of 1247, Shams returned. Schimmel describes the reunion in Konya, with the two mystics:

Embracing each other; nobody knew who was the lover, who the beloved...For the attraction was mutual; not only saw Jalal al-Din his Beloved in Shams, but Shams had found in Jalal al-Din the master and friend for whom he had been searching throughout his life. And the line in the *Mathnavi*:

³⁴ Gölpınarlı quoted in Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 24.

³⁵ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 23.

³⁶ Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 274.

³⁷ Ibid., 275.

³⁸ Ibid., 275.

Not only the thirsty seek the water,
but the water seeks the thirsty as well,

Which condenses Mawlana's whole philosophy of love and
longing may well be interpreted as a reflection of this measureless
spiritual love between the two mystics.³⁹

Once again, Rumi and Shams were enraptured with one another, passing weeks and months in ecstatic conversation.⁴⁰ Yet Rumi's disciples became jealous, frustrated once more with Shams for taking their master from them. In the late fall of 1248, Shams' wife, Kimia Khatun, died and not much later, Shams disappeared, never to return.⁴¹

Shams' disappearance is contentious, with some sources arguing that rather than simply disappearing, Shams was murdered. The debate over Shams' disappearance is intriguing not only because it underscores the role that historians play in resurrecting the lives of those that come before, but it also brings into question the role of memory and, to a certain extent, mythology.

Schimmel writes of the murder, citing Aflaki's account:

Rumi and Shams talked till a late hour, when someone knocked at the door and asked Shams to come out for some purpose. He went, was stabbed, and then thrown into the well opposite to the back entrance of the house—a well which still exists. Sultan Valad, informed about the action, hastened to take the body out of the well and bury it in a hurriedly dug tomb nearby, which was covered with plaster and then with earth.⁴²

Schimmel suggests Aflaki's account to be true due to the recent "discovery by Mehmet Onder, the then director of the Mevlana Muzesi in Konya,"⁴³ of a large tomb covered with plaster from the Seljuk era. Yet Schimmel's confirmation of the events comes from her book *The Triumphal Sun*, published in 1993. Lewis's book, *Rumi; Past and Present, East and West*, which was

³⁹ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 21.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁴¹ Ibid., 21.

⁴² Ibid., 22.

⁴³ Ibid., 22.

published more recently in 2000 and then revised and republished in 2008, contests the supposed murder. Lewis, whose book attempts to tease apart the various narrative accounts of Rumi's life and discern hagiography from biography, writes that:

In modern times, some scholars, most notably Gölpınarlı, have subscribed to the thesis that 'Ala al-Din, Rumi's son, was responsible for arranging the murder and that Sultan Valad, though not one of the plotters, was involved in the cover-up. But this murder rumor arises late, circulates in an oral context, and is almost certainly groundless.⁴⁴

While these two disparate accounts of Shams' disappearance stand in opposition to one another, reading both of these accounts as valid leaves the reader with a better understanding of Rumi's life. Lewis's account prioritizes what he holds to be historically true. Lewis is attempting to comment on previous narratives of Rumi's life and assess, through his scholarship, their accuracy to the corporeal existence of Jalal al-Din Rumi. Aflaki's account, per Schimmel, instead conveys an emotionally impactful loss with which the reader can identify. The loss of Shams is real, regardless of whether or not he was murdered, and the sorrow of Shams' abrupt exit from Rumi's life can be felt in every verse of Rumi's poetry. For those readers who have experienced the loss of a loved one, Rumi's writing takes on a new dimension. Articulating the complex, desperate feelings of grief, the reader finds within Rumi's writing a reflection of their own heartache:

Burning with longing-fire,
wanting to sleep with my head on your doorsill,
my living is composed only of this trying
to be in your presence.⁴⁵

Rumi's touching and emotive writing connects the reader to the text, forming a bridge between the reader and Mawlana irrespective of time. Furthermore, the suffering that overwhelms Rumi's

⁴⁴ Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 193.

⁴⁵ Jalalu'ddin Rumi, *Unseen Rain*, trans. John Moyne and Coleman Barks (Vermont: Threshold Books, 1986), 64.

poetry after Shams' disappearance is made more poignant when it is read within the context of Shams' murder, which better conveys the feelings Rumi felt. For the love shared by Rumi and Shams was so great that the despair and suffering that followed Shams' death could easily be conceived of as mourning the death, even the murder, of a loved one.

After Rumi's heartache and anguish at the disappearance, or death, of Shams he experiences a sudden and revitalizing catharsis. Rather than being gone forever, Rumi realizes that Shams is now within him. Schimmel describes the process, writing:

Eventually, he had found Shams in himself, 'radiant like the moon.' The process of complete identification between lover and beloved had come to its end: Jalal al-Din and Shams al-Din were no longer two separate entities, but one forever.⁴⁶

Not only did this realization console Rumi, but it influenced his poetry as well. Having now tasted the totality of the mystical experience, Rumi could convey through his poetry the "longing, yearning, searching, and again and again [the] hope for union, love without limits."⁴⁷ Rumi internalizes the voice of Shams and this, too, becomes reflected in his poetry. Throughout the poetry composed after the disappearance of Shams, "Rumi appears...as the survivor of spiritual crisis and a guide to the shores of inner enlightenment, which can be reached only through great suffering and burning away the self."⁴⁸ Mawlana's ability to guide the suffering to the shores of inner enlightenment falls in line with the description Schimmel provides of the 13th century as a time when "great saints, poets, and mystical leaders, who, in the darkness of political and economic catastrophes, guides the people towards a world which was unhurt by change, telling them the secret of suffering love, and taught that God's inscrutable will and His

⁴⁶ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 23.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁸ Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 275.

Love may reveal itself in affliction even better than in happiness.”⁴⁹ Rumi the poet, as he is known today, is both born out of the fires of his own suffering and the guide through which we may traverse the suffering of our own humanity.

The end of Rumi’s life was spent composing poetry and teaching his disciples. Though none that followed could replace Shams, Rumi did find two mirrors of his divine light, two rays of the Eternal Sun. The first was Salah al-Din, the goldsmith, for whom Rumi composed *ghazals*.⁵⁰ After Salah al-Din came Hosam al-Din, and through him Rumi’s *Masnawi* was born.⁵¹ By his death in 1273, Rumi composed “more than 30,000 verses of lyrical poetry, more than 26,000 verses of didactic poetry, [as well as conversations] noted down in *Fihi ma fihi*, [and] composing numerous letters for the benefit of his countrymen.”⁵² A prolific writer with the ability to convey his personal experiences with the Divine, Rumi’s poetry was not only born out of his own experiences but also relied on the familiar imagery of previous Muslim mystics.

The beginning of this chapter emphasized Rumi’s Muslim and Persian identity, refuting the modern and perhaps Islamophobic notion of Rumi as a paragon of New Age spirituality. This view, popularized by so-called translations of Rumi’s poetry that are more often than not selective readings of English translations rewritten in blank verse, might be satisfactory for laypeople interested in New Age renderings of Rumi but does little to appease the interest of serious students of religion. Instead, we must emphasize the context of Rumi’s life as it unfolds, which can be explored further through Rumi’s positionality within a chain of mystics that unites them across time through common themes.

⁴⁹ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 10.

⁵⁰ Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 275. *Ghazals* are a form of Persian lyrical poetry.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁵² Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 35.

The proliferation of didactic poetry began with Sanai of Ghazna, a former court poet turned Sufi, who in 1120 composed “the first comprehensive didactic work”⁵³ entitled *Hadiqat al-haqiqah*, or *The Orchard of Truth*. Sanai’s work would “set the model for all later mystical *mathnavis*, e.g. didactical works written in rhyming couplets, which contain numerous stories, anecdotes and parables without fixed order to illustrate different aspects of mystical and practical life.”⁵⁴ Soon after, Faridoddin Attar followed Sanai’s model but instead took a “much more artistic [approach] than...his predecessor.”⁵⁵ It was not uncommon for Sufis to produce “handbooks in which mysticism was explained in accordance with orthodox teachings”⁵⁶ and oftentimes these didactic works would allow for such an explanation. Within this context Rumi’s poetry, albeit beautiful and unique, is not necessarily an invention of his own but a deliberate choice to place himself in dialogue with these great mystics that had come before him. Similarly, the idea of mystical love did not begin with Rumi. Rather, Rumi developed and expanded upon mystical love, filtering the common Sufi theme through his own personal lens.

The Sufi’s emphasis on love arguably began with Dhu al-Nun of Egypt in the 800s.⁵⁷ Dhu al-Nun used the term *ma’refat* to describe the “intuitive and experiential knowing of God.”⁵⁸ *Ma’refat*, “or gnosis, is achieved not by studying the law but by loving God.”⁵⁹ After Dhu al-Nun came Ahmad Ghazzali who was recognized “as one of the greatest masters of mystical love theories”⁶⁰ and who gave mystical love a new form. Initially “directed exclusively

⁵³ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 5.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁷ Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 24.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶⁰ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 6.

towards God without any object...between”⁶¹ the mystic and the Beloved, Ghazzali blended this love “with the admiration of a beautiful face in which God’s Beauty reveals itself to the loving mystic...[and] the oscillation between heavenly and earthly love became then, a standard aspect of Persian and related poetry.”⁶² Within this framework, one easily recalls the relationship of Shams and Rumi wherein each saw in the other the reflection of God’s Beauty in an earthly form. Yet for Rumi, when that earthly form left him, he was without access to the heavenly love he had experienced. It was not until Rumi discovered that heavenly love within himself that he could go on to produce such a work as the *Masnavi*. Yet it was at the behest and instigation of Hosam al-Din that Rumi agreed to dictate lines to Hosam, who would in turn write them down after confirming with his master that what he wrote was correct.

Noting Hosam al-Din’s role in recording Rumi’s *Masnavi*, an exploration of Rumi’s purpose in creating the *Masnavi* is required. Schimmel describes Rumi’s *Masnavi* as:

A book for students, and instead of simply proclaiming his love and its expressions, Rumi has directed his speech toward edification. The work contains the entire wisdom of an unusual and yet exemplary life, the fruit of scholarly and poetical activity, of burning in Divine Love and of being revived. There is not a single verse that is not steeped in experience, and often in suffering...it is rather like a wondrous tree that has produced strange blossoms and fruits, a tree in which birds of different hues are nesting—until they leave the nest “Word” and fly back to their eternal home.⁶³

It was typical for a Sufi master to outline his mystical knowledge in an accessible form for his disciples. Thus, the *Masnavi* acts as a compendium of stories retold in novel ways by Rumi. Utilizing stories already known by his audience allowed for Rumi’s writing to be extremely accessible, even to the unlearned who relied on the oral retelling of tradition. This served the

⁶¹ Schimmel, *I Am Wind You are Fire*, 6.

⁶² Ibid., 6.

⁶³ Ibid., 29.

dual function of disseminating Mawlana's stories in an enjoyable way while also imparting ethical and religious themes to his audience. While the role of storytelling will be discussed further on, stories as a genre serve the unique function of providing near universality in their reach. After all, a central aspect of Rumi's identity imparted on him by the Qur'an, is the fact that those "who [quicken] one person, it is as if [they] had quickened all people."⁶⁴ Rumi was genuinely interested in alleviating the suffering of those around him. Mawlana would often cite the aforementioned sura when asking his more established disciples to aid another disciple who might be struggling. Oftentimes writing letters to friends asking them for help, Rumi would describe in detail the plight of another disciple, writing, for example, how:

He has no place where to go at night, his mother is poor. His mother's husband is a bad-tempered, stingy person. He has thrown the child out, telling him "Do not come to my house, do not eat my bread..."⁶⁵

Following the example was a request for "the vizier or a high-standing jurist to allot a post in a certain mosque or madrasa to this or that person, or ask the minister to buy some copper vessels from an honourable, poor merchant and to pay him immediately."⁶⁶ These requests were always done in the context of being a proper Muslim and caring for those around you that are less fortunate. Rumi's altruism was not limited to his disciples, however, and carried over into his family life as well.

There is an interesting incident, retold by Schimmel, wherein she cites a letter Rumi wrote to his daughter-in-law. Mawlana, wanting to solidify his relationship with Salah al-Din, married Salah al-Din's daughter, "Fatema, to his son Sultan Valad, who was then in his mid-

⁶⁴ Sura 5:32 in Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 31.

⁶⁵ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 31.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 31.

twenties.”⁶⁷ Rumi expressly instructed his son to treat his new wife well, and at one point when “a tension had taken place between the couple, he consoled his daughter-in-law with heartfelt words:

If my dear son [Sultan Valad] strives to hurt you, I shall verily
verily take away my love from him; I will give up loving him, I
shall not respond to his greetings, I do not want him to come to my
funeral...⁶⁸

Wanting to fulfill his duties as a Muslim, Rumi’s focus on the well-being of his daughter-in-law is not only emblematic of Rumi’s character, but also on the family-oriented nature of Islam. Furthermore, it serves the added purpose of humanizing a man who is today revered as a saint. So often Rumi is depicted as the unencumbered mystic, as the transcendent human who converses with God. This image, while accurate, is made all the more powerful by the humanness with which he lived his life and the humility with which he cared for those around him, including the poor.

The stage upon which Rumi’s life unfolded is integral to understanding the content of the *Masnavi*. His Persian and Muslim heritage provided a wealth of rich texts and oral histories that he could draw upon for inspiration and deploy for rhetorical effect. Rumi’s narrative voice was further bolstered by his Sufi upbringing and deepened by his studies in Islamic law and philosophy. Rumi’s genius as a poet lies not just in his ability to write beautifully, but also in his ability to reinterpret previous stories. Transforming a commonly understood story into a fresh, vibrant, living narrative allowed Rumi to convey difficult concepts with ease, inspiring his disciples and captivating the world.

⁶⁷ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 26.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

Chapter II: The Text

Now listen to this reed-flute's deep lament
About the heartache being apart has meant:
'Since from the reed-bed they uprooted me
My song's expressed each human's agony,
A breast which separation's split in two
Is what I seek, to share this pain with you:
When kept from their true origin, all yearn
For union on the day they can return.
Amongst the crowd, alone I mourn my fate,
With good and bad I've learnt to integrate,
That we were friends each one was satisfied
But none sought out my secrets from inside;
My deepest secret's in this song I wail
But eyes and ears can't penetrate the veil:
Body and soul are joined to form one whole
But no one is allowed to see the soul.'
It's fire not just hot air the reed-flute's cry,
If you don't have this fire then you should die!*

Love's fire is what makes every reed-flute pine,
Love's fervour thus lends potency to wine;
The reed consoles those forced to be apart,
Its notes will lift the veil upon your heart,
Where's antidote or poison like its song,
Or confidant, or one who's pined so long?
This reed relates a tortuous path ahead,
Recalls the love with which Majnun's heart bled:
The few who hear the truths the reed has sung
Have lost their wits so they can speak this tongue.
The day is wasted if it's spent in grief,
Consumed by burning aches without relief—
Good times have long passed, but we couldn't care
When you're with us, our friend beyond compare!
While ordinary men on drops can thrive
A fish needs oceans daily to survive:
The way the ripe must feel the raw can't tell,
My speech must be concise, and so farewell!⁶⁹

⁶⁹ M 1: 1-18, translated by Mojaddedi.

So begins Mawlana Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi's *Masnavi* with the plaint of the reed-flute ripped from its bed beside the water. Filled with heartache, the reed-flute sings of its separation, yearning to return home. What unfolds over the next 26,000 verses of poetry⁷⁰ is a kaleidoscopic image of the human soul in pursuit of the Divine Reality.⁷¹ Yet the first eighteen lines of Rumi's *Masnavi* represent in microcosm the entire purpose of creating the *Masnavi*: Rumi's need to articulate the painful experience of being human and the collective ache of separation from our Creator. As with all great literary works, Rumi carefully deploys an abundance of rhetorical strategies to articulate and convey his experiences with the Divine. Rumi's intention is not to argue about aspects of the Divine, but rather to elicit within the reader the emotions that he himself felt. Within this goal lies one of the great paradoxes of Rumi: his disciplined and meticulous use of language to articulate the failure of words in conveying intimate, mystical experience. With this in mind, the *Masnavi* becomes a delightfully coy text that oscillates between heartache and ecstasy, drawing the reader in only to end the story entirely, preferring silence as a more appropriate vehicle to convey mystical experience.

Writing in Persian, with references in Arabic to Qur'an and *ḥadīth*, a brief understanding of Persian language and poetry is required before the more complex aspects of Rumi's rhetoric are explored. While "the Persian language developed from the earlier Pahlavi and Dari languages of Sassanid Iran,"⁷² it was not until the "destruction of the Sassanid empire by the Arab armies in the first/seventh century"⁷³ that Persian became "deeply infused with the vocabulary of Quranic Arabic."⁷⁴ The subsequent "wedding between Islam and the soul of the Persian people"⁷⁵ led to

⁷⁰ S. H. Nasr and J. Matini, "Persian Literature," in *Islamic Spirituality; Manifestations*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 338.

⁷¹ Jawid Mojaddedi, *Book One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), xxiv.

⁷² Nasr and Matini, "Persian Literature," 328.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 328.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 328.

Persian becoming "the only language in the Islamic world besides Arabic to become universal and to be used by others beyond the borders of the land of its native speakers."⁷⁶ With the spread of the Persian language, from "China to Iraq and even farther west within the Ottoman Empire,"⁷⁷ Persian became interwoven with Islam and played a substantial role in contributing to "the Islamic transmitted and intellectual sciences."⁷⁸ Furthermore, Persian "became the vehicle for most schools of Islamic thought and spirituality"⁷⁹ in part because of Persian poetic forms, "from the quatrain (*rubai*) to the rhyming couplet (*mathnawi*) to the sonnetlike *ghazal*,"⁸⁰ which allowed for the flow of mystic discourse in poetic form.

Persian poetry contains a great many literary masterpieces. Yet it is Ahmad Ghazzali who is attributed with the founding of a "new genre of Sufi literature in which Sufi gnosis is presented in the dress of love and longing and in a language of great poetic beauty."⁸¹ This love "ranges from love for the beauty of forms to the love of the Beauty of the Face of the Beloved"⁸² and it was Mawlana who "brought [this] tradition of Persian Sufi poetry to its peak"⁸³ with his *Masnavi*. In their survey of Persian literature, S. H. Nasr and J. Matini write of Rumi's *Masnavi* as:

an esoteric commentary on the Quran and a compendium of the esoteric sciences expressed in the language of symbols and parables in a deceptively simple form although some of the verses of the *Mathnawi* are quite enigmatic. There is no work in Persian Sufi literature that investigates the heights and depths of the human soul, the meaning of existence, the nature of God, man, and the

⁷⁵ Nasr and Matini, "Persian Literature," 328.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 328.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 328.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 329.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 329.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 332.

⁸¹ Ibid., 335.

⁸² Ibid., 335.

⁸³ Ibid., 337.

universe, and the enigmas of the unity of the Truth and the diversity of revealed forms in poetic language of such power and beauty.⁸⁴

While this is an accurate account of Rumi's *Masnavi*, the depiction of Rumi's poetic form as "deceivingly simple"⁸⁵ should not be misinterpreted to mean that Rumi's language was simple.

Nasr and Matini are describing the simplistic rhyme scheme characteristic of a type of Persian verse form called the *masnavi*. The full name of Rumi's *Masnavi* is *Masnavi-ye ma'navi* but "Rumi's work is usually known as the *Masnavi*, par excellence,"⁸⁶ so named for his expert use of the *masnavi* verse form. It is a fitting name for Mawlana's magnum opus, since the Persian poetic form receives its name from the adjective "*ma'navi* [which] means 'relating to the inner meaning,' or for concision's sake, 'spiritual.'"⁸⁷ Poetically, the *masnavi* genre consists of "rhyming couplets with the rhyme scheme following the pattern aabbccdd, etc. Poets generally employed the *masnavi* form for narrative verse...Beginning with Sana'i, poets adapted this form to ethical-didactic and mystical poetry, and Rumi modeled his narrative couplets on the genre of such works, as exemplified in Sana'i and Attar."⁸⁸ Due to the rhyme scheme of the *masnavi* genre, which allows for rhyming couplets instead of a more restrictive monorhyme, "the *masnavi* form enables poets to compose long works consisting of thousands of verses."⁸⁹ Through his ability to write indefinitely within the *masnavi* verse form, Rumi was able to channel the flood of ecstasy into couplet after couplet of praise for God. Furthermore, the ability to write for as long as Rumi wanted ensured that he could convey the entirety of his spiritual ideology without fear of his message being lost in the outward forms. For Rumi was well aware that:

⁸⁴ Nasr and Matini, "Persian Literature," 338.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 338.

⁸⁶ Lewis, *Rumi—Past and Present, East and West*, 304. Throughout the following chapters, all use of "*masnavi*" refers to the Persian poetic form, while the "*Masnavi*" refers to Rumi's *Masnavi-ye ma'navi*.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 304.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 304.

⁸⁹ Mojaddedi, *Book One*, xx.

...the outward form passes away,
[while] the world of reality remains forever.⁹⁰

And it is Rumi's own experience of this "world of reality"⁹¹ that he attempts to convey, through diverse methods, throughout the entirety of his *Masnavi*.

While the rhyme scheme of Rumi's *Masnavi* is straightforward, the nonlinear narrative of the *Masnavi*, particularly to the contemporary reader, is entirely opaque. In the introduction to his translation of Rumi's *Masnavi*, Mojaddedi asserts that the text "leaves the impression that he was brimming with ideas and symbolic images which would overflow when prompted by the subtlest of associations."⁹² Mojaddedi then asserts that, because of this overflowing of symbolic images prompted by multiple associations, Rumi was "free from the constraints of a frame narrative or a strict principle of order,"⁹³ which allowed him "to produce a work that is far richer in content than any other example of the mystical *masnavi* genre."⁹⁴ While the richness of Rumi's *Masnavi* is not contested, the assumption that Rumi was somehow beyond strict narrative structure ignores authorial intent. Rumi utilized a nonlinear structure when organizing the stories within the *Masnavi* for rhetorical effect. Hamid provides unique insight into Rumi's *Masnavi*, recognizing that "[t]o the casual observer the *Masnavi*, as a whole, seems to have no narrative sequence with its plethora of apparently unconnected and disjointed stories,"⁹⁵ which themselves are "interrupted by other stories, sermons, expositions of Qur'anic verses, *ahadith*, stories of prophets (*qisas al-anbiya*), popular Islamic lore and glosses, etc."⁹⁶ Unlike Mojaddedi's assertion

⁹⁰ Farooq Hamid, "Storytelling Techniques in the "Maṣnavī-yi Ma'navī" of Mowlana Jalal Al-Din Rumi: Wayward Narrative or Logical Progression?" *Iranian Studies* 32 (1999): 32.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁹² Mojaddedi, *Book One*, xxiii.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

⁹⁵ Hamid, "Storytelling Techniques in the "Maṣnavī-yi Ma'navī,"" 27.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

that Rumi was free from a strict principle of order, Hamid argues that Rumi adhered to a determined structure: nonlinear, circular storytelling. Hamid continues, writing that interwoven narratives are “an instrument of Rumi’s didactic purpose”⁹⁷ and work to further convey a point, rather than being an extraneous result left over from his mystical experiences.

Any attempt to disregard the nonlinear structure of the *Masnavi* as a byproduct of Rumi’s mystical experience underscores the role that Rumi played as author. The *Masnavi*, which was dictated to Rumi’s disciple and close friend Hosam al-Din, was meticulously “checked and corrected” by Rumi after each verse’s recitation.⁹⁸ Rumi was very clear in his intention to create a work of his own construction, and Hosam did not provide any input into the structure of the *Masnavi*. Furthermore, the abrupt end of the *Masnavi* in the middle of a story that is never completed is evidence for some scholars that Rumi died before completing the *Masnavi*. The epilogue of the *Masnavi* manuscript that Isti’lami uses, however, is:

dated three years and nine months prior to Rumi’s death, which, Isti’lami concludes, demonstrates that Rumi himself did not feel that the ending was truncated and was satisfied with where the story stood. Isti’lami believes that the ending is logical and is based on the fact that the subject matter of the *Masnavi* and its internal logic drive the form of the narrative.⁹⁹

Isti’lami’s manuscript suggests that Rumi was content with the ending of his *Masnavi*, which reiterates the conscious choice on Mawlana’s part to employ nonlinear structure as a rhetorical strategy within his poetry. Making such statements as:

The *Masnavi* lacks ‘architectural structure’; or ‘like other long didactic Sufi poems before it, the *Masnavi* is a rambling collection of anecdotes and tales’; or that it includes ‘tangential stories...that

⁹⁷ Hamid, “Storytelling Techniques in the “Maṣnavī-yi Ma’navī,”” 28.

⁹⁸ Mojaddedi, *Book One*, xxi.

⁹⁹ Hamid, “Storytelling Techniques in the “Maṣnavī-yi Ma’navī,”” 31.

are not necessarily related to the general scheme'; or that 'Rumi's stories are without beginning and end' ...may prove...highly questionable [upon closer reading of the *Masnavi*].¹⁰⁰

Anyone interested in Rumi can pick up a translation of his *Masnavi* and see for themselves that the final story, the "Story of the Three Princes," concludes thirty-nine lines before the *Masnavi* ends.¹⁰¹ Yet right after the conclusion, Rumi begins a parable. The parable does not conclude the "Story of the Three Princes," but instead tells a story anew, of a son asking his mother what to do when he is frightful in a graveyard. While the parable conveys meaning, it does not complete or add to the "Story of the Three Princes." Rather, the parable begins a new story that never comes to a concise conclusion. Unlike the beginning of the *Masnavi*, which prepared the reader for the coming verses with an eighteen-line microcosm of his entire work, Rumi ends abruptly and leaves the reader waiting. Craving for a satisfactory ending, the reader is left nostalgic and wanting. In this way, Rumi invokes a similar emotional response to that of the human soul craving God, searching for completion, but unable to manifest completion for themselves. Only when the ink has dried will we know our *maktub*.¹⁰²

In Hamid Dabashi's analysis of the "Story of the Jewish king who for bigotry's sake used to slay the Christians," he argues that there is "an underlying moral discourse in the course of the major story. Every major story may include any number of minor anecdotes, and Qur'anic and *ḥadīth* references, but they are all internally related and point toward the final theoretical

¹⁰⁰ Hamid Dabashi, "Rūmī and the Problems of Theodicy: Moral Imagination and Narrative Discourse in a Story of the *Masnavī*," in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rumi*, ed. Amin Banani et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 134.

¹⁰¹ M 6: 4876, translated by Nicholson.

¹⁰² *Maktub* (مكتوب) is an Arabic word that, when literally translated into English, means "written." Colloquially, however, it is often used to reference fate. This stems from the belief that everything that will ever happen has already been written by God before time began. Throughout their lives, human beings are thus fulfilling what has already been written.

conclusion of the moral discourse.”¹⁰³ Dabashi believes that “in order to prove a point Rumi may either argue logically or simply narrate a story, with its moral conclusion functioning as a conceptual unit in the overall logical structure of the narrative discourse.”¹⁰⁴ Nonlinear structure does not obfuscate the moral themes of the *Masnavi* but rather contributes to their articulation. Like individual lenses, each story filters the central moral theme through colored glass, providing multitudinous images of a single truth. Yet right when the reader believes she can reach out and grasp the truth, the image explodes into further reflections.

Rumi relies on language begrudgingly,¹⁰⁵ often walking the line between silence and effusion. Rumi’s nonlinear storytelling represents his attempt to emphasize, paradoxically, the very limitations of language. In order to understand the wayward narrative of the *Masnavi* we must recognize that:

because of its very nature as a mystic-religious treatise, the discursive style and language it employs is not necessarily a drawback for the Sufis, though it may be for the common reader. For the Sufis their intimate experience of the Divine is inextricably linked to the linguistic expression of this experience in the form of poetry, epistles, homilies, *tazkiras*, and allegorical tales.¹⁰⁶

The structure of the *Masnavi* runs contrary to “the ‘literature as an organic unity’ model [which] presupposes a beginning, a middle and an end to the narrative”¹⁰⁷ and which represents what the contemporary reader is accustomed to when reading a narrative. Yet Hamid suggests that this model “follows a pattern that closely resembles human life.”¹⁰⁸ When read alongside Lawrence Lipking’s notion that “despite the poet’s desire to transcend death in their work, their project

¹⁰³ Dabashi, “Rūmī and the Problems of Theodicy,” 133.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 134.

¹⁰⁵ Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 330.

¹⁰⁶ Hamid, “Storytelling Techniques in the “Maṣnavī-yi Ma’navī,”” 28.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 34.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 34.

fails when they are faced with the realization that poetic form, too, is finite,”¹⁰⁹ Hamid believes that “the ‘organic’ end of the poetic form [Rumi] employs is nowhere in sight.”¹¹⁰ This conclusion closely aligns with Margaret Mills’ study of the *Masnavi* in folk tradition, when she writes that the *Masnavi* “is a *living* document, not only a textual icon or an object of literary archeology but a medium of creative and re-creative expression, multilayered even in its ostensibly simplest renditions.”¹¹¹ Both Hamid and Mills attempt to understand the protean nature of Rumi’s poetry, which maintains resonance and vitality even after its author is long dead.

Hamid concludes with the notion that the wayward narrative of the *Masnavi* works by “challenging the reader interested in its message to constantly go beyond the descriptive and the dialectical modes in order to read the prophetic mode of understanding.”¹¹² For Hamid, the prophetic mode is “one which reflects the personal vision of the speaker/author...In this mode the writer is more of a speaker and the narrative in such a mode is written down later by a ‘writer,’”¹¹³ mirroring the transmission of God’s word through Gabriel to Muhammad.

Following Rumi’s role as orator, Hamid writes that “Rumi has to employ the techniques of an orator: antithesis, simile, allegory and, most importantly, repetition.”¹¹⁴ While these strategies are not exhaustive of Rumi’s rhetorical devices, they provide a foundational primer whereby more complex aspects of the *Masnavi* can be understood.

¹⁰⁹ Hamid, “Storytelling Techniques in the “Maṣnavī-yi Ma’navī,”” 34.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 35.

¹¹¹ Margaret A. Mills, “Folk Traditions in the *Masnavi* and the *Masnavi* in Folk Tradition,” in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rumi*, ed. Amin Banani et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 170.

¹¹² Hamid, “Storytelling Techniques in the “Maṣnavī-yi Ma’navī,”” 39.

¹¹³ Ibid., 37.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 39.

Recognizing the need to address the notion of a theme throughout Rumi's *Masnavi*, let us return to "The Song of the Reed." While determining a single universally applicable theme is reductionist, themes still serve to organize the reader's approach to the material. In the case of Rumi, a theme will allow the non-initiated to approach each story within the *Masnavi* from a perspective that is both aware of Rumi's ideas as well as familiar with his language. Turning to "The Song of the Reed" the reader is presented with a small taste of what will unfold throughout the *Masnavi*. Mojaddedi writes that many scholars have found that the "initial eighteen verses...contain the essential message of the entire work"¹¹⁵ and can thus be viewed as an encapsulation of the entire *Masnavi*. "The Song of the Reed" articulates the profound yearning of the reed-flute after it is stripped of its reed-bed. The flute, a metaphor for the human soul, now spends the entirety of its existence crying out in lamentation for the home it once knew. Hearing "The Song of the Reed," the reader is immediately confronted with the painful longing of one whose "eyes and ears can't penetrate the veil"¹¹⁶ and whose pain continues throughout the ensuing *Masnavi*. Like the falcon circling her falconer overhead, the *Masnavi* circles the song of the reed-flute, elaborating and expanding upon it in ever widening circles of descriptive experience. Throughout the text, the plaint of the reed-flute remains quietly in the background. Forlorn and wailing, the reed-flute harkens the disciple along the path towards God, in constant search of the reed-bed from which we were torn.

The stories told throughout Rumi's *Masnavi* are rarely his own. Rather, Rumi draws upon the great wealth of Persian and Arabic stories, as well as medieval folklore, to retell a common story in a novel way. Rumi then:

¹¹⁵ Mojaddedi, *Book One*, xxiv.

¹¹⁶ M 1: 7, translated by Mojaddedi.

alters the endings or highlights certain aspects of each story not emphasized in the original, tailoring the tales to point certain morals. We need to remember that Rumi took only the narrative outlines of his stories, mostly from prose sources in Arabic or Persian, and then versified them in his delightful way. Important as tracing the sources and influences of Rumi may be, as Nicholson pointed out in *Tales of Mystic Meaning*, he ‘borrows much but owes little; he makes his own everything that comes to hand.’¹¹⁷

Rumi does not utilize familiar narratives because they are convenient or because he is incapable of crafting his own stories, but instead because of the ability for common narratives to resonate with his audience. Multiple layers of overlapping allusion allow for more symbolically laden discourse. Drawing on a veritable literary empire of Muslim, Persian, Arabian, and folkloric tradition allows Rumi to appeal to his audience while also compounding the meaning of each line. Mills describes the role of folklore in the *Masnavi*, writing:

It is only in the atmosphere of Mawlana’s deep and rich annexation of folk tradition that his explosions of it have their maximum force. Reductions of stories to aphorisms, narrative-based proverbs, or brief indexical references are evidence of Rumi’s participation in a vigorous popular narrative tradition...[in which] the most cursory reference to a story can be sufficient to evoke appropriate associations for some listeners.¹¹⁸

She continues on, describing how the:

allusive use of narrative and thematic reiteration is a major component of daily speech, Rumi’s delight in piling up brief references in similes or metaphors four, six, even ten or twelve deep is a rhetorical device I have not encountered in modern daily speech. This pattern seems to be part of Rumi’s startling poetic exuberance as well as an assertion of his vigorous poetic control, in that he constantly demonstrates a consciousness which is several jumps ahead of either his characters or his audience. The latter is

¹¹⁷ Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 287.

¹¹⁸ Mills, “Folk Tradition in the *Masnavi* and the *Masnavi* in Folk Tradition,” 146.

challenged not by the familiar individual allusions but by the unexpected, even unprecedented multiplication of associations and interpretations which Mawlana evokes in linking collections of similes together.¹¹⁹

Rumi's ability to interweave different narratives upon one another grants the text multivalence, relying on the reader to connect within themselves each disparate narrative strand. Perhaps in the reader's recognition of a familiar story we hear the refrain of the reed-flute's song, stirring within us a sense of something once known but now distant.

Delighting in his ability to pile narratives upon one another, Rumi also possessed an affinity for word play. Word play, like Rumi's use of allusion, allows for multiple interpretations of his *Masnavi*, which adds not only to the text's ability to conform itself to the reader but also displays Rumi's poetic genius. In the story of Hilal and the Amir, or prince, Rumi focuses on the ability for one to be of a lowly worldly station but surpass their peers in spiritual station. The character of Hilal possesses the "lowly task [of] tending the Amir's horses and dealing with their refuse,"¹²⁰ all the while being far closer to God than the Amir. When Muhammad arrives, seeking Hilal, the dual meaning of Hilal's name comes to the fore through Rumi's use of metaphor:

Rumi plays on the meaning of the word *hilal* (crescent), also referring to the name of the Sufi the Prophet was visiting. Hilal, the Sufi, represents the Sufi intellect ('*aql-i sharif*) appearing as a *hilal* (crescent) waiting to go forward (unlike the Amir's animal intellect) and to spiritually grow to become the universal/prophetic intellect ('*aql-i kull*) represented by Muhammad in the metaphor of *mah* or *badr* (full moon).¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Mills, "Folk Tradition in the *Masnavi* and the *Masnavi* in Folk Tradition," 146.

¹²⁰ Hamid, "Storytelling Techniques in the "Maṣnavi-yī Ma'navi,"" 45.

¹²¹ Ibid., 45.

Hilal's name is not merely a name but also a demarcation of his station on the Sufi path. The intellect of Muhammad is viewed as a full moon, while Hilal is a sliver of that moon. Although Hilal is secondary to Muhammad, he is far superior to the Amir since he has chosen the path of God and not the path of worldly affairs. Therefore, Rumi, through Muhammad, consoles the discouraged Hilal who is frustrated by his immaturity on the Sufi path. Rumi writes:

Until thou wash thyself entirely clean of 'how-ness,'
do not put thy hand on this (Holy) Book, O youth.
You say to me, 'For the sake of the (Divine) reward,
do not go into the water-tank without having washed';
(But) outside of the tank there is nothing but earth:
no one who does not enter the water is clean.¹²²

Hilal should not allow his uncleanness to inhibit his approach of the water, for then he will never become clean. Rather, it is only when Hilal recognizes his misgivings that he can begin ridding himself of those faults and climb higher to God. Rumi utilizes the wordplay of Hilal's name to articulate a very relevant problem to his disciples: namely, the role that mistakes and fear of failure play in inhibiting the initiate from taking the next step on the Sufi path. For even though Hilal is but a crescent compared to the brilliance of Muhammad's full intellect, Hilal still shines, and as such is part of that reflective light.

As English speakers analyzing Rumi, it is important to understand that translations are not equal. The intentions and biases of the translator often seep into the resultant translation, and it is therefore necessary to recognize the limitations of the translated text before using it for analysis. Nicholson's translation is often relied on as a classic for non-Persian speaking proponents of Rumi because of Nicholson's legitimacy as a scholar and because of his

¹²² M 6: 1195, 1197-98, translated by Mojaddedi.

painstaking work to translate every Persian word as accurately as possible.¹²³ Nicholson writes that his translation is:

as exact and faithful as I can make it, but it does not attempt to convey the inner as distinguished from the outer meaning: that is to say, it gives the literal sense of the words translated without explaining either their metaphorical or their mystical sense... I have on the whole adhered to the principle that translation is one thing, interpretation another, and that correct interpretation depends on correct translation, just as the most fertile source of misinterpretation is inability or neglect to translate correctly.¹²⁴

Nicholson is not treating the *Masnavi* as a mystical treatise, although he fully recognizes that is what it is, but rather as a text which must be translated as linguistically accurately as possible. As such, he emphasizes the literal meaning of the words translated and does not stray from concrete meaning, even when the text cannot be translated word for word because of the limitations of the English language in capturing the original Persian. On the other hand, Mojaddedi's edition of the *Masnavi* breaks from Nicholson in its attempt to maintain rhyming couplets that mirror the Persian form of *masnavi*. Choosing to convey the Persian meter of *masnavi* in English iambic pentameter, Mojaddedi's translation is much more lyrical and poetic. Mojaddedi maintains as much of the Persian as he can, while also striving to convey the beauty of Rumi's poetic form. Mojaddedi's translation, however, is not yet complete because he has only translated the first three books of Rumi's six book *Masnavi*. Therefore, both Nicholson and Mojaddedi's translations will be used throughout the ensuing chapters depending on the context of the citation. Larger quoted sections will most often be from Mojaddedi's translation because of his ability to maintain poetic form, while quotations from the final three books will be from

¹²³ It should be noted that both Nicholson and Mojaddedi use the Persian edition prepared by Mohammad Estelami. Therefore, while the translations are different, they draw on the same primary source material, with each line number referring to the corresponding line of the *Masnavi* in Persian, edited by Estelami.

¹²⁴ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi*, xv.

Nicholson's translation. Rumi is, first and foremost, the author of a massive body of mystical poetry. Reading the *Masnavi* in English is a disservice to Mawlana, but our inability to speak Persian should not inhibit us from delving into the wealth of knowledge contained within his writings. Mojaddedi's translations will hopefully preserve the mystical beauty of Rumi's poetry so that, as we read him in English, we remain fixated on our whirling Mawlana.

Chapter III: Approaching God

Jalal al-Din Rumi's poetry is an attempt to bring his disciples into his own personal cosmology. While it is important for Rumi to convey the structure of his world, God, and humanity's role in the world, he is not attempting to present a systematic philosophy. Rumi does not want to be a philosopher and speaks out against the use of logic to understand God's creation. Using the symbol of the blind man's staff that, like logic, "props him up and allows him to grope inch by inch ahead,"¹²⁵ Rumi writes:

Had He not shown you mercy and favor
Your wooden deductions would snap in two;
Who gave them their staff of analogies
and proofs? One Manifest and Seeing!
When that staff turns to an instrument
of war and hate, shatter it, my blind one!¹²⁶

Logic charms humanity into viewing the world through a human lens, but the world is created and maintained by God. While modern academics consider Rumi's discursive and poetic style as hampering his ability to convey a systematic philosophy, they are missing a crucial point.¹²⁷ Rumi was not incapable of systematically organizing his thoughts into an easily understood philosophy, but rather chose not to construct a text in such a simplistic and obvious fashion. Rumi, as a poet and a mystic, was much more concerned with the conveyance of emotive and religious experience than he was with philosophic discourse. Lewis, describing Rumi's discursive fashion, writes that "while Rumi's immediate models in terms of generic structure are 'Attar and Sana'i, he also imitates (if not consciously, then by having internalized its narrative

¹²⁵ Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 400.

¹²⁶ M 1: 2135-2137, translated by Lewis.

¹²⁷ Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 394.

patterns) the literary style of the Koran.”¹²⁸ The Qur’an, like Rumi’s *Masnavi*, is a textured, interwoven, and often mercurial text that presents the reader with new insight upon every return. Philosophical treatises provide insight into one’s worldview, but do little to paint that worldview in vibrant color. Verse and prose, on the other hand, paint picture after picture of Rumi’s world and his endless love for God.

While Rumi’s primary aim is not to present a systematic cosmology and philosophy for his reader, this does not mean that he did not have a unique worldview. It becomes necessary, then, to move forward gently as we attempt to understand Rumi’s cosmology, always keeping in mind that Rumi’s first and foremost goal is not philosophy but poetry. Chittick writes that Rumi’s goal “is not primarily to explain but to guide...He only wants to make [his listeners] realize that as human beings, they are bound by their very nature to turn toward God and to devote themselves totally to Him.”¹²⁹ To read the *Masnavi* and construct a system of philosophical thought dilutes Rumi’s poetic and mystical message. Furthermore, Rumi’s careful construction of the text means that to “appreciate Rumi in all his dimensions, one must read Rumi himself, not the scholarly commentators.”¹³⁰ This becomes difficult, however, when access to Rumi depends not only on access to translations from the Persian original, but also an understanding of Rumi’s near constant references.¹³¹ Understanding the context of Rumi unlocks the innermost parts of Rumi’s writing, bringing them to the fore. Before approaching Rumi, it then becomes imperative to reflect inwardly *why* one is approaching Rumi. Chittick remarks on the role of the student when he writes that, “[a]s every student of Rumi knows, his verses are an inexhaustible ocean, and ultimately the student’s understanding will depend upon his own

¹²⁸ Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 395.

¹²⁹ William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 8.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹³¹ Ibid., 9.

capacity.”¹³² As we approach full text citations of Rumi throughout the next chapters, it is important to keep in mind that ambiguity abounds and meaning is elusive. To say that one story has a specific and clear final meaning, or that Rumi intended any of his writing to come to a neat conclusion, misunderstands the mystic’s goal. Finally, Chittick concisely summarizes how the student of Rumi should approach Mawlana, writing that:

Rumi’s voluminous works present a kaleidoscopic image of God, man, the world, and the interrelationship of these three realities. But in spite of the often bewildering complexity of the picture Rumi paints, all his expositions and explanations are so infused with a common perfume and so harmonious that one can readily agree with those who say that they are all reducible to a single sentence or phrase. Although his teachings can probably never be totally encompassed by any systematic exposition, certainly all of them express a single reality, the overriding reality of Rumi’s existence and of Islam itself: ‘There is no [G]od but God.’¹³³

It is towards this single reality that we now turn.

In line with many other medieval Muslim thinkers, Rumi adhered to a traditional Islamic cosmology.¹³⁴ Within this view, the universe was understood as, “nine concentric spheres surrounding their center, the earth.”¹³⁵ Starting at the center, Earth, and radiating outward through various spheres, one finally arrives at the footstool of God.¹³⁶ The cosmology of nine concentric spheres is a common trope of medieval thinkers, but for Rumi it also serves as, “an excellent symbolical vehicle for expressing his metaphysical knowledge.”¹³⁷ Rather than just representing visible planets, the spheres also “correspond to the ascending stages of the spiritual

¹³² Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 9.

¹³³ Ibid., 7.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 72.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 72.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 73.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 72.

journey.”¹³⁸ The spheres then become stepping-stones on Rumi’s path towards God and serve as helpful images signifying one’s position on that path. Movement from one sphere to the next can be both forward, towards God, and backward, towards Earth, and oscillation between the two is common; one cannot sit at the footstool of God eternally. Finally, the cosmology of the spheres reiterates the original creation of the universe. The descent of Adam from formless eternity through the spheres to Earth makes the human soul’s re-ascent possible. Rumi’s cosmology, like creation, begins in the outermost edge of the visible world in the ninth or starless heaven.¹³⁹ The ninth starless heaven is also known “as God’s ‘Throne’ (*‘arsh*)”¹⁴⁰ and marks the boundary where the visible universe ends and the spiritual world, or “the world of the command,”¹⁴¹ begins. From this point, “[t]he eight remaining heavens in descending order are those of (8) the fixed stars, sometimes called God’s ‘Footstool’ (*kursi*), (7) Saturn, (6) Jupiter, (5) Mars, (4) the sun, (3) Venus, (2) Mercury, and (1) the moon,”¹⁴² all circling the Earth.

It was within the ninth starless heaven that God, craving to be known, hurtled the universe into motion. Like a polo mallet striking a ball, “Rumi postulates that the Koranic decree of God, ‘Be and it was,’ has smacked us into motion...and we are now rolling through both space and meta-space.”¹⁴³ God’s reason for creation lies in the Divine Attribute of God as Creator (*al-Khaaliq*), but also because God craved to be known.¹⁴⁴ God’s creation of the universe was in part born out of God’s very nature as the Divine, but also because God wanted “to display His Attributes. Hence, the Prophet reported that God said, ‘I was a Hidden Treasure, so I wanted

¹³⁸ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 72.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 73.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 73.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 73.

¹⁴² Ibid., 73.

¹⁴³ Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 414.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 47.

to be known. Therefore I created the world that I might be known.”¹⁴⁵ When God, by declaring “Be and it was,”¹⁴⁶ set the universe in motion, God asked all that was created if it would carry the “‘Trust’ (*amanat*).”¹⁴⁷ Rumi placed a great deal of importance on this covenant, writing:

There is one thing in this world which must never be forgotten. If you forget everything else, but not that one thing, then have no fear. But if you perform, remember and do not forget all things, but you forget that, you have done nothing... *We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to carry it and were afraid of it; and man carried it. Surely he is sinful, very foolish* (XXXIII 72)... *We have honored the children of Adam* (XVII 70). God did not say, ‘We have honored the heavens and the earth.’ So man is able to perform that task which neither the heavens nor the earth nor the mountains can perform. When he performs that task, he will no longer be *sinful, very foolish*.¹⁴⁸

Beyond being an example of Rumi’s exegetical expansions of Qur’an, this also serves to illustrate the primacy that Rumi placed on humanity. God created the world to be known, and sought out a vicegerent whom God could give the “knowledge of all things.”¹⁴⁹ The Qur’an describes the refusal of the heavens and the earth and the mountains to carry the Trust, while humanity, sinfully and foolishly, decides to carry the Trust. Yet Rumi returns to this verse and expounds upon it, viewing humanity’s choice to carry the Trust not as sinful or foolish but as a task, once complete, that saves humanity from being sinful. The creation of the nine spheres, while revolving around Earth, could also be viewed as revolving around the earthly human. Through humanity’s choice to be God’s vicegerent, the entire universe was ordered in such a way that humans were placed at the center of the world.

¹⁴⁵ Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 47.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 414.

¹⁴⁷ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 63.

¹⁴⁸ *Fihi ma fihi* 14-15, in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 63. Italics represent Arabic, and Qur’anic verses are listed in parentheses.

¹⁴⁹ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 63.

As vicegerents of God's universe, humans now find themselves thrust out of formless eternity and into the spinning spheres of the visible world. At their center on Earth, human beings are torn from the Beloved, existing in a world of suffering and beauty. Just as the entire universe is a reflection of God, so too are Earth's suffering and beauty reflective of the distance and majesty of God's creation. The world's beauty reflects God's creation and attributes, while the suffering of the human soul results from the distance between the human and God. The difference between form and meaning is a theme that Rumi returns to throughout his writing. Forms are the outward appearance of a thing and serve as a "veil over the inward meaning."¹⁵⁰ As God's creation, every aspect of the universe reflects God. The inward meaning of everything, on Earth and in the heavens, is God. When one worships the outward form of a thing, that "worship is idolatry"¹⁵¹ because it reflects the worshipper's inability to see God in all creation. Chittick explains how the dichotomy of form and meaning is further muddled when he writes of form as "'place' and meaning [as] 'No-place'; foam is 'color' and the sea is 'Colorlessness.' For meaning is opposite to form and can only be attained by form's negation, by 'formlessness.'"¹⁵² Within Chittick's explanation, the dichotomy of form versus meaning shifts to form versus formlessness. Similar to the visible world and the spiritual world, the nine spheres represent God's created, visible world of form, while the formless eternity represents the spiritual world where God's essence resides. The need for the human soul to penetrate the veils of form and reach God, residing in formless eternity, is a further reflection of the soul's need to understand

¹⁵⁰ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 4.

¹⁵¹ Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 415.

¹⁵² Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 23.

the difference between form and formlessness. For even with all the multiplicity of forms, “all have one meaning. When you smash the jugs, the water is one.”¹⁵³

Presented with Rumi’s cosmos, we now find ourselves in need of analyzing the role of love in creation. Oftentimes Rumi is heralded as a mystic of love. His writing circles back to love at every turn, and one cannot help but recognize the profound importance of love in Rumi’s world. Yet to view Rumi as solely writing of love underscores the role of God in his writing. Modern renderings of Rumi’s poetry often isolate those sections that are replete with references to God’s love for humanity or the importance of love in the human heart. What these accounts do not emphasize, however, is that the love Rumi talks about is divided up into two categories. The first is, “‘true love’ (*‘ishq-i haqiqi*), or love for God; and [the second is] ‘derivative love’ (*‘ishq-i majazi*), or love for anything else.”¹⁵⁴ While it is true that “all love is in fact love for God, since whatever exists is His reflection or shadow,”¹⁵⁵ to assume that derivative love is equal to true love is to prioritize form over formlessness. Sufis recognize the inability for derivative love to ever compare with true love, having “already discovered that there is only one Beloved; [they see] all derivative love as cold and unreal.”¹⁵⁶ In Discourse thirty-six, from Rumi’s *Fihi ma fihi*, Rumi explains that, “just as God is the root of all being and creation secondary branches, so too love is at the root of the outward aspect of the things we see in this world. Love gives rise to a multiplicity of forms, but these are secondary and non-essential.”¹⁵⁷ Just as “[t]he conflicts among men stem from names [so too must we t]race back the meaning and achieve accord”¹⁵⁸ when it comes to love. To allow the outward foam of forms to hide the sea that lies below is no

¹⁵³ *Divan* 32108, in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 8.

¹⁵⁴ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 201.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁵⁷ *Fihi ma fihi* 139, in Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 406.

¹⁵⁸ M 2: 3680, translated by Lewis.

better than worshipping false idols. Misconstruing derivative love as equal to true love, or as a method for reaching God, is a misunderstanding of Rumi's complex division of love and reflects a New Age desire for secularized spirituality.

God's creation of the world is born out of God's love for humanity and thus it is important to give love its proper place within Rumi's cosmology. Stressing that the love I refer to is true love and not derivative love, Rumi firmly believes that the cosmos is made existent by God's love, for:

It's waves of love that make the heavens turn
Without that love the universe would freeze:
 no mineral absorbed by vegetable
 no growing thing consumed by animal
 no sacrifice of anima for Him
 Who inspired Mary with His pregnant breath
 Like Ice, all of them unmoved, frozen stiff
 No vibrant molecules in swarms of motion
Lovers of perfection, every atom
turns sapling-like to face the sun and grow
Their haste to shed their fleshly form for soul
sings out an orison of praise to God.¹⁵⁹

While love is certainly an attribute of God, to view love as the absolute attribute of God is to misunderstand God's divinity. God is not one thing; God is all things. God being love:

does not exhaust His Reality. In the same way He is Mercy, Knowledge, Life, Power, and Will. He possesses all these qualities; His Being is the same as their Being; but we may not say that God is Mercy and nothing else, or that He is knowledge and nothing else...He possesses all His Attributes absolutely, yet in His Essence He is beyond them all. From one point of view He is Love, but from another point of view He is beyond Love. Both points of view are seen in Rumi's verses and prose.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ M 5: 3854-9, translated by Lewis.

¹⁶⁰ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 196.

One of the central paradoxes of Muslim theology lies in the fact that God possesses all divine attributes absolutely, while God's Essence exists beyond those very attributes. Being both an attribute and beyond that attribute is a philosophical paradox emblematic of Divinity while also far too complex to convey to the non-initiated reader. Rumi sees the love of God for human beings as an intimate and caring relationship, writing of how God "holds your hand wherever you wander."¹⁶¹ Yet there is much to be said for the primacy that Rumi places on love and the way in which he teeters on the edge of heresy. Especially within Rumi's *Divan*, where the prose was produced during bouts of ecstatic union after being with Shams, Rumi speaks of love as an almost greater force than God, writing of how "Love's branches are in Eternity-without-beginning, its roots in Eternity-without-end—this tree is not supported by God's Throne, the earth, or a trunk."¹⁶² Within Rumi's cosmology, he places love as beyond the visible world and existent in the spiritual world, that formless eternity where only God can be found. On the one hand, Rumi could be talking of love and God as synonymous; on the other, however, Rumi could be asserting the supremacy of love over God. The ambiguity here is intentional, for it reminds us that words, like forms, do not accurately convey the formless meaning. Intentionally ambiguous statements force the reader to do the work on her own, to discern the true meaning behind the form of language. They also serve to highlight the failing of language when it comes to discussing the Divine, a common theme for Rumi's prose.

Turning now to the human spirit on Earth, we are confronted with the suffering of human beings who, in God's creation, must reconcile their existence in a confusing world. Spiritually, human beings exist in a constant battle between the ego and the intellect. For the majority of humanity, our ego triumphs over our intellect and as such we "cannot distinguish between truth

¹⁶¹ *Divan* 27421, in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 210.

¹⁶² *Divan* 4183, in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 196.

and falsehood, the real and the unreal, meaning and form.”¹⁶³ This is dangerous, for it leads to disillusionment and obsession with the forms of Earth and an inability to see God as the root of those forms. As vicegerents of God’s Trust, we “are an ocean of knowledge hidden in a dew drop, a world concealed in three ells of body.”¹⁶⁴ But we are forgetful, earthly creatures and as such we have forgotten our “original home and [our] covenant with God.”¹⁶⁵ In order to remember, humans must turn themselves towards God. This is challenging, however, because the Earth is distant from God and it becomes difficult to see God through the pain of that distance. The initiated Sufi, however, begins to realize that pain is but a distraction and an inability to see the world through God’s eyes. Evil on earth derives:

from the dimming of goodness as it becomes distant from the Source. In the world, things are relatively good and evil, not absolutely so, since there can be no absolute qualities within creation. From another point of view, things are good and evil only in relation to us, not in relation to God, for in His eyes all things are performing but one task: making the Hidden Treasure manifest.¹⁶⁶

Evil and pain are not absolutes that exist on Earth, but are instead a result of perspective. The human, unlike God, does not see the connectivity and purpose in all of creation and misinterprets creation, seeing evil when there is none. Like the “[c]reatures of water [who] see the ocean as a garden, creatures of earth see it as death and torment.”¹⁶⁷ This does not negate the pain that human beings feel and so Rumi begs us to:

Look not at Time’s events, which come from the spheres and make
life so disagreeable!
Look not at this dearth of daily bread and means of livelihood!
Look not at this famine and fear and trembling!

¹⁶³ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 34.

¹⁶⁴ M 5: 79, translated by Chittick.

¹⁶⁵ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 70.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 53.

¹⁶⁷ M 4: 69, translated by Chittick.

Look at this: In spite of all the world's bitterness, you are passionately and shamelessly attached to it. Know that bitter tribulation is a Mercy! Know that the empire of Marv and Balkh is a Vengeance!... The Cruelty of Time and of every suffering that exists is easier than distance from God and heedlessness. For that cruelty will pass, but distance from Him will not. No one possesses good fortune but he who takes to Him an aware spirit.¹⁶⁸

Furthermore, the Sufi knows that the world is not against him. God, in God's organization of the universe, manifests both the severe and gentle names. The positive and negative divine attributes are all visible in creation, but all gentle names "take precedence ontologically over the former...Or rather, all suffering and evil exist only to manifest a greater joy and good. However bleak the form may be, the meaning is always Mercy, which is eternally prior to Wrath."¹⁶⁹ Purifying the human soul allows one to see past the form of pain to find God within their suffering. The discovery of God behind the veils of earthly form brings one closer to God, further easing their suffering that is a result of distance from God.

Rarely can the Sufi purify themselves without the careful and loving guidance of a *sheikh*, or master. The initial phase of purification involves transforming the heart into a mirror and replacing the tyranny of the ego with the supremacy of the intellect.

Rumi has nothing but pity and disdain for those who look at the world around and within themselves and do not understand that what they are seeing is a veil over reality. The world is a dream, a prison, a trap, foam thrown up from the ocean, dust kicked up by a passing horse. But it is not what it appears to be.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ M 6: 1733-36, 56-57, translated by Chittick.

¹⁶⁹ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 46.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 19.

The first of the *sheikhs* were the prophets, who for Muslims are most readily accessible through the Qur'an. Rumi describes the care and love with which the prophets and saints urge human souls towards God:

Flee to God's Koran, take refuge in it;
there with the spirits of the prophets merge.
The Book conveys the prophets' circumstances
those fish of the pure sea of Majesty.
If you read the Book without acceptance,
what profit in meeting saints and prophets?
When you accept the stories as you read
the bird of your soul will feel encaged.
A bird imprisoned in the cage must seek
release, or failing that is ignorant.
The only souls to have escaped the cage
are the prophets, mankind's befitting guides.
We hear them from beyond sing melodies
of faith, 'Here is your path, this way release.'
This is how we escape confining cage
no recourse for this cage but by this path.¹⁷¹

The Qur'an's truths, in the form of stories, teach the Sufi that our souls are caged within an earthly, forgetful form. Realizing this entrapment, it is natural to seek release, which comes through a chain of prophets that teach us to free ourselves from the constraints of the material Earth. One necessary trait of the saints and prophets is their God-consciousness, which is reflected in their heart, the "ultimate center of man's consciousness, his inmost reality."¹⁷² To reiterate the form and meaning dichotomy, the heart that Rumi refers to is not the physical heart of the human form but the metaphysical heart of the soul. For most human beings, their hearts "are veiled by innumerable levels of dross and darkness, so that in practice the center of their consciousness or 'heart' is their...ego."¹⁷³ But the prophets and saints are different:

¹⁷¹ M 1: 1537-44, translated by Lewis.

¹⁷² Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 37.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 37.

The saints have polished their breasts until cleansed of greed,
 cupidity, avarice, and hatred.
 Without doubt the pure mirror is the heart acting as a receptacle for
 infinite pictures.
 The Moses-like saint possesses within his breast, in his heart's
 mirror, the infinite, formless Form of the Unseen.
 What does it matter if that Form is not contained by the heavens,
 the divine Throne, the footstool, or the Fish supporting the earth?
 These things are all delimited and defined, but the heart's mirror
 has no limits—know that!
 Here the intellect must remain silent, or else lead us astray. For the
 heart is with Him—indeed, the heart is He.¹⁷⁴

While the prophets and saints possess purified hearts, which glisten like mirrors and reflect the infinite pictures of God, the ordinary human heart is filled with water and clay. Humanity is thus tasked with cleansing their “[muddy] heart[s], to polish [them], and ultimately to make of [them] a perfect mirror reflecting God. This [humans] can only accomplish with the guidance of the Possessor of the Heart.”¹⁷⁵

The Sufi disciple is taught by their master to purify the heart through ascetic discipline, spiritual warfare, or *jihad*, and *dhikr*, a form of meditative remembrance. Through these methods the ego can die away and the soul can move upwards to the ninth sphere and beyond, to God's formless eternity. Movement upward towards God is made possible because of the original descent of Adam: beginning with his creation in the spiritual world and descending through the spheres to Earth. The spirit's movement between the spheres is made more complicated by the fact that the spirit “is always transcendent [and dwells] in its original home,”¹⁷⁶ or the spiritual world, with God. The spirit is not moving between the spheres so much as it is becoming “outwardly manifested through a series of ever darker shadows until the darkest shadow, the

¹⁷⁴ M 1: 3484-3489, translated by Chittick.

¹⁷⁵ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 39.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 74.

physical body, makes its appearance.”¹⁷⁷ Put another way, “[t]he physical world is but the shadow or reflection of the spiritual world.”¹⁷⁸ Looking at this reading, the spirit is the eternal meaning that lies beyond the form. While the form might move about within the physical world, its true nature lies eons away in the world of spirit. The ego, like the form, must die in order for the meaning of the spirit to be made manifest. That is why:

the seeker of God must die to self before he can shine with the divine light. Dying to self, or even slaying the self, which is known by Sufis as the greater jihad, includes learning to accede to God’s will, putting out the fires of ego, training the carnal self and concupiscent soul. When these veils of self are lifted, the divine light of the soul shines through; when burnished of all its rust, the mirror of the soul perfectly reflects the attributes of God.¹⁷⁹

Union, the ultimate goal of every Sufi, can only be achieved when the ego has died. Ego-death empties the self so that the Divine presence may fill the soul:

The Absolute Being works in nonexistence—what but nonexistence is the workshop of the Maker of existence? Does anyone write upon a written page? Does anyone plant a sapling in a place already planted? No, he searches for a paper free of writing, he sows a seed in a place unsown. Be, oh brother, a place unsown, a white paper untouched by the pen!¹⁸⁰

By emptying the ego, God plants gardens in our forms. In this state, the human soul does not suffer but instead subsists within the presence of God. Annihilation, or *fanā’*, occurs when the ego dissolves in the face of God, while subsistence, or *baqā’*, follows shortly after union. On the molecular level, all existent things are moving towards God in ascending levels, from the mineral

¹⁷⁷ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 74.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 74.

¹⁷⁹ Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 417.

¹⁸⁰ M 5: 1960-63, translated by Chittick.

state, to the plant state, and upwards to the human form, only to ultimately ebb away into the presence of the Divine:

Man came first to the realm of the minerals, and from them he fell
in among the plants.
For years he lived among the plants and joined the animals, he
remembered nothing of the vegetative state,
Save only the inclination he feels towards it, especially at the time
of spring and fragrant herbs...
Then that Creator whom you know kept on pulling him from
animality to humanity.
In the same way he passed from realm to realm, until now he is
intelligent, knowledgeable, and strong.
He remembers not his first intellects, and he will leave this present
intellect behind—
He will be delivered from this intellect full of avarice and cupidity
and see hundreds of thousands of marvelous intellects.¹⁸¹

Guided by the prophets, through the Qur'an, the human ego is slowly burned away through successive deaths. Dying should not be feared, however, for death is but another form that veils humans from God. The Sufi disciple with pure intention should run towards ego-death openly, consumed by love for the Divine, until everywhere they turn they see God reflected and manifest.

The most immediate way to manifest God is through the practice of *dhikr*, or remembrance. Muslims believe that humans are born inherently forgetful. *Salat*, or prayer, is the second pillar of Islam and requires Muslims to pray five times a day. Breaking up the profane movements of daily life with prayerful God-consciousness ensures that forgetful humans regularly reorient themselves towards God. The meditative remembrance of *dhikr* can be viewed as another form of God-consciousness, with the final goal being constant remembrance. After practicing *dhikr* for an extended period of time, every breath the Sufi takes becomes filled with

¹⁸¹ M 4: 3632-40, 3646-3649, translated by Chittick.

the remembrance of God. Constant *dhikr* is thought to bring about union with God because it burns away the outward forms until God becomes manifest. Once manifest, the brilliance of God's existence alongside the Sufi's existence annihilates the self. This annihilation is not absolute, however, and God's presence floods into the Sufi's so that she may subsist within God's presence. In this way, the Sufi can become filled with God so that every action reflects God's grandeur.

One of the most important stories within the Qur'an is that of Joseph and Zalikha. Sufis often interpret the story as the soul's longing for God told through the metaphor of Zalikha's longing for Joseph. Rumi utilizes the story of Zalikha's remembrance of Joseph to articulate not only *dhikr* but the subsistence that rewards constant *dhikr*:

Zalikha had applied to Joseph the name of everything, from rue-seed to aloes-wood.
She concealed his name in (all other) names and made the inner meaning thereof known to (none but her) confidants.
When she said, 'The wax is softened by the fire,' this meant, 'My beloved is very fond of me.'
And if she said, 'Look, the moon is risen'; or if she said, 'The willow-bough is green (with new leaves)';
Or if she said, 'The rose has told her secret to the nightingale'; or if she said, 'The king has disclosed his passion for Shahnaz';
Or if she said, 'How auspicious is Fortune!' or if she said, 'Give the furniture a good dusting'
Or if she said, 'The water-carrier has brought the water'; or if she said, 'The sun is risen';
Or if she said, 'Last night they cooked a potful of food' or 'The vegetables are cooked to perfection';
Or if she said, 'The loaves have no salt (savour)'; or if she said, 'The heavenly sphere is going round in the contrary direction';
Or if she said, 'My head aches'; or if she said, 'My headache is better'—
If she praised, 'twas his (Joseph's) caresses (that she meant); and if she blamed, 'twas separation from him (that she meant).
If she piled up a hundred thousand names, her meaning and intention was always Joseph.

Were she hungry, as soon as she spoke his name she would be
 filled (with spiritual food) and intoxicated by his cup.
 Her thirst would be quenched by his name: the name of Joseph was
 a sherbet to her soul;
 And if she were in pain, her pain would immediately be turned into
 profit by that exalted name.
 In cold weather it was a fur to her. This, this (is what) the
 Beloved's name can do (when one is) in love.
 The vulgar are always pronouncing the Holy Name, (but) it does
 not do this work (for them) since they are not endowed with true
 love.
 That (miracle) which Jesus had wrought by (pronouncing) the
 Name of *Hu* (God) was manifested to her through the name of
 him (Joseph).
 When the soul has been united with God, to speak of that (God) is
 (to speak of) this (soul), and to speak of this (soul) is (to speak
 of) that (God).
 She was empty of self and filled with love for her friend (Joseph),
 and (as the proverb says), 'A pot drips what is in it.'¹⁸²

Zalikha thus represents the ideal Sufi disciple, turning herself towards God constantly. The
 attempt of the earthly form to face Formlessness is rewarded by the subsistence of the soul in
 God and the abatement of suffering. God thus becomes a panacea for human suffering when we
 learn to see past the forms of suffering for what they truly are: God beckoning us towards the
 Divine, guiding us out of the pain of distance and into God's Divine presence where nothing is
 wanted, where the very whisper of God's name quenches our thirst and warms our cold forms.

At this point, there is no difference between Zalikha and Joseph. We cannot even speak
 of duality, for Zalikha is empty of self and filled with her love for Joseph. Nothing remains
 within her but him. Like the Sufi in union, the self is obliterated in the face of God. At this point,
 the nine concentric spheres, the fixed stars, the Lote Tree of the Far Boundary, even the cosmos
 itself collapses. Compressed inward on itself, the great expansiveness of the known universe
 becomes singularly God. Like Zalikha, distance and separation no longer exist in God's

¹⁸² M 6: 4021-4041, translated by Nicholson.

presence. The destruction of the cosmos draws upon what will occur on “the *yawm al-dīn*, the ‘day of reckoning’ or ‘moment of truth.’”¹⁸³ Sura 82, *al-Infītar* or the Cleaving, describes what will happen at the end of the world:

When the skies are torn apart
When the stars are strewn
When the seas boil over
When the tombs burst open
Then a person will know what she has given and what she has held
back.¹⁸⁴

All external forms that orient the soul will be thrown into chaos. Rifts will open in the sky, the stars will fall, and the seas will consume the earth. On this day, the soul will be judged for what it has given and what it has held back. Within the last line of this translation of *al-Infītar* is a careful musing on the human condition: “Then a person will know what she has given and what she has held back.”¹⁸⁵ Evil does not occur because of Satan, or temptation, or any external form. Rather, evil is a direct result of human beings hiding from their own nature. The use of “giving” and “holding back” insinuates that it is in our nature as human beings to give abundantly, and in giving, we are spreading compassion. Evil enters into the world when we withhold our nature, when we do not act generously. In this context, giving is viewed as the operative function of the human soul, while evil on earth is a result of holding back that true nature. This sura is not just a statement about what will happen on the day of reckoning nor is it meant to articulate human nature in its entirety. Rather, it serves to describe that “what seems real and secure (the mountains and the earth; wealth, status, and lineage; the cosmos itself) [will be] ripped away. What seems insignificant (a ‘mote’s weight’ of kindness or meanness) [will be] revealed to have

¹⁸³ Michael Sells, “Bewildered Tongue: The Semantics of Mystical Union in Islam,” in *Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith*, ed. Moshe Idel and Bernard McGinn (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 95.

¹⁸⁴ Sura 82: 1-5, in Sells, 95.

¹⁸⁵ Sura 82: 5, in Sells, 95.

absolute ontological value.”¹⁸⁶ On this day, the secret “hidden within the earth, behind the cosmic spheres, within the human heart, and within the grave, will be revealed.”¹⁸⁷ The secret might be the destination of the soul on the day of reckoning, or it might be the realization that all outward forms are simply the veils of God. Whatever the hidden secret may be, reading *al-Infītar* as just a pronouncement of the end of time misses its applicability to unitive experience. Keeping in mind the cosmology of Rumi’s world, it is towards union that we will now turn.

¹⁸⁶ Sells, “Bewildered Tongue,” 95.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قَالَ نَكِّرُوا لَهَا عَرْشَهَا

نَنْظُرْ أَتَنْهَدِي أَمْ تَكُونُ مِنَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٤١﴾ فَلَمَّا جَاءَتْ قِيلَ
أَهَكَذَا عَرْشُكِ قَالَتْ كَأَنَّهُ هُوَ وَأُوتِينَا الْعِلْمَ مِنْ قَبْلِهَا وَكُنَّا مُسْلِمِينَ
﴿٤٢﴾ وَصَدَّهَا مَا كَانَتْ تَعْبُدُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنَّهَا كَانَتْ مِنْ قَوْمٍ كَافِرِينَ
﴿٤٣﴾ قِيلَ لَهَا ادْخُلِي الصَّرْحَ فَلَمَّا رَأَتْهُ حَسِبَتْهُ لُجَّةً وَكَشَفَتْ عَنْ
سَاقَيْهَا قَالَ إِنَّهُ صَرْحٌ مُّمَرَّدٌ مِنْ قَوَارِيرَ قَالَتْ رَبِّ إِنِّي
ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي وَأَسْلَمْتُ مَعَ سُلَيْمَانَ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾

41. He said, 'Disguise her throne for her, so that we may see whether she is discerning or if she is one of the undiscerning ones.'
42. So when she came, it was said [to her], 'Is your throne like this one?' She said, 'It seems to be the same, and we were informed before it, and we had submitted.'
43. She had been barred [from the way of Allah] by what she used to worship besides Allah, for she belonged to a faithless people.
44. It was said to her, 'Enter the palace.' So when she saw it, she supposed it to be a pool of water, and she bared her [ankles]. He said, 'It is a palace paved with crystal.' She said, 'My Lord! Indeed I have wronged myself, and I submit with Solomon to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds.'¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Sura 27: 41-44. Translation by 'Ali Quli Qara'i, image by www.quran.com. Qara'i translates "ساقاها" as "shanks," specifically "her two shanks," while others translate it as referring to "her two ankles" or "her two thighs." While I chose Qara'i's translation because of its poetic beauty, I have chosen to change his translation of "ساقاها" to "ankles" rather than "shanks."

Believing the floors of Solomon's palace to be a flowing river, the Queen of Sheba lifts her skirts, bewildered and struck with awe. The floors are not water, but reflecting tiles of bright crystal, which enchant and confuse the Queen. While the palace disorients her, it would be a mistake to characterize the Queen of Sheba as lacking discernment. A few lines prior to her entrance provide ample evidence that she is in fact quite intelligent and shrewd. In response to the question of whether or not the throne before her is like her own throne, she treads carefully, saying that "it seems to be the same."¹⁸⁹ Recognizing that it would require a miracle to transport her throne to this location, she is hesitant to say that it is the exact same throne. Yet the Queen is aware of the reputation of Solomon. Knowing his wisdom, she provides space in her response for ambivalence, for the possibility of a miracle. Furthermore, there is something quite humanizing about our Queen baring her ankles to enter the flowing water. There is something mysterious and awe-inspiring in her confusion, at once disorienting and beautiful, about standing in the presence of something that confounds and impresses, or in the words of Rudolf Otto, something numinous.¹⁹⁰

While mysticism as a religious category prioritizes the often inexpressible experience of the Divine, mystical texts paradoxically overflow with multisensory, eloquent descriptions. Rumi's use of "khamush," or silence, is used as a counterpoint to his evocative verse, balancing the need to express the ecstasy of God with the inability of language to ever grasp the emotional experience. As with other mystical texts, scholars of Rumi benefit from a mystical lexicon that provides appropriate words to convey mystical states. Otto writes that:

It is a well-known and fundamental psychological law that ideas 'attract' one another, and that one will excite another and call it into consciousness; if it resembles it. An entirely similar law holds good with regard to feelings. A feeling, no less than an idea, can

¹⁸⁹ Sura 27: 42, translated by Qara'i.

¹⁹⁰ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Eastford, CT: Martino Find Books: 2010), 6.

arouse its like in the mind; and the presence of the one in my consciousness may be the occasion for my entertaining the other at the same time.¹⁹¹

While Otto articulates the similarities between ideas and feelings, this quotation is also applicable to language. Furthermore, with Otto's emphasis on the need for a vocabulary of mysticism, we see within the above quotation an apt summation of his *Das Heilige*. Words, like ideas, attract one another but more importantly, they excite into consciousness the feeling the word is attempting to convey. In this way, *Das Heilige* circles the holy through language, through words that describe aspects of the Divine, without ever being able to encompass the Divine in full. Yet the word *numen*, more than any other term theorists have used to describe the Divine, comes closest to grasping the intangible.

Otto believes language to be incapable of conveying God in full. Within this framework he views the Divine as characterized by both rational and non-rational attributes. Rational attributes "in the idea of God and the divine, [mean] by the term that in it which is clearly to be grasped by our power of conceiving, and enters the domain of familiar and definable conceptions."¹⁹² Otto maintains that "beneath this sphere [the rational] of clarity and lucidity lies a hidden depth, inaccessible to our conceptual thought, which we in so far call the 'non-rational.'"¹⁹³ Even in his use of the rational/non-rational dichotomy, Otto is hesitant and wary of misunderstanding, adding that these names are "purely formal...connoting a contrast and hence merely provisional."¹⁹⁴ Like the Divine, human beings are equally rational/non-rational beings, and language is a product of our rational side. Therefore, language easily conveys the rational attributes, but when the non-rational attributes of God require description "the tongue can only

¹⁹¹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 43.

¹⁹² Ibid., 61.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 61.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 61.

stammer brokenly.”¹⁹⁵ The deployment of precise language, however, allows us to circle the Divine “from afar, by metaphors and analogies,” and grants us comprehension of God, though our descriptions will forever be limited, “inadequate and confused.”¹⁹⁶

Finding modern language limited in articulation, Otto appropriates the term *numen*.

Acting as a foundation of Otto’s lexicon, the *numen* is defined as an adoption of:

A word coined from the Latin *numen*. *Omen* has given us *ominous*, and there is no reason why from *numen* we should not similarly form a word ‘*numinous*’. I shall speak then of a unique ‘*numinous*’ category of value and of a definitely ‘*numinous*’ state of mind, which is always found wherever the category is applied. This mental state is perfectly *sui generis* and irreducible to any other; and therefore, like every absolutely primary and elementary datum, while it admits of being discussed, it cannot be strictly defined. There is only one way to help another to an understanding of it. He must be guided and led on by consideration and discussion of the matter through the ways of his own mind, until he reach the point at which ‘the *numinous*’ in him perforce begins to stir, to start into life and into consciousness.¹⁹⁷

Within Otto’s definition, the *numen* is articulated as *sui generis*, absolute, indefinable, and requiring guidance, in some capacity, before the *numen* can be experienced. This first definition does nothing to convey the feeling of the human object before the *numinous* subject. For this, we turn to a more evocative description of the *numen* as:

an object of horror and dread, but at the same time...something that allures with a potent charm, and the creature, who trembles before it, utterly cowed and cast down, has always at the same time the impulse to turn to it, nay even to make it somehow his own. The ‘mystery’ is for him not merely something to be wondered at but something that entrances him; and beside that in it which bewilders and confounds, he feels a something that captivates and

¹⁹⁵ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 34.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

transports him with a strange ravishment, rising often enough to the pitch of dizzy intoxication.¹⁹⁸

Adding to the technical traits of the numinous already mentioned, the emotive experience of the numen is classified as alluring, entrancing, bewildering, captivating, and intoxicating. The numen also inspires within the human experiencing it a sense of trembling and shuddering.

These characteristics receive their own Ottonian terms, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*,¹⁹⁹ and creature-consciousness.²⁰⁰

The *sui generis* aspect of the numen refers to its uniqueness and self-generative nature. The numen does not exist as a product of human existence, nor of nature or the world, but in and of itself. The numen is “ineffable, unutterable mystery, the ‘absolute other’, as the incomprehensible, unwonted, enigmatic thing, in whatever place or guise it may confront us.”²⁰¹ Otto constructs yet another term in reference to the numen’s otherness: the wholly Other, which is defined as “that which is quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar, which therefore falls quite outside the limits of the ‘canny’, and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment.”²⁰² The *sui generis* nature of the numen makes it wholly Other, makes it incomprehensible in many ways, and removes it from human invention and natural existence. Thus, not only is the numen wholly Other, but it also stands outside of and beyond creation. The human experience of the numen is made more difficult to articulate because numinous experiences arise not from our perception of the world but the numen’s; existing beyond and outside of perception, the numen breaks through into human existence in the form of mysterious objects and enrapturing experience.

¹⁹⁸ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 31.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 12.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 9.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 65.

²⁰² Ibid., 26.

Otto adds to his definition of the wholly Other, writing that the numen bursts into our plane of existence and attaches itself to “objects which are already puzzling...or are of a surprising or astounding character,”²⁰³ in addition to acting upon and affecting humanity. The objects affected by the numinous are characterized by Otto as mysterious insofar as they are:

beyond our apprehension and comprehension, not only because our knowledge has certain irremovable limits, but because in it we come upon something inherently ‘wholly other’, whose kind and character are incommensurable with our own, and before which we therefore recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and numb.²⁰⁴

Thus, objects that inspire the numinous but are also products of our world carry some residue of the numinous, traces whereby we are startled into brief awareness. Like the feeling of walking in a forest, which at first is pleasant and relaxing, until you realize you have strayed from the path. Suddenly what was once beautiful and known becomes terrifying and unknown, but by unknown Otto does not mean simply not-known, but unknowable, impossible to discern because it does not exist for our minds to discern but rather entirely for itself. Confronted with the recognition that something exists outside of us, beyond us, and will remain unknowable to us regardless of how much time we spend studying it, what is there left to feel but holy dread?

The terror of the numen is tempered by the pull with which it entices us towards it, and the beauty with which its mystery may manifest. Otto referred to this tripartite articulation of the numen as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, or ‘aweful majesty’²⁰⁵ and fascination.²⁰⁶ In one of Otto’s more eloquent passages, he writes of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, describing how:

²⁰³ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 28.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 28.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 20.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 31.

The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant... It may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy. It has its wild and demonic forms and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering. It has its crude, barbaric antecedents and early manifestations, and again it may be developed into something beautiful and pure and glorious. It may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of—whom or what? In the presence of that which is a *Mystery* inexpressible and above all creatures.²⁰⁷

These descriptions of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* contain both positive and negative accounts of the numinous. As will be discussed later, the interplay between danger and ecstasy is integral to the numinous experience, but we must avoid any characterization of these traits as morally good or bad. Restraining, as best we can, our inherent codifying of language into positive and negative traits will better prepare us for our conversation of morality and the numen. Returning to the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, each characteristic will be explored in full while highlighting the interconnectedness of each trait.

Beyond the obvious connotations of mystery, Otto's rendering of mystery retains an air of danger and uncertainty. Writing of *mysterium*, Otto characterizes it as "that before which the eyes are held closed, that which is hidden and esoteric, that which is beyond conception or understanding, extraordinary and unfamiliar."²⁰⁸ Mystery necessitates emotive experience that is unfamiliar and inward. Mystery cannot be perceived by sight alone but must be felt, like a wave washing over the body. Without having ever felt the pull of the ocean tide, one remains incapable of contemplating the sheer force of the ocean. And the numen, like the ocean, is a force that is at

²⁰⁷ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 12.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

once beautiful and terrifying. Otto adds to his definition of *mysterium*, articulating that there is an overflow of content when one calls to mind the mysterious. This surplus of content causes the conception of the mysterious to boil over into the awful:

The reactions in consciousness that correspond to the one readily and spontaneously overflow into those that correspond to the other; in fact, any one sensitive to the use of words would commonly feel that the idea of ‘mystery’ (*mysterium*) is so closely bound up with its synthetic qualifying attribute ‘awful’ (*tremendum*) that one can hardly say the former without catching an echo of the latter, ‘mystery’ is almost itself becoming ‘awful mystery’ to us.²⁰⁹

The intermingling of mystery and awfulness creates a tantalizing interplay in the experience of the numen. The contrast between these two emotions is what lends itself so well to the numinous. Similarly, there is a delightful terror in finding oneself on the precipice of a cliff. From such great heights, one can see for miles while standing mere steps away from a precipitous death. Yet for all of our biological programming we move closer to the edge. There is a dalliance between the rapture and terror of the cliff, wherein the comingling of the two emotions juxtaposes one another and deepens the force of the experience. Otto would view this experience as evocative of the numen, as a point wherein the numen breaks into the natural plane and descends upon the creature standing so near the cliff. To the terror of the mortal creature we now turn.

Otto calls the *tremendum* by many names: tremor, terror, fear, shuddering, and the uncanny. Otto is troubled by his inability to find the correct word to shed light on the *tremendum* in particular, writing that:

‘Tremor’ is in itself merely the perfectly familiar and ‘natural’ emotion of *fear*. But here the term is taken, aptly enough but still only by analogy, to denote a quite specific kind of emotional response, wholly distinct from that of being afraid, though it so far

²⁰⁹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 25.

resembles it that the analogy of fear may be used to throw light upon its nature.²¹⁰

“Tremor” grasps at the physical and emotional response to the numen, which is expanded upon by our conception of fear, but neither articulate what actually occurs. Rather, they simply “throw light upon its nature.”²¹¹ Indeed, the entirety of *Das Heilige* can be viewed as an attempt at throwing light upon the nature of the Divine. Returning to the *tremendum*, Otto also describes it as an inward shuddering, “Here we have a terror fraught with an inward shuddering such as not even the most menacing and overpowering created thing can instill. It has something spectral in it.”²¹² In this classification of *tremendum* we see echoes of the wholly Other aspect of the numen insofar as the emotional response it creates is incomparable to any created thing. Otto ultimately concludes that, due to the interdependence of *mysterium* and *tremendum*, they should be rendered collectively as “‘tremenda majestas’, or ‘aweful majesty.’”²¹³ Paying close attention to Otto’s use of “aweful,” rather than “awful,” we see a decision on Otto’s part to emphasize the feeling of awe, which he feels has been stripped of the modern, colloquial, and more negative “awful.” This returns to the already hinted notion that the numen is incapable of moral definition.

The Wrath of God, for Otto, does not carry moral connotations. Otto understands wrath to be “the *urgency* or *energy* of the numinous object. It is particularly vividly perceptible in the ‘ὀργή’ or ‘Wrath’; and it everywhere clothes itself in symbolical expressions—vitality, passion, emotional temper, will, force, movement, excitement, [and] violence.”²¹⁴ Wrath becomes not anger or fury but rather a depiction of necessary movement, which causes the numen to “know

²¹⁰ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 13.

²¹¹ Ibid., 13.

²¹² Ibid., 14.

²¹³ Ibid., 20.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 23.

not stint nor stay [and] which is urgent, active, compelling, and alive.”²¹⁵ Turning ever-again to mysticism, Otto writes of wrath within the context of mysticism, specifically love-mysticism:

where it is very forcibly seen in that ‘consuming fire’ of love whose burning strength the mystic can hardly bear, but begs that the heat that has scorched him may be mitigated, lest he be himself destroyed by it. And in this urgency and pressure the mystic’s ‘love’ claims a perceptibly kinship with the [Wrath] itself, the scorching and consuming wrath of God; it is the same ‘energy’, only different directed. ‘Love’, says one of the mystics, ‘is nothing else than quenched Wrath.’²¹⁶

Otto’s wrath not only conveys the urgency and energy of the numen, but also the will for mystics to submerge themselves within that energy. For those familiar with mysticism, however, describing the mysterious pull into numinous, frantic energy as will misarticulates the captivating and fascinating nature of the numen.

Finally, turning towards the *fascinans* aspect of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* description of the numen, Otto explores the attraction that human beings feel towards the numen and numinous objects. Analyzing the interplay between the captivating and intimidating nature of the numen, Otto writes that “these two qualities, the daunting and the fascinating, now combine in a strange harmony of contrasts, and the resultant dual character of the numinous consciousness is at once the strangest and most noteworthy phenomenon in the whole history of religion.”²¹⁷ While we must be careful of reductionist renderings of the multifaceted and deeply layered history of religion, there is profound significance, particularly within mysticism, to the attraction and fear of God. Mystical language is replete with images of violence and love, emphasizing the near frantic need for God’s presence as well as the annihilation and desolation that follows God’s unveiling. Furthermore, the mystical tenets of a religion often form a core

²¹⁵ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 24.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 24.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 31.

whereby the hottest fires of the faith are kindled and carried. The flames of which speak to “something supra-rational [throbbing and gleaming], palpable and visible...prompting...a sense of ‘terror’ that no ‘natural’ anger can arouse,”²¹⁸ and with terror comes the sublime awe of God.

When mortal humans stand before the numen unveiled, Otto believes they are confronted with their own creature-consciousness. Describing the dependence that overwhelms one in the face of God, Otto turns to the story of Abraham pleading with God for the men of Sodom, writing how Abraham beseeched God:

‘Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes.’ There you have a self-confessed ‘feeling of dependence’ which is yet at the same time far more than, and something other than, *merely* a feeling of dependence...It is the emotion of a creature, abased and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures.²¹⁹

The feeling of being “but dust and ashes” is integral to the experience of the human in the presence of the Divine because it further asserts the supremacy of the wholly other numen. Yet when viewing human beings as creatures in relation to God, a distinction must be made between “createdness” and “creaturehood.” For Otto, createdness was indicative of “the creature as the work of the divine creative act,”²²⁰ while creaturehood conveys “impotence and general nothingness as against overpowering might, dust and ashes as against ‘majesty.’” In the one case [createdness] you have the fact of having been created; in the other [creaturehood], the status of the creature.²²¹ Viewing dependence on God as createdness centralizes the human being over God; we are made into the products of God’s Divine work. Creaturehood, on the other hand, places God as subject and human as object, impotent and hollow. Finally, the creature-feeling:

²¹⁸ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 19.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 9.

²²⁰ Ibid., 21.

²²¹ Ibid., 21.

turns upon the *character* of [the numen's] overpowering might...which cannot be expressed verbally, and can only be suggested indirectly through the tone and content of a man's feeling-response to [the numinous object]. And this response must be directly experienced in oneself to be understood.²²²

A central theme of Otto's theory is the focus of his religious inquiry on experience, and his firm belief that the word numen is the only way to fully convey the experience of the Divine. All other attempts at metaphor and exposition fall flat when it comes to the category of the numen. As such, he believed that one required a guide who could evoke within their disciples the numen, granting the disciple the necessary experience to understand the sheer, ineffable grandiosity of the numen.

"There is, of course, no 'transmission' of it in the proper sense of the word; it cannot be 'taught', it must be 'awakened' from the spirit,"²²³ writes Otto. The need for the individual to experience the numen was so profound for Otto that, eight pages into *Das Heilige*, he writes:

The reader is invited to direct his mind to a moment of deeply-felt religious experience, as little as possible qualified by other forms of consciousness. Whoever cannot do this, whoever knows no such moments in his experience, is requested to read no further; for it is not easy to discuss questions of religious psychology with one who can recollect the emotions of his adolescence, the discomforts of indigestion, or, say, social feelings, but cannot recall any intrinsically religious feelings.²²⁴

While necessitating the reader to have experienced a "deeply-felt religious experience"²²⁵ unnecessarily controls access to the study of religion, Otto's firm stance makes logical sense. When the entirety of *Das Heilige* is concerned with the non-rational, emotional, and internal aspects of religion, the inability for the reader to draw on a numinous experience severely limits

²²² Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 10.

²²³ Ibid., 62.

²²⁴ Ibid., 8.

²²⁵ Ibid., 8.

her comprehension of Otto's theory. Yet Otto speaks of the ways in which experience can be contemplated and grown "by careful exercise in depth and inwardness, there what one man feels *can* be 'expounded' and 'brought to consciousness' in another: one man can both educate himself to a genuine and true manner of feeling and be the means of bringing others to the same point."²²⁶ Thus, the initial drama of Otto's claim is tempered by the ability for people to be nurtured and guided towards the experience of the numen.

Through Otto's copious citing of literature, particularly poetry, one comes to realize that he placed a great deal of importance on the ability for literature, music, and poetry to convey and invoke the numinous. As evidence of the innate nature of the numen within the human heart, Otto quotes Schiller's *Der Graf von Habsburg*:

Und wecket der dunklen Gefühle Gewalt,
Die im Herzen wunderbar schliefen.

It waketh the power of feelings obscure
That in the heart wondrously slumbered.²²⁷

Slumbering within the hearts of every mortal creature lies a numinous spark, waiting to be kindled by an experience of a wholly Other kind. For Goethe, the spark was easily lit through poetry and music:

In Poetry there is from first to last something daemonic, and especially in its unconscious appeal, for which all intellect and reason is insufficient, and which, therefore, has an efficacy beyond all concepts. Such is the effect in Music in the highest degree, for Music stands too high for any understanding to reach, and an all-mastering efficacy goes forth from it, of which however no man is able to give an account. Religious worship cannot therefore do without music. It is one of the foremost means to work upon men with an effect of *marvel*.²²⁸

²²⁶ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 181.

²²⁷ Ibid., 152.

²²⁸ Ibid., 155.

Yet before we can return to the numinous poetry of Rumi, we must reconcile Otto by turning to his contemporary critic, Robert Orsi.

Orsi believes that the category of experience has been displaced not only in religious studies, but also in other disciplines of the humanities and social sciences.²²⁹ Orsi argues that:

With the (re)introduction of experience comes renewed interest in the agency of the experience, with issues of freedom, action, and limitations; in the multiple sources of experience, such as the imagination (collective and individual), memory, family contexts, emotions, and the unconscious, which are never simply identical to the world as it is given (in authorized versions of 'reality,' for example, in facts or in ordinary consciousness), and how these contribute to the making of the really real; and in the relational grounds of experience, including dimensions of intersubjectivity other than the verbal or the conscious (meaning touch, intuition, and the erotic in its most capacious meaning).²³⁰

The opening up of the world to new and different realities is integral to Orsi's conception of the holy. When dominant power structures utilize their authority to establish an assumed, universal reality, opening spaces within culture for alternative realities to flourish is integral. Not only does this combat the oppressive structures of society, but it also allows for recognition that individuals might realistically exist within different realities. Orsi utilizes his experiences with his handicapped uncle who found meaning and a measure of authority through his identity as a "holy cripple," Orsi argues that "[t]he holy opened a crack in the givenness of the social world. It made possible for my uncle and his friends, as well as for the people around them, other experiences besides those mandated by social discourses in an environment that was otherwise mostly cruel and dismissive of persons with handicaps."²³¹ Otto's articulation of the holy, or numen, as

²²⁹ Orsi, "The problem of the holy," 86.

²³⁰ Ibid., 86.

²³¹ Ibid., 89.

wholly Other and as a subject, alongside which humans are objects, grants a radical importance to the holy that goes largely ignored by scholars of religion today.

Fully recognizing Otto's limitations, Orsi believes that there is still merit to Otto's mystical lexicon and prioritization of experience. Orsi's primary critique of Otto is the centralization and overemphasis of Christianity as a perfect religion. Otto, being Lutheran, grants pride of place to his own tradition. Placing Christianity in comparison to other traditions on a linear model of progress, Otto inherently categorizes all other religions as inferior to Christianity, which he views as a beacon of religious perfection. Otto writes, "[n]o religion has brought the mystery of the need for atonement or expiation to so complete, so profound, or so powerful expression as Christianity. And in this, too, it shows its superiority over others."²³² In addition to Otto's prioritization of Christianity, Orsi is also critical of Otto's sympathy for the Nazis. Yet Otto's failures should not prevent academics from reaping the benefits of his theoretical contributions. Orsi, as a neo-Ottonian, plays a crucial role in both critiquing Otto and advocating for his academic contributions. Revitalizing Otto's theories, it becomes necessary to read Orsi and Otto alongside one another before deploying either of them in our analysis.

Orsi articulates the importance of Otto's mystical lexicon, as well as the ability for individuals who have experienced the numen to "kindle" the numinous within others. Orsi describes holiness as:

Something real in culture and history, with real, if ambivalent, effects. I do not mean something unequivocally good or bad, nor do I mean something free of time and place, at least in its inception (I think it *becomes* free of time and place, a topic I will return to) Rather, I mean something that is more than the sum of its social parts and that comes to have a life of its own independent of the

²³² Orsi, "The problem of the holy," 97.

humans out of whose imaginations, inheritances, and
circumstances it emerged.²³³

The independence of the holiness and its ability to exist autonomously from those that formed it, experienced it, or imagined it necessitate a language of the holy to articulate an idea that is more-than-an-idea. Otto's neologisms can be deployed to convey "the feeling of the numinous [that] is not like all the other emotions for which we have names, so we need a new vocabulary for it."²³⁴

In addition to a new vocabulary, we need a method for guiding others towards the numinous.

Here, again, Orsi provides a succinct and beneficial summation of Otto, writing that "the feeling of the holy is 'induced, incited, and aroused' in ordinary folk by 'the instrumentality of other more highly endowed natures,' which Otto also called 'divinatory natures.' 'Faith, in the deepest sense of the word,' he wrote, 'can only be 'kindled.'""²³⁵ The role of the prophets is to kindle the holy within the souls of humanity, singing to us:

'Here is your path, this way release.'
This is how we escape confining cage
no recourse for this cage but by this path.²³⁶

Orsi spends a substantial portion of the beginning of his article restructuring the holy personally. Remaining critical of Otto and the way in which the category of the holy can be used to hurt others, Orsi is "on the lookout for domination, denial, and exploitation"²³⁷ when "rich prelates or first world theologians declare that the poor are God's special people, or [when] adults say that children are especially gifted spiritually."²³⁸ Keeping in mind that the holy can act as "a treacherous pivot on which fantasies and realities of domination, desire, and destruction

²³³ Orsi, "The problem of the holy," 91.

²³⁴ Ibid., 94.

²³⁵ Ibid., 94.

²³⁶ M 1: 1543-1544, translated by Lewis.

²³⁷ Orsi, "The problem of the holy," 89.

²³⁸ Ibid., 89.

[spin] around each other,”²³⁹ throughout the rest of this paper we will emphasize the ability for Otto to provide a compendium of mystical terms for our analysis of Rumi while ensuring that Rumi is not romanticized or reduced.

Orsi’s insight lies not in modernizing Otto’s ideas but in expanding upon them, drawing from what he calls “the *tradition of the more*.”²⁴⁰ Orsi utilizes William James’ model of “ $2 + 2 = 5$ ”²⁴¹ to articulate the surplus of the holy, which is definitive of Orsi’s tradition of the more. The $2 + 2 = 5$ model works to depict the production of something wholly Other, outside of and beyond humanity and nature. The tradition of the more, and other theories which emphasized an abundance or excess of *sui generis* energy, “arose in protest against the sterility of materialist, positivist, and naturalist analyses of culture generally, religions in particular, and against the bourgeois theological insistence that the holy was primarily a moral category, and it is marked by a strong contrarian and even subversive impulse.”²⁴² Hopefully having thrown light upon the holy, we will now look at one final description of the holy before addressing the semantics of union:

The experience of the holy blurs certain boundaries of the real as moderns conceive it: between here and there, for instance, the past and the present, or between one person and another. It also unsettles boundaries dear to modern ways of knowing: between academic disciplines (psychoanalysis and history for instance); between accounts of conscious knowing and the unconscious; and especially between the imaginary and the real. It requires a new theoretical vocabulary, which is why the experience was so generative of neologisms and what I have resorted to the $2 + 2 = 5$.²⁴³

²³⁹ Orsi, “The problem of the holy,” 99.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 99.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 99.

²⁴² Ibid., 99.

²⁴³ Ibid., 104.

The holy pushes back against human understanding and boundaries because it is not human; it is beyond and above human conception and surges into human existence but never depends on human recognition to exist. The ability of the holy to open up these rifts in society, muddling methods of knowing, and bridging time and place are integral to analyzing the Sufi quest for union with God.

While Otto and Orsi provide a methodological lexicon for mysticism, as well as modern renderings of the holy, Sells focuses on the textual analysis of union within Islam. Mystical union in Islam is referred to in two parts: *fanā'* and *baqā'*. *Fanā'*, most often translated as “annihilation,” refers to “the ‘passing away’ of the self,”²⁴⁴ while *baqā'* is “the ‘remaining’ of a consciousness that can be said to be divine within the human or human within the divine.”²⁴⁵ *Baqā'* also refers to the ability for the human soul, after it is annihilated, to subsist within the presence of the Divine. The textual basis for *fanā'* and *baqā'* comes from a *ḥadīth qudsī*, meaning “transcendent hadith,”²⁴⁶ which is read as “an extra-Qur’anic pronouncement in the divine voice.”²⁴⁷ The *ḥadīth*, translated by Sells, goes as follows:

I become the hearing with which he hears, the seeing with which
he sees, the hand with which he grasps, the foot with which he
walks.²⁴⁸

The *ḥadīth*, often read in the Divine voice, is confusing because of the ambiguity of subject and object. Sells focuses his analysis of union on language, emphasizing the rhetorical devices that signify union and which draw upon a background of Arabic poetry, jurisprudence, and language structure. Summarizing his definition of union, as well as his central argument, Sells writes:

²⁴⁴ Sells, “Bewildered Tongue,” 87.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 87.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 87.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 87.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 87.

When one of the entities (the human) passes away, the other (the divine), insofar as it can be considered an entity at all, fills its psychic space, becoming its hearing and its seeing. To become empty of self, to pass away, is to become like a polished mirror reflecting the divine image and to become one with the divine in that image. This moment of union is manifested in language through a transformation of normal reference and the divisions between subject and object, self and other, reflexive and nonreflexive, upon which language is based.²⁴⁹

Academic definitions of union are difficult. Sells provides a working definition for his analysis, but academic readings of lived experience always fall apart upon closer inspection. As such, it is important to keep in mind that the use of “union” throughout this paper will refer to Sells’ definition, which is ultimately incomplete, but which provides an initial basis of understanding. Hopefully, Sells’ rendering of union is complete enough to allow for the discussion and analysis of union within the *Masnavi*. As Sells himself notes, “union is a secret or mystery (*sirr*) that even in expression remains paradoxically unrevealed... [and which] lies unfathomably deep within the poetic remembrance. Complete theological expression of unity lies beyond the dualities of language reference and discursive thought.”²⁵⁰ Union is an experience of the wholly Other, the holy surplus, and any attempt at articulating it through language is limited and flawed. Yet with the study of religion comes the need to define our terms and categorize experiences. Furthermore, arguments that criticize academic categorization and scholarly discourse of experience should keep in mind what Rumi tells us from the very start:

My deepest secret’s in this song I wail
But eyes and ears can’t penetrate the veil...
Love’s fire is what makes every reed-flute pine,
Love’s fervor thus lends potency to wine.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ Sells, “Bewildered Tongue,” 87.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 88.

²⁵¹ M 1: 7, 10, translated by Mojaddedi.

We may never penetrate the veil, but we must never stop trying. Indeed, it is the love of God that moves tongues to sing, and perhaps in our analysis we might “hear the truths the reed has sung.”²⁵²

The language of mystical union is often one of contorted structures that purposefully create ambiguity. Ambiguous language is not viewed as detracting from the meaning of the text, as it is often characterized in English literature. Rather, “when union becomes the central principle of a mystical dialectic, a transreferential *aporia* or perplexity is built within language, transforming its normal functions and structure.”²⁵³ This not only distinguishes mystical discourse as a unique canon in Arabic and Persian writing, but also emphasizes the connectivity between form and content. The non-linear form of the discourse is shaped by the bewildering and perplexing content of the experience. As the mystic searches for a form that adds to the language of their unitive experience, the form most often deployed is one of perplexity and ambiguity. Muslim mystics also utilize paradox in a similar manner. Recognizing that “*fanā*’ occurs only insofar as the self passes away, conversations from within union involve essential paradoxes concerning the identity (in both senses of the term) of the two parties [involved].”²⁵⁴ After all, it seems logical to conclude that union would be a profoundly confusing occurrence since it involves the removal of what makes us individual and separate: the self. Yet the very core of union necessitates the passing away of self, for it is separation from God that brings about suffering and pain. Release from the turmoil of material and earthly life comes only when one can annihilate the self.

²⁵² M 1: 14, translated by Mojaddedi.

²⁵³ Sells, “Bewildered Tongue,” 89.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 89.

Sells provides a necessary historical context to union, emphasizing the contributions that early Arabic poetry made to Islamic mystical discourse. Muslims often “refer to pre-Islamic Arabic culture as the *Jahiliyya* (period or condition of moral ignorance), and the Qur’an places itself within the prophetic, Abrahamic tradition.”²⁵⁵ Yet Sells views pre-Islamic Arabic poetry as the foundation for mystical Sufi writing, comparing it in importance to the *Song of Songs* in Jewish and Christian mystical literature.²⁵⁶ While Sells recognizes the critiques of pre-Islamic Arabia, he nevertheless finds between pre-Islamic poetry and Sufi poetry a wealth of similarities in form and language:

the Qur’an also insistently and emphatically calls itself an *Arabic* Qur’an, marking its immanence within the cultural-linguistic world that developed with or through the oral tradition of *Jahiliyya* poetry. Rather than rejecting this heritage, early Islam recorded it in one of history’s greatest philological endeavors. The harshest critique of pre-Islamic society did not prevent the preservation and appropriation of its deeper symbolic patterns.²⁵⁷

Through Sells’ analysis of the *qasida*, or ode, of pre-Islamic Arabia, he draws similarities to the movements of Sufi poetry.

Dividing the *qasida* into three major movements and four poetic conventions, Sells argues that an understanding of the *qasida* aids in analyzing Sufi literature. The three major movements of the *qasida* are:

- (1) the *nasīb*, or remembrance (*dhikr*), of the lost beloved;
- (2) the journey (a movement that in some way prefigures the major Islamic journey of the Hajj);
- (3) the boast.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ Sells, “Bewildered Tongue,” 90.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

The first movement, that of remembrance or *dhikr*, is integral to Sufi love poetry. Believing humanity to be inherently forgetful, Islam emphasizes the need for Muslims to remember God in everything they do. As a branch of Islam, Sufism takes remembrance even further, believing it to be a tool that diminishes the ego and emboldens the presence of God within the mortal human. *Dhikr* thus becomes a meditative tool that aids in orienting the Sufi towards God and burning away the veils of division and form. Sells argues that remembrance is a “wellspring” of not only the Sufi voice but the poetic voice as well.²⁵⁹ He then briefly lists the major conventions and motifs of pre-Islamic poetry that Sufis appropriate, transform, and echo:

- (1) the traces of the lost beloved’s abodes;
- (2) the blame of the lost beloved for her continually changing forms and moods (*ahwāl*);
- (3) the stations (*maqamāt*) of her journey away from the poet;
- (4) images of fertility and tranquility that memory of her conjures in place of the desolate ruins of her campsite, images that open onto the underlying archetype, beloved as lost garden.²⁶⁰

In our brief understanding of *fanā’* and *baqā’* we see a mirroring of these forms, albeit through the lens of God as beloved and Sufi as poet:

- (1) The need to find the traces of God within the forms surrounding the Sufi.
- (2) The blaming, anger, sorrow, and pain that the Sufi feels as they try to find God in outward forms, struggling to realize that God is not within any of those forms but instead immanent and distant. God is both the essence and true meaning of all forms while simultaneously out beyond the fixed stars in formless eternity.
- (3) The stations of the nine concentric spheres of the Ptolemaic universe, which Sufis employ as imagery of the various stepping-stones towards God.
- (4) The return after union with God wherein *baqā’* nourishes the Sufi on Earth, a desolate and unforgiving world after experiencing the ecstasy of union with the Divine.

²⁵⁹ Sells, “Bewildered Tongue,” 90.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 90.

Emphasizing the madness of both the poet and the Sufi, Sells writes of how “[t]he love-mad poet, wandering and perishing in the desert, becomes the Sufi, driven mad by divine love, transcending the imprisonment of reason, society, and ego.”²⁶¹ The absolute otherness of God overwhelms the human mind and, like a drop of water falling into the ocean, is irretrievably lost in the numinous flow of God:

How should it (the spirit) find (God)? He that finds (God) becomes
lost (in Him): like a torrent he is absorbed in the Ocean.
The seed is lost (in the earth): (only) then does it become a fig-
tree.²⁶²

Oftentimes the madness emblematic of Sufi discourse and character is overemphasized in modern renderings of Sufi poetry. As we have already seen with misguided and ignorant “translations” of Rumi, which unhinge him from his Muslim identity, reading Sufis as only love-mad mystics is reductionist. The ire that misinformed translations of Rumi invoke is a result of their dilution, which strips Rumi’s verse of meaning. Reading Rumi as a mystic of love is one-dimensional and particularly painful given the vast depth of his poetry. Similarly, recognizing the Muslim intellectual and academic traditions that steep Sufi poetry only grants mystical literature more depth. Sells argues that the influence that pre-Islamic literature had on Sufi poetry equals the influence of theological disputation:

Sufi language of union is as intermeshed with the disputations of the scholastic theologians as it is with the odes of the poets. The love-madness of many Sufis was achieved not through the abandonment of intellectual and theological endeavor but within that endeavor.²⁶³

Furthermore, classical Islamic arguments within the Qur’an:

²⁶¹ Sells, “Bewildered Tongue,” 92.

²⁶² M 6: 4052-4053, translated by Nicholson.

²⁶³ Sells, “Bewildered Tongue,” 95.

between human free agency and divine omnipotence, between divine unity (*tawhīd*) and the plurality of divine attributes (the all-seeing, the all-knowing), generated a profusion of theological positions that for the Sufis heightened the sense of *hayra*, the perplexity or bewilderment that the theologians had aimed to dispel. Sufi language of union would turn on its head the theological sense of *hayra*, finding in the irreducible character of the enigma a key to the language of mystical union. But this revalorizing of bewilderment was not an abandonment of theological disputation. In many instances Sufi language of mystical union interiorizes within its own movement both sides of the arguments.²⁶⁴

As we have seen with paradox, Sufi poetry leans into these arguments and extends their contrast in order to evoke the irreducible character of the numen. The literacy necessary to articulate and manipulate these multifaceted arguments only comes from years of theological and exegetical study. Without interiorizing these arguments, Sufi poetry would have never climbed to such heights as Attar, Sana'i, Rabia, and Rumi.

While we must read the madness of Sufis with a measured hand, to ignore the bewilderment and confusion of the soul in union with God is to undervalue the primacy of these emotions. Union with God entails entering into the world of the Divine, a world determined by God and characterized by numinous Otherness. Being a world of the formless and incomprehensible God, the dissolution and breakdown of human thought, reason, and consciousness arrives at a logical conclusion, “[i]nsofar as the Sufi ‘achieves’ *fanā*’, or passing away, there is no individual human subject anymore who can be said to achieve union. Union involves not only a passing away of selfs (*nafs*) but also a loss of discursive reason (*‘aql*) that functions upon the principle of self-identity.”²⁶⁵ The very lens through which we have experienced our world since birth shatters. Within the falling fragments, we see reflected in it the

²⁶⁴ Sells, “Bewildered Tongue,” 96.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 93.

multitudinous refractions of the numen, and a choice word capable of conveying this experience in English is bewilderment. However, there may be another word that could convey the unitive experience, if it were to be resuscitated from colloquialisms: the erotic.

Sells writes that “[t]he common distinction between profane and Sufi love is difficult to make on the basis of the respective treatments of love. In each case the love is erotic, less in the popular sense of sexual than in the psychological phenomenology, the loss of reason, identity, sense of self.”²⁶⁶ Sells’ use of the erotic plays upon the more sexual and physical prose of the pre-Islamic poets, but also hints at the reclamation of the erotic from modern colloquialisms. In this way, Sells’ erotic mirrors Audre Lorde’s erotic in that it references “a power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge.”²⁶⁷ Lorde emphasizes the erotic as non-rational, mirroring Otto’s belief that the most integral aspects of the numen, and the aspects which are most in need of reclamation, are the non-rational attributes. Furthermore, Lorde’s erotic is born within the depths of the human soul and only surfaces through the experience of something wholly Other. The erotic erupts into being, entering into the field of human experience, through the pull of the Otherness from which it is born. In the spontaneous eruption of Lorde’s erotic, there is something dangerous, something tremendous and chaotic within the erotic, for the “very word erotic comes from the Greek word *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects – born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony.”²⁶⁸

The erotic is wholly experiential. Owing the numen for its existence, human beings do not create the erotic but rather the erotic bursts forth, like the numinous, into human consciousness. It is something to be felt, which enraptures the human form, sweeping the soul

²⁶⁶ Sells, “Bewildered Tongue,” 93.

²⁶⁷ Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*,” in *Sister Outsider* (Freedom: The Crossing Press, 1984), 53.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

away in a torrent of feeling. Lorde captures the way in which the erotic overwhelms her, writing of how she knows it is present through “the way my body stretches to music and opens into response, hearkening to its deepest rhythms, so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience, whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, [or] examining an idea.”²⁶⁹ Within these experiences, from the mundane to the sacred, Lorde believes that “for me, [there is] no difference between writing a good poem and moving into sunlight against the body of a woman I love.”²⁷⁰ For Rumi, too, there is no difference between the chickpea boiling over the fire and the experience of the human soul moving through the universe. Regardless of the particular experience, all things reflect God’s sublime beauty. Even within the story of Satan and his purported betrayal, Sufis have the compassion to see God’s mercy in action.

The story of Iblis’, or Satan’s, refusal to bow to the created form of Adam has been deployed by many Sufis to convey their stance on unitive experience. During the premundane covenant regarding humanity’s decision to carry the Trust, the angels ask God a perplexing question. The ensuing conversation between God and Iblis has been interpreted by two Sufi masters, Hallaj and Ibn Arabi, to depict their interpretation of union.

In order to understand Hallaj and Ibn Arabi’s interpretations, a general outline of the story is required. Sells summarizes:

In the Qur’anic account of Adam’s creation, Allah announces to the angels that he will create the human being to be his *khalīfa* (regent) on earth. The angels ask, ‘Will you create one who will spill blood and corrupt the earth?’ The divine voice replies by asking the angels whether they know the ‘names.’ When they respond that they only know what they have been taught, Allah

²⁶⁹ Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*,” 56.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 58.

commands Adam to teach them the names. The angels are then commanded to prostrate themselves before Adam. All obey except for Iblis (Satan), who refuses and is exiled from the heavens.²⁷¹

It is important to remember that Iblis here is not the same Satan of Judaism or Christianity. The dispute between Iblis and God serves two discursive objectives for understanding unitive experience for Sufis. Hallaj's interpretation views Iblis as exemplar of the ideal Sufi approaching God, while Ibn Arabi inverts Hallaj's interpretation and understands Adam to be a better example for Sufis.

Hallaj views Iblis' passionate refusal to bow before any being other than his Creator, knowing full well that he will be exiled from his Beloved's presence, as an ideal that every Sufi should strive for. Iblis refuses to see multiplicity in God, maintaining *tawhīd*, or the unity of being of God, at his own expense. Sells writes:

Hallaj interprets Satan's refusal to bow before Adam as a refusal to worship the image of the divine rather than the divine itself in its absolute, imageless unity. The order to bow was a test. Iblis refused the explicit command, obeying instead the interior, secret divine will. At one point Iblis suggests that his disobedience was itself predetermined by that same inner will. He acts out of pure love, oblivious to rewards and punishments, willing to endure external exile from the beloved as well as eternal opprobrium from all beings, rather than betray that love. The love-madness exemplified in Majnun Layla recurs here intertwined with theological reflections upon destiny and unity, as the suggestion that Iblis's action has been predetermined pulls against the heroic, willful passion of his refusal to bow to Adam. In the follow verses Iblis explains his refusal of the divine command as his affirmation (*taqdīs*) of the divine transcendence of any mere image such as Adam. The last verse is constructed so as to leave two equally plausible readings.

My disavowal in you is *taqdīs*.
My reason in you is befuddlement.
Who is Adam, other than you?
And the one in between is *Iblīs*. [or]

²⁷¹ Sells, "Bewildered Tongue," 98.

And to distinguish one from the other, who is
Iblīs?²⁷²

Iblis' staunch refusal to believe that God could exist in any other form shows a selfless belief in *tawhīd*, a central aspect of God. Yet it is also his downfall, for God explicitly commands Iblis to bow. The final verse further expresses the ambiguity of Iblis' stance. On the one hand, Iblis asserts that he stands in between Adam and God. In his role as Satan, whose role it is to tempt humans into acting against God, he stands between Adam, or humanity, and God. In the second translation by Sells, Iblis denies his own ego for the sake of God. Iblis asserts his inability to distinguish one from the other because all he sees is God and nothing else. In this last interpretation, Iblis affirms *taqdīs*, or God's transcendence of any image, at the expense of his own status. Iblis is willing to throw himself into the fire, to be purged of every fault, for the sake of God; Iblis is the ideal Sufi.

Sells also characterized Hallaj's account as reflective of a unique aspect of unitive experience: the *coincidentia oppositorum*. Sells describes the *coincidentia oppositorum* as the bringing together of nearness and separation.²⁷³ Applying it to Hallaj's account, Sells writes:

At the point of Iblis's exile, nearness and separation are brought together in a *coincidentia oppositorum*: 'I have attained certitude that distance and nearness are one.' Iblis was the guardian of the divine throne, the creature most intimate with the creator. As one approaches union one approaches the *coincidentia oppositorum*, which can be expressed either as a simultaneous presence of contradictories or, in narrative, as a violent oscillation between them. Rather than seeking a logical mean or compromise between the two extremes, the Sufi logic of Hallaj pulls the two sides of the paradox to their limit.²⁷⁴

²⁷² Sells, "Bewildered Tongue," 98.

²⁷³ Ibid., 99.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 99.

Once again, Sells reiterates the Sufi's embrace of paradox to convey union, rather than resolving it theologically. Paradox is strongest, however, within the *coincidentia oppositorum* that occurs after union. Returning to Rumi's cosmology, as well as the fourth section of the *qasida*, the *coincidentia oppositorum* could be viewed as the Sufi's return to earth after union. Carried away in the torrent of unitive experience, the soul suddenly finds herself thrust back to desolate earth. She was the closest that she could possibly be to God, and now she is the farthest from God. Simultaneously, she returned to the premundane moment only to return to the starting point of her own journey. Within the *qasida*, the fourth motif is that of the poet in a desolate ruin, with only the memory of the beloved to console him. Similarly, the Sufi soul has experienced *fanā'* alongside God, but now must return to earth and subsist in *baqā'*, existing because of God but not within God. The soul cannot sit at the footstool of God forever, nor can she remain in union with God eternally. Eternal union comes only at death, when Lover and Beloved join for eternity like Rumi on his wedding night.

Hallaj's interpretation of the dispute between Iblis and God, per Sells, reflects one aspect of union: the *coincidentia oppositorum*. In contrast, Ibn Arabi's reading prioritizes Adam as the ideal for union, rather than Iblis:

The second interpretation, by Ibn 'Arabi, favors Adam over Iblis, seeing Adam as the archetype of mystical union. Iblis should have prostrated himself before Adam. Adam is the image of the divine, and through his knowledge of the names, that is, the divine attributes, he is more complete than the angels. The cosmos and the human heart are the mirror of the divine, but that mirror is clouded. In *fanā'* the Sufi's own ego-self that clouds the mirror is obliterated and the heart becomes like a polished mirror reflecting the divine image or like a prism in which the undifferentiated light of divine unity is refracted into all the various attributes. At this moment the individual Sufi realizes the primordial nature of Adam. In such a reflection and refraction the true referent of the *his* in 'his image' is revealed. Were we to use the convention of capitalizing

pronouns with a divine referent, we would have to write that Adam was created ‘in His/his image.’ Rather than trying to solve through standard logic the debate over the antecedent of *his*, Ibn ‘Arabi finds in mystical union a paradoxical logic in which the term refers to both the human and the divine party. Self and other, reflexive and nonreflexive, are semantically fused. Divine attributes, rejected as instrumental predications, are retrieved as realizations within the union of divine and human.²⁷⁵

Human beings are mirrors of the Divine, but because they are made of clay, a physical and earthly substance, they must polish the mirror of their heart in order to reflect God. *Fanā*’ only occurs when the mirror has been polished to perfection, when all that is left reflects God and nothing else. Adam, unlike the angels in knowledge and form, is thus the only one capable of truly reflecting God. The angels do not know God’s attributes, but Adam does and when the angels ask God to tell them, God instructs Adam to teach the angels. This interpretation of the dispute places human beings closer to God in characteristics and knowledge than the angels, but necessitates that humanity be physically distanced from God on Earth. Hallaj and Ibn Arabi’s differing accounts of the dispute between Iblis and God also highlight two important characteristics of union: the *coincidentia oppositorum*, wherein there is a conflation of distance and a rapid oscillation between what would be viewed as polar opposites, and semantic fusion.

Semantic fusion, outlined by Ibn Arabi, is characterized as paradoxical pronoun usage. A singular pronoun simultaneously refers to two entities: the subject and the object of the sentence, or God and the soul. Arabic and Persian do not capitalize letters, thus the capitalization of God and all pronouns referring to God, as seen in English, does not occur in Arabic or Persian. When translating texts from these languages into English, translators make arbitrary decisions about what and what not to capitalize. In this way, they are determining how English readers will read subjects and objects, as either God or human, but not as an amalgamation of the two. This has a

²⁷⁵ Sells, “Bewildered Tongue,” 99.

significant impact, seen through a *ḥadīth* which describes how Adam is “‘made in his image’ (*bi sūratihī*).”²⁷⁶ The ambiguity of what the “his” refers to is a conundrum for the English speaker. If it was translated as “made in His image” then English speakers would assume that the “his” refers to God. Yet taking Ibn Arabi’s reading of it as “made in His/his image” we see a conflation of identity that is not only descriptive of union but also linguistically ingenious.

Let us now return to our Queen, left standing in the threshold, skirt lifted as she stands suspended above a pool of water. The Queen of Sheba stands poised to enter the palace of Solomon but hesitates when she sees the tiled floor. Struck with confusion at the overwhelming beauty of the palace courtyard, she cannot determine if the floor is solid or liquid. The courtyard stands prior to the throne room, and the palatial imagery mirrors Rumi’s cosmology. At the edge of the universe, the fixed stars act as God’s footstool (*kursī*) and demarcate the boundary between the known material universe and the formless eternity of God’s unveiled existence. Between these two worlds, however, lies the thin realm of God’s throne (*‘arsh*). The Queen of Sheba stands just prior to a throne room. At first assumed to be the throne room of Solomon, this assumption is complicated by the ambiguous statements “It was said to her, ‘Enter the palace’”²⁷⁷ and “He said, ‘It is a palace paved with crystal.’ She said, ‘My Lord! Indeed I have wronged myself, and I submit with Solomon to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds.’”²⁷⁸ The unspecified voice that speaks to the Queen could be read as God, Solomon, or the unknown voice of a member of Solomon’s court. In our reading we are not concerned with unnecessary assertions of correct or incorrect interpretation; the ambiguity exists and as such, we can read into that ambiguity. Reading the throne room to come as God’s throne, these four lines can be

²⁷⁶ Sells, “Bewildered Tongue,” 98.

²⁷⁷ Sura 27: 44, translated by Qara’i.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

read as a depiction of union, wherein the Queen of Sheba finally submits to “Allah, the Lord of all the worlds.”²⁷⁹

A few lines prior, the Queen of Sheba is tasked with identifying whether or not the throne before her is her own throne. Knowing that her throne lies in her palace, far away, she concludes that it would require a miracle for it to be her throne. Aware of Solomon’s power, however, she is cautious with her answer. The throne before her is actually her throne, transported by one of the members of Solomon’s court. The Queen is therefore presented with a *coincidentia oppositorum* wherein her throne, which is far away, appears to lie before her, but which she knows cannot be her throne because it is not within her palace. The Queen is beginning to realize that her perceptions of reality are not as concrete as she initially thought, which occurs for every soul near God, wherein “[t]he tension [becomes] strongest near the culmination of the ascent, where the journeyer encounters the divine throne and often finds a figure sitting upon it.”²⁸⁰ We will never see the Queen of Sheba approach the figure on the throne, however, since her story ends with her confronted by the shimmering tiled floor. Providing historical context to the story of the Queen, Sells writes of how:

[t]he throne room bedazzles and bewilders the visitor by the brightness of its reflecting tiles, a bewilderment of reflections that test the journeyer’s entitlement to such a station. The same theme is present in Hekhalot interpretation of the Talmudic account in which Rabbi Akiva warns the mystic that when he reaches the tessellated walls of the divine palace he should not shout ‘water, water.’ In both Sufi and Hekhalot texts the sense of drowning is aligned with the identity confusion brought about by the reflections. The drowning theme resonates with the warning, quoted above in section two, that the issue of destiny is a deep sea

²⁷⁹ Sura 27: 44, translated by Qara’i.

²⁸⁰ Sells, “Bewildered Tongue,” 102.

and with Qur'anic reference to the divine throne being upon water.²⁸¹

Within the metaphor of union as drowning, the *coincidentia oppositorum* appears once more.

The Queen's initial confusion as to how her throne could be present in a different place suddenly becomes wild bewilderment upon seeing the tessellated courtyard. Not only is she struck by its beauty, but polar distinctions such as solid and liquid, up and down, near and far melt around her. A transformation of logic and thought occurs when confronted with the otherness of the Divine courtyard:

In this logic of extremes, the greater the original tension, the more compelling the moment when willer and willed, divine and human, pretemporal eternity of covenant and posttemporal eternity of the moment of truth, come together in union. At this moment one 'drowns' in the deep waters of destiny and passes away in *fanā*'. Bewilderment becomes the active principle leading ever deeper into the irresolvable questions of destiny and divine unity to the point where the standard logic and the referential structures of language are transformed.²⁸²

While Sells focuses his analysis of union on its textual renderings, the transformation of language also necessitates a transformation of thought, due to their interconnectedness. The human mind is limited in comparison to the absolute of the Divine; therefore, any attempt at comprehending God requires veils. As we have seen through Otto's theory, the numen must make things numinous, in varying degrees, in order for the numinous object to approach the numen. In this way, God must be veiled in varying degrees; otherwise, the unprepared human mind would be overwhelmed and destroyed. This destruction is drastically different from *fanā*' because *baqā*' does not follow the annihilation. Yet for the mastered soul, the bewilderment of God's unveiled formlessness is in fact sweet release from the confines of material existence.

What was foundational and required for life on earth becomes disdainful and filled with

²⁸¹ Sells, "Bewildered Tongue," 103.

²⁸² Ibid., 101.

suffering, and the overwhelming and dangerous confusion of formlessness becomes sustaining. This is both a moment of ecstatic release and violent danger.

Union is dangerous because of the paradox and bewilderment necessitated by unitive experience. Sells writes:

[a]s one nears the divine presence such considerations are obliterated by the intensity of the witness (*shahāda*) or self-witnessing, as standard boundaries between self and other, between deity, idol, angel, Satan, and Prophet, between worship and idolatry begin to dissolve, and standard certainties are drowned or dissolved in a moment, dangerous and promising, of the most profound ambiguity. The encountering of the secret is not so much a resolution of mystery through a comprehensive knowledge as it is a deepening of mystery through unresolvable paradox.²⁸³

Material existence necessitates that the human mind solve paradox. Yet God is unresolvable, formless paradox. God is also the true meaning behind all creation and as such creates every image. The danger of union lies within the mind attempting to resolve the unresolvable. Trying to swim against the currents of the ocean results in exhaustion and drowning, surrendering to the ocean, letting it pull you where it wills, grants immortality:

At this point danger is greatest. Since for the individual in space and time, the images and manifestations of the divine must be constantly changing ('in every moment he [Allah], is in a [different] state'), to hold on to the image that appears in the polished mirror is the prime temptation. To bind the divine in it is to fall into worship of a static and delimited image, with all the attendant dangers of intolerance and spiritual stagnation. The response to this danger is a perpetually transformative conception of *fanā*' based upon a new version of the *waqt*, or moment.²⁸⁴

The only solution to the constant changing of God is to change with the Divine, to allow your self to dissolve away in surrender to God: "[i]n every moment one should pass away, become

²⁸³ Sells, "Bewildered Tongue," 107.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 121.

one with the divine in the mirrored image, and then give up that image to pass away again.”²⁸⁵

Otto highlights the inability for language to convey the divine. So too does language fail when it comes to articulating unitive experience. Sells writes of how a “writer cannot disclose the secret of union, cannot disclose ‘what’ is encountered there, anymore than a Sufi writer can distinguish what occurs in mystical union from what occurs in the erotic union of the poets. What is revealed in union is communicated only to one who passes away.”²⁸⁶ Rumi, attempting to convey unitive experience through language, thus employs all the aforementioned rhetorical strategies to create a charged language of mystical discourse. “With the lightest touch, the subtlest play upon syntax or vocabulary, a Sufi writer can evoke the full power of the poetic tradition”²⁸⁷ of pre-Islamic Arabia. Rumi, like other Sufis, utilizes pre-Islamic poetic constructions, folklore, the *coincidentia oppositorum*, semantic fusion, metaphors, similes, proverbs, and language replete with images of mystery, humility, lovesickness, madness, violence, death, and ecstasy:

It is as if by burying the audience in a mass of partial representations the poet seeks to convey the experience of submersion in the Whole. The goal of the *Masnavi* is not to provide, proverb-style, a single rhetorical ‘cap’ with which to interpret experience, but to demonstrate the uncapturability of the Whole. The clustered deployment of proverbs and aphorisms invokes the authoritativeness of proverb rhetoric for a subversive purpose, as if to point out the inability of any single representation to capture the object of description.²⁸⁸

Returning to Rumi once more, we will explore some of these rhetorical devices further.

Rumi plays upon the story of Hallaj, a Sufi master who came before him and who was executed for political dissidence. Hallaj, in a state of intoxication and union with God,

²⁸⁵ Sells, “Bewildered Tongue,” 122.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 123.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 94.

²⁸⁸ Mills, “Folk Tradition in the *Masnavi* and the *Masnavi* in Folk Tradition,” 148.

proclaimed, “I am the Truth” (*ana al-Haqq*). *Al-Haqq*, or the Truth, is one of God’s ninety-nine names, and Hallaj was believed by others to have committed *sherk*, a heretical assertion of partnership with God, who is entirely singular and without form or equal.²⁸⁹ Executed for heresy and political dissidence in Baghdad in 922, Hallaj became a powerful example of Sufi union, with some Sufis using him as the archetypal mystic in ecstatic union and others distancing themselves from his perceived blasphemy.²⁹⁰ For Rumi, Hallaj was revered as a martyr of divine love and Rumi references Hallaj throughout the *Masnawi* when articulating union.²⁹¹ Rumi contrasts Hallaj’s statement of “I am God” with Pharaoh’s “I am God” to articulate the difference between *sherk* and *shathiyât*, or ecstatic outbursts of intoxicated souls:²⁹²

He that is without pain is a brigand, because to be without pain is
to say ‘I am God.’
To say that ‘I’ out of the (proper) time is a curse (to the speaker);
to say that ‘I’ at the (proper) time is a mercy (from God).
The ‘I’ of Mansur (Hallaj) certainly became a mercy; the ‘I’ of
Pharaoh became a curse. Mark (this)!
Consequently, it is incumbent (on us) to behead every untimely
bird (every cock that crows too soon), in order to give notice
(warning).
What is ‘beheading’? Killing the fleshly soul in the holy (spiritual)
war, and renouncing (sensual) heat.
Just as you would extract the scorpion’s sting in order that it might
be saved from being killed,
(Or) pull out the venomous fang of a snake, in order that the snake
might escape from the calamity of being stoned (to death).²⁹³

The union of Hallaj with God is a mercy given by God, whereas the assertion of Pharaoh’s “I am God” is a curse. Rumi then highlights the importance of beheading “every untimely bird”²⁹⁴ that crows too soon. He deploys the classic Sufi motif of killing oneself in order to purify the soul of

²⁸⁹ Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 25.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁹³ M 2: 2521-2527, translated by Nicholson.

²⁹⁴ M 2: 2524, translated by Nicholson.

the ego, viewing this as “holy war.”²⁹⁵ The beheading of the self is necessary to present a polished mirror before God. Any cloudiness within the human soul will lead to the death of the soul without subsistence in God’s presence. It is a mercy to kill the self rather than be destroyed in the confusion of static images, just as it is a mercy to defang a snake before it is stoned for having fangs. Destroying a part of the snake, the venomous fang, saves the most important part of being a snake, the snake’s life; killing a part of the human self, the ego, saves the truly eternal part of the human, the soul. Rumi reiterates the need for the soul to be prepared prior to going before God:

In (the hour of) separation Love fashions forms (of phantasy); in
the hour of union the Formless One puts forth his head,
Saying, ‘I am the ultimate origin of sobriety and intoxication: the
beauty in (all) forms is reflected from Me.
At this moment I have removed the veils: I have raised Beauty on
high without intermediaries.
Because thou hast been much occupied with My reflexion, thou
hast gained the power to contemplate My essence denuded (of
the forms by which it is veiled).’²⁹⁶

While more directly a passage about union, Rumi also muses on the nature of God. Mistaking static images for God when overwhelmed by God’s Otherness is the most dangerous part of union. Yet Rumi’s God, like Otto’s numen, only removes the final veils when God knows the soul to have “gained the power to contemplate My essence denuded.”²⁹⁷ The Beloved does not seek the destruction of the human soul but rather craves for humanity to know God in all the Divine’s intimate complexity, for God said, “‘I was a Hidden Treasure, so I wanted to be known. Therefore I created the world that I might be known.’”²⁹⁸ When the mountains quaked, when the

²⁹⁵ M 2: 2525, translated by Nicholson. This is a reference to *jihad*, or spiritual warfare. The greatest form of *jihad* is believed to be internal struggle.

²⁹⁶ M 5: 3277-3280, translated by Nicholson.

²⁹⁷ M 5: 3280, translated by Nicholson.

²⁹⁸ Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West*, 47.

seas retreated, humanity stepped forward to carry God's Trust, and in accepting the weight of that Trust, humanity was rewarded with knowing God.

In order to read Rumi, we require a hermeneutical lens through which we can grasp the intangible. Rumi's writing is constantly returning to the lament of the reed-flute, he is always singing of the pain of separation and the desperate need for union. And Rumi must sing, he must cry out like the reed-flute, for the emotions that swell within him are too energetically charged, too ecstatic to remain silent. Yet as soon as Rumi opens his mouth, he fails in articulating the otherworldly brilliance of the light of God. Overwhelmed with the oscillation between overflowing speech and silence, Rumi dances back and forth in constant praise of God, whether that praise is beautiful imagery or silent contemplation:

Even such is the seeker of the Court of God: when God comes, the
seeker is naughted.
Although that union (with God) is immortality on immortality, yet
at first that immortality (*baqa*) consists in dying to the self
(*fana*).
The reflexions that are seeking the Light are naughted when His
Light appears.
How should the reason remain when He bids it to go? *Everything*
is perishing except His Face.
Before His Face the existent and the non-existent perish: existence
in non-existence is in sooth a marvelous thing!
In this place of presence (all) minds are lost beyond control; when
the pen reaches this point, it breaks.²⁹⁹

Rumi's breaking of the pen silences the reader through the abrupt ending of text. Perhaps within the silence that follows, Rumi hopes his reader might feel the numinous breaking forth into our world, spilling over in an overplus of Otherness that fills the reader with trembling awe.

²⁹⁹ M 3: 4658-4663, translated by Nicholson.

Chapter V: The Dropsical Lover

An elephant was brought to a dark building
By Indians, so they could hold a viewing,
So lots of people would come just to see—
They rushed into the darkness eagerly.
It was impossible to see it there,
So people groped to feel it everywhere:
One man's hand brushed its trunk—he said, 'This creature
Is like a pipe.' He based this on one feature.
Another could feel just its ears—that man
Believed the elephant was like a fan.
Another felt one of its legs alone:
'Its shape is like those columns made of stone.'
Another touched its back and then cried out:
'It's similar to a throne without a doubt.'
When they heard 'elephant' each one conceived
Only the part that they themselves perceived.
Different perspectives meant discrepancies:
One called it straight like I's, one bent like c's.
For arguments there would have been no space
If each had held a candle in that place;³⁰⁰

Analyzing and interpreting a mystical text is fraught with difficulties, especially when working in translation. First, we must recognize that reading primary source material for oneself is always a more direct and illuminating experience. However, reading mystical texts through another's lens provides the reader with insight and, when necessary, clarification. To maintain the experience of reading Rumi, I have provided all of the primary source material in the appendix, to be read at the reader's discretion. What follows is an analysis of the story of "The Dropsical Lover"³⁰¹ wherein I will quote the most relevant sections for our analysis.

³⁰⁰ M 3: 1260-1269, translated by Mojaddedi.

³⁰¹ "The Dropsical Lover" is Nicholson's name for this story, while Mojaddedi uses the longer "The love of the *vakil* for his ruler." Throughout the paper, I will refer to this story as "The Dropsical Lover," even though I use Mojaddedi's translation, because it is succinct and clear. Additionally, "dropsical" refers to someone suffering from dropsy, an antiquated term for edema, which is the accumulation of excess fluid in the body.

Having already discussed Otto, we would be remiss to ignore the most obvious downfall of academic lenses, namely the relaying of the academic's experience in supplementation of the reader's experience. As academics, however, it is our very duty to analyze and synthesize phenomena for others to understand. Therefore, it is with measured steps that we move forward. It is my hope that this analysis can contribute in some small part to the larger whole of Rumi scholarship. Heeding Rumi's advice, perhaps if we move forward together, each of us holding a candle, we can shed light on this unknowable, numinous thing.

Rumi divided the *Masnavi* into sections, which translators expanded upon for added clarity. Oftentimes, Rumi's titles were simply the first few lines of that section.³⁰² Translators use subsequent headings within a larger story "[f]or the sake of clarity."³⁰³ Rumi's title for the section of the *Masnavi* which we will focus on is "The Dropsical Lover." Mojaddedi added all subsequent headings within the story, while the original Persian manuscript does not contain section breaks, although we will rely on them for our analysis. Furthermore, as we have already discussed, Rumi often interrupts stories with other stories to elucidate or expand on a small segment of the larger story. Within "The Dropsical Lover," Rumi has fourteen different narrative arcs and four explicit exegetical sections. The fourteen narrative arcs, along with "The Dropsical Lover," make up some 1,000 lines of the *Masnavi*. Furthermore, within "The Dropsical Lover," Mojaddedi places forty-nine subject headings to aid in the breakup of the story.³⁰⁴ While every subject heading contains content that expands upon the central story of the Lover, not all of them need to be reproduced here. As such, some parts of this story will be summarized, emphasizing only the content necessary to move forward, while others will be quoted directly. For full comprehension of this story, it is recommended that readers seek out their own copy of the

³⁰² Mojaddedi, *Book One*, xxvii.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, xxvii.

³⁰⁴ See the appendices on page 136 for a visual rendering of "The Dropsical Lover."

Masnavi and read the complete story themselves. Finally, because every story within the *Masnavi* circles back to “The Song of the Reed,” each story within “The Dropsical Lover” acts as a mirror reflecting the central theme of union. Therefore, reading the *Masnavi* in full, slowly and with great care, is the only way to experience the full weight of every line. Keeping in line with the importance of reading Rumi ourselves, this chapter entails an extended, close reading of the story of “The Dropsical Lover.”

Prior to “The Dropsical Lover” is a seventeen-line story entitled “The annihilation and subsistence of the dervish.” Just as the “The Song of the Reed” presents a compounded version of the *Masnavi*, so too does “The annihilation and subsistence of the dervish” function as an epigraph for the larger story to come. An initial exploration of “The annihilation and subsistence of the dervish” will benefit our reading of “The Dropsical Lover” further on:

The annihilation and subsistence of the dervish

‘There is no dervish in the world,’ one said
‘And he’d be non-existent, if instead
There were one here: subsisting in God’s essence,
His attributes would be effaced in God’s ones.’
Candlelight in the sun is non-existent,
Yet it is still considered an existent—
Its essence still exists, for if you poke
Cotton into it, that will burn with smoke;
It’s non-existent—naught’s illuminated
By it; in sunlight it’s annihilated:
To jars of honey if you add *one cup*
Of vinegar, the honey soaks it up,
And yet the vinegar will leave no taste,
Although on weighing scales the cupful’s traced.
Before a lion deer will fall unconscious;
That lion’s being swamps their own. It’s obvious.
Analogies that show our work’s deficient
Next to God’s come from love—they’re not impertinent.
The lover’s pulse without restraint will race
Towards the king and claim an equal place;
In this world no one seems so impolite,
Yet none is so well-mannered far from sight.

These are two poles—polite and impolite—
 Which relativity can still unite:
 He is ill-mannered from what you can see,
 Since his love-claim suggests some parity,
 But look in him then tell me what's to blame—
 The Sultan has effaced him and his claim.
 If Zayd's the subject of these words: '*Zayd died*',
 When he's no more, how is that justified?
 Zayd is the subject from the view of grammar,
 Though he's the object, death is here the killer.
 What kind of subject can he be like this—
 Effaced, he's lost all of his 'subjectness'.³⁰⁵

Already highlighting the theme of effacement in God through *fanā'* and *baqā'*, "The annihilation and subsistence of the dervish" presents these difficult to grasp concepts through the easily accessible metaphor of the candle and the sun. Candlelight is unnecessary when the sun shines brightly, yet the candlelight still exists within the rays of the sun. Placing cotton on the candle would prove that it still exists, but without the cotton, it would be impossible to discern which ray of light comes from which source. In this way, once the dervish has achieved *fanā'* they are effaced in the light of God, but like the candle they continue to exist within the light of God. It is near impossible, in this state, to discern God apart from the mortal soul because of the soul's subsistence within the nourishing presence of God.

The description of union for the dervish also articulates the ability for two perceived opposites to exist united in God. Recognizing the unity of God means that it is impossible for dichotomies to exist, for the essence of every form lies in the Formlessness of God. Dichotomies do exist, however, and so there must be a reconciliation between the differences of form and God's unity. Rumi stresses this difference through the two poles of polite and impolite. The lover races towards the king, a metaphor for the dervish rushing towards God, and in the lover's hurry, he is seen as impolite. Rumi emphasizes that relativity can unite the poles of polite and impolite.

³⁰⁵ M 3: 3671-3687, translated by Mojaddedi.

Utilizing the same metaphor through a different perspective, Rumi shows how the lover rushing towards the king is in fact an act of piety, and not impolite, because it depicts the effacement of the lover in the king. Similarly, the dervish that, in their orientation towards God, stumbles through physical existence is not doing so because she is impolite but because she has glimpsed the unveiled ineffable. “Seeing” the numinous God prevents complete return to daily life because of the profundity of the experience. Acting as a primer for annihilation and subsistence, we will now see how Rumi continues the discourse of the lover through his story of “The Dropsical Lover.”

The first section of the twelve sections which focus explicitly on the Lover within “The Dropsical Lover” sets an initial context for the rest of the story to unfold:

Bukhara's *sadr* once had a slave who hid
When he was blamed for what another did.
Confused, for ten long years he roamed and ran
In deserts, mountains, and through Khorasan.
After ten years his yearning meant that he
Could not bear separation endlessly.
He thought, 'I cannot take more banishment.
Nothing heals feelings of abandonment.'
These lands are barren now from separation;
Dirt gives the water its discoloration.
The life-increasing wind gets filled with sickness
And fire turns ground beneath us into ashes.
Even heavenly gardens face disease:
Leaves yellow, rot, then drop off from the trees.
Separate from friends the intellect feels low,
Just like an archer with a broken bow.
This separation made hell-fire so scorching,
And it makes old men's limbs continue shaking.
If I talk of this spark-like separation
Until the end I'll have said just a fraction.
Don't breathe a word about its burning then—
Just say, '*Lord, save me!*' and say it again.
Imagine what it's like to be apart
From things here that bring joy inside your heart:

Others enjoyed what you enjoy here, friend,
But it still fled them wind-like in the end—
Don't love that thing. It will soon leave you too.
Escape from it before it flees from you!³⁰⁶

The slave, or the Lover, has been hiding for ten years from his *sadr*, or Prince, because he was blamed for doing something that he did not in fact do. Roaming through the deserts and the mountains, he longs to return to his prince, for he cannot “bear separation endlessly.”³⁰⁷ The earth has become barren with sickness, rot, and disease because of the separation of the Lover from his Prince. Rumi mirrors the distance that the human soul feels from God, particularly towards the end of this section, when he asserts that we must not love physical things for they “will soon leave you too.”³⁰⁸ Like the outward forms of the material earth, all these will flee from us, “wind-like in the end,”³⁰⁹ because they are limited and dying, for “Everything is to perish except His face.”³¹⁰ Therefore it is imperative for the Lover to “[e]scape from [outward forms] before [outward forms flee] from you!”³¹¹ For a Sufi mystic like Rumi, the only way to flee the outward forms of earth is through the Sufi path towards God. The Lover and the Prince, a metaphor for the Sufi soul and God, recreate, in microcosmic expression, Rumi's ideal path towards God. Along the Lover's path, we will encounter the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* of the numen, the *coincidentia oppositorum*, semantic fusion, paradox, ambiguity, multivalent symbols, and violent death imagery. All of these serve as rhetorical strategies for Rumi to convey the numinous while also acting as waypoints along the path to mark the soul's distance from God.

³⁰⁶ M 3: 3688-3701, translated by Mojaddedi.

³⁰⁷ M 3: 3690, translated by Mojaddedi.

³⁰⁸ M 3: 3701, translated by Mojaddedi.

³⁰⁹ M 3: 3700, translated by Mojaddedi.

³¹⁰ Sura 28: 88, translated by Qara'i.

³¹¹ M 3: 3701, translated by Mojaddedi.

The first interruption of the story occurs after these fourteen lines, in which the story transitions into a discussion of “[t]he appearance of the Holy Spirit in human form to Mary when she was naked and bathing, and her taking refuge in God,” and “The Holy Spirit tells Mary: ‘I am a messenger from God to you. Don’t be agitated or hide from me, for this is God’s command!’” The interjected story of Mary focuses on the fact that God prepares those who approach the Divine through the removal of veils slowly. If the unprepared human soul were to see the wholly Other God without preparation, they would go mad, unable to subsist within God’s presence because of their attachments to outward forms. God, like unrelenting summer, would burn the human soul completely:

If it were always summer, then the sun
Would scorch the orchard, and would quickly burn
All flower-beds down to their roots inside,
And dried-up plants would not then be revived.
December’s sour-faced, but it’s kind, while summer
Will laugh with all, then burn them to a cinder.³¹²

Like Otto’s numen, which prepares those approaching it with touches of the numinous, so too does Rumi’s God burn away the veils slowly. Rumi writes:

God feeds you wisdom in degrees, my friend,
So it won’t choke you at the very end.³¹³

Rumi also makes his first statement about the need for the human soul to die to the earthly world in order to reach God, writing:

Be dead now, to prepare for when you’ll die.
You’ll join eternal love like this on high.³¹⁴

³¹² M 3: 3738-3740, translated by Mojaddedi.

³¹³ M 3: 3748, translated by Mojaddedi.

³¹⁴ M 3: 3762, translated by Mojaddedi.

Throughout the rest of the Lover's story, Rumi returns to the idea of needing to die spiritually before one dies physically. The speaker's stance on death articulates where on the Sufi path the speaker lies. For example, throughout the story the Lover is told not to return to Bukhara because he will die. Advisers, friends, and fellow Bukharans all warn him that he is seeking his own death by choosing to return. The Lover, however, is not interested in what they have to say because they misunderstand what death is: to them death is the end because they cannot see past the outward forms of materiality; for the Lover death is merely the beginning of his movement towards God. As we will see, with each successive death, the Lover moves closer to God and closer to immortality through union with God.

Unaware of whether or not he will die, the Lover decides to set out to Bukhara without fear. Rumi proclaims that Bukhara is a city of knowledge and those that enter Bukhara are humble and knowledgeable enough to find the great city. For the Lover, his separation from this wondrous place has been agony, but that agony pales in comparison to the pain of being separated from his *sadr*. After the Lover decides to return to his homeland, Rumi deploys eschatological imagery alongside celebratory imagery of Eid to articulate what might occur when the Lover returns to his Prince. Eschatological imagery, as we have already discussed, is indicative of union for Rumi, and the celebration of Eid marks this event as positive. Saying goodbye to all those he has come to know, the Lover speaks of how his soul has already departed towards Bukhara:

Leave Mary's candle lit, because that lover
Whose heart's aflame is going to Bukhara
Impatiently and in a blazing furnace—
Read in the tale of the great *sadr* to learn this.
Bukhara stands for knowledge's true source;
All who possess it are Bukharans of course.

When near the shaikh you're in Bukhara too,
 So don't look down on that place seen by few.
 Its ebb and flow forms such a major hurdle
 That none reach this Bukhara but the humble.
 Happy the man whose *self is brought down low!*
Stubbornness ruins others. It's your foe.
 The exile from the *sadr* had torn apart
 The lover's soul's foundation part by part.
 He said, 'I will return to faith once more
 Although I was an infidel before.
 I'll go back there and fall down at the feet
 Of the great *sadr* whose thoughts are always sweet.
 "I've flung my soul before you!" I will say,
 "Revive me or chop off my head today!"
 Being dead and slain near you, O moon of graces,
 Is better than being king in other places.
 More than a hundred times I've tried this out—
 Without you my life won't taste sweet, no doubt.
My wish, sing me the tune of Resurrection!
Kneel, she-camel! My joy has reached perfection.
Earth, swallow up my tears. They will suffice.
Soul, drink the pure draught straight from paradise.
Welcome, my Eid! You've come back like last year.
O breeze, how sweet is what has wafted here.
 'Farewell, my friends! I've headed out,' he said,
 'To that *sadr* whose commands are all obeyed.
 Each moment I'm more roasted in the heat,
 But, come what may, I'll go and not retreat.
 And though he makes himself so stony-hearted,
 Towards Bukhara my soul has departed,
 That is the seat of my beloved king—
 "*Love of one's homeland*" means no other thing.'³¹⁵

After this section of "The Dropsical Lover" comes a very small section, only four lines long, in which a lover asks her estranged lover which city is most beautiful. The lover replies that the most beautiful city is the city that contains his beloved:

Wherever her royal carpet's spread in size
 Is a huge plain, even small *needles' eyes*;
 And any place where moon-like Josephs dwell
 Is heaven, even deep inside a well.'³¹⁶

³¹⁵ M 3: 3791-3809, translated by Mojaddedi.

³¹⁶ M 3: 3812-3813, translated by Mojaddedi.

It is unclear whether this lover is the Lover within the larger narrative, since the section is not long enough to provide further details. This interjection serves to articulate once more the fact that when the soul is approaching God, outward forms do not matter. A huge plain can exist within the eye of a needle, and heaven can be found inside a well, so long as the beloved is there. Yet the beloved of this lover is not God but rather a human lover. Rumi conveys the importance of this earthly love but then contrasts it with the Divine, True love of the human soul for God through the imagery of the Lover and his Prince. The following six sections of the story of “The Dropsical Lover” focus primarily on the Lover narrative and are the largest cluster of consecutive stories. The linear aspect of the next six sections is then contrasted by a climax of the Lover’s story, followed by an abrupt interjection of twelve different narratives that prolong the conclusion of “The Dropsical Lover.”

Due to the importance of the next six sections, these will be analyzed section by section, providing each line of poetry in full. The first section outlines the threats of the Lover’s friends and the Lover’s indifference to their concerns:

‘You clueless one!’ a counsellor then said,
 ‘If you can, think about what lies ahead:
 Ponder your past and future rationally!
 Only moths burn themselves so passionately.
 How will you reach Bukhara? You’re insane
 And should be bound in prison with a chain.
 The angry *sadr* champs iron as he tries
 To find your whereabouts with twenty eyes.
 He’s sharpening a knife for you alone—
 He’s like a starving dog and you’re the bone!
 You have escaped him once when God let you,
 So why head back to gaol? What’s wrong with you?
 If you had gaolers chasing now, we’d say
 You’ll need to use your wits to get away,
 But nobody is chasing you at all,
 So why yourself create an obstacle?’

A secret love had kept him prisoner;
 But this was not seen by that counsellor.
 A hidden gaoler chases gaolers too—
 If not, why do these curs act like they do?
 Into their souls the king of love's rage came,
 Forcing them to a thuggish life of shame:
 His rage strikes, saying, 'Beat him!' On account
 Of hidden thugs I've wept a huge amount.
 Whomever you see in decline, though he
 Appears alone, a thug's his company.
 If he knew of God's presence, he would moan
 And rush to the Most Powerful Sultan's throne,
 Scattering dust on his own face in shame,
 For refuge from the frightening demon's aim.
 You're less than ants, but you thought you might be
 A prince; that's why, blind fool, you couldn't see.
 These false wings filled you up with self-deception
 And drew you to a harmful self-destruction.
 You can fly high if you keep your wings light,
 But if they're muddled there's no hope for flight.³¹⁷

The Lover's friend, who counsels him not to return to Bukhara, depicts the Lover as clueless and not thinking rationally. Rationality, however, is a trait that is beneath the Sufi mystic. Utilizing academic language, Rumi criticizes the Lover's counselor by articulating the inability for the mind to grasp an ineffable God. The counselor then tells the Lover, "[o]nly moths burn themselves so passionately."³¹⁸ Rumi's writing is replete with the imagery of moths, in which the moth represents the Sufi soul, flinging itself into the flame without fear of dying in the heat. At a much later point in the *Masnawi*, Rumi describes the Miraj, or Night Journey, of Muhammad, written below as Ahmad, and utilizes moth imagery to convey the Sufi soul:

When Ahmad passed beyond the Lote-tree (on the boundary of
 Paradise) and his (Gabriel's) place of watch and station had
 farthest limit,
 He said to him (Gabriel), "Hark, fly after me." He (Gabriel) said,
 'Go, go; I am not thy companion (any farther).'

³¹⁷ M 3: 3814-3831, translated by Mojaddedi.

³¹⁸ M 3: 3815, translated by Mojaddedi.

He answered him, saying, 'Come, O destroyer of veils: I have not yet advanced to my zenith.'
 He replied, 'O my illustrious friend, if I take one flight beyond this limit, my wings will be consumed.'
 This tale of the elect losing their senses in (contemplation of) the most elect is (naught but) amazement in amazement.
 Here all (other) unconsciousnesses are (a mere) play. How long will you keep possession of your soul? for it is (a case of) abandoning your soul.
 O 'Gabriel,' though you are noble and revered, you are not the moth nor the candle either.
 When the candle calls at that moment of illumination, the soul of the moth does not shrink from burning.³¹⁹

Gabriel, an archangel and God's chosen messenger, cannot pass beyond the Lote Tree of the Far Boundary. The Lote Tree of the Far Boundary marks the beginning of the footstool of God, or the fixed stars, and Gabriel cannot fly past the tree without burning his wings because he is not human. Only humans, having chosen to carry God's Trust and be God's regents on earth, can pass beyond the boundaries of the universe, demarcated by the tree, and approach God's throne. Gabriel, unlike the moth, does not readily fling himself into the fire. Standing on the edge of the universe, he falters, unable to move forward out of fear. Muhammad's human soul, like a moth, rushes towards the fire to be consumed and purified. Only through the burning away of the self can the soul approach God. The counselor intends his metaphor of the Lover as a moth to convey the Lover's foolishness, but it is actually a veiled criticism, of the counselor, by Rumi. Like the Sufi, it is in the moth's nature to fling herself without abandon into the all-consuming flames. Often playing with imagery and symbols, Rumi will describe an entire story only to utilize the same story later on to depict the limitations of another. While this is the first instance of this rhetorical strategy within "The Dropsical Lover," moth imagery appears again, through a reference to the story of the lion and the hare.

³¹⁹ M 4: 3801-3807, translated by Nicholson.

Ending the section, Rumi provides an explicit critique of the counselor, and emphasizes the ability for the human soul to reach God if one purifies oneself:

You can fly high if you keep your wings light,
But if they're muddied there's no hope for flight.³²⁰

Rumi's use of "muddied" in the last half of the quoted line plays upon the fact that humans are made of clay while also expressing the need to purify oneself. The human soul as a mirror in need of polishing is a constant trope for Rumi and he often references the dirty, muddy human hearts in need of cleansing. For the Lover, he is aware that he must purify his soul and therefore has set out to Bukhara. The counselor, on the other hand, sees himself as peerless when in fact he is blind to his own failings:

You're less than ants, but you thought you might be
A prince; that's why, blind fool, you couldn't see.³²¹

Continuing the conversation between the counselor and the Lover, the Lover proclaims that he does not care if he is going to die; he will go to Bukhara:

'How long will you advise me? Please refrain,
For I've been tied up with a heavy chain
That's harder to endure than your advice.
Your expert didn't know love and its price:
The jurists have no teaching they can offer
About how love increases pain we suffer.
Don't threaten me with death, for desperately
I thirst for my own blood. What's death to me?'
Each moment a new death is found by lovers;
Their deaths are not one kind; they've many others,
For Guidance's Soul gave lives by the score:
Each moment he will sacrifice some more.
Since for each he gets ten in compensation:
'*Ten of their like*'—recite this revelation.
'If that Beloved sheds my blood, I'll throw
My life before home, dancing as I go.

³²⁰ M 3: 3831, translated by Mojaddedi.

³²¹ M 3: 3829, translated by Mojaddedi.

I've tested it. Death is this life for me--
 When I leave life it's for eternity.'
Murder me, murder me, my trusty friends!
In being killed there's life that never ends.
Eternal Soul, you who make all cheeks glow,
Draw up my soul to union You bestow!
Love for my lover roasts my bowels, but still
If He wants to walk on my eyes, He will.
 Speak Persian although Arabic thrills more;
 Love has a hundred languages in store,
 But all those languages are dumbstruck when
 That Pure Beloved's scent wafts here again.
 I'll stop, for the Beloved will speak now--
 Be all ear! *God knows what's best anyhow.*
 If lovers should repent, beware, for they
 Will teach drunk on the gallows come what may.
 This lover may be going to Bukhara,
 But teachings aren't what he is chasing after—
 The Loved One's beauty is the lover's teacher,
 His face their notebook, lesson, and class lecture.
 They're silent, but their inner repetition
 Rises up to His throne and seat in heaven.
 Their lesson is to whirl in ecstasy,
 Not to read texts or spout philosophy.
 The 'chain' of this group is His musky tress,
 Their 'circle case' concerns His curls no less.
 If someone asks about 'the purse's case',
 Then say: God's treasure's not found in that place.'
 If there's talk of types of divorce, don't you
 Find fault, as this evokes Bukhara too.
 Mention of things has special influences,
 As attributes have their own substances.
 You prosper in Bukhara with your virtues,
 But being truly humble is what frees you:
 Mere knowledge couldn't burden this Bukharan
 Who'd concentrated on the Sun of Vision.
 Whoever's found true vision through seclusion
 Shuns knowledge gained through theory and tuition;
 If someone's seen the beauty of the soul,
 He won't be moved by sciences at all;
 Vision is knowledge's superior, so
 Most men succumb to this world down below—
 They see this world as theirs and so immediate,
 But think the other world is bought on credit.³²²

³²² M 3: 3832-3861, translated by Mojaddedi.

Beginning with a proclamation of defiance in the face of counseled advice, the Lover asserts that the chains he endures are greater pain than the prospect of death. Reiterating the faulty logic of the ignorant counselors, as well as a critique on the intellect, Rumi writes that:

The jurists have no teaching they can offer
About how love increases pain we suffer.³²³

When it comes to love, the jurists are incapable of understanding. Rumi expands upon the need to die to the self, writing that lovers will die many times because God grants many lives to those that sacrifice themselves to God. Not only does the Lover assert that he will die for the Beloved, but says that he will do so “dancing as I go.”³²⁴ The Lover is not just willing to die for his Beloved but thirsts for his own blood. For when the Lover leaves life “it’s for eternity,”³²⁵ through *fanā’*. The italicized portion of this section is a direct quote, in Arabic, of “a famous poem attributed to the Sufi al-Hallaj.”³²⁶ The force of this quote becomes even more powerful for those that are aware of the fact that Hallaj was executed for experiencing union. Quoting a section of a poem by Hallaj not only references the author but does so through a line which is particularly evocative of madness, crying out for his trusty friends to “*Murder me, murder me.*”³²⁷ The end of the Hallaj quotation also references the superior will of God. Craving to be drawn up to God in union, Hallaj asserts that “*If He wants to walk on my eyes, He will.*”³²⁸ Effaced in the presence of God, Hallaj is an object to be acted upon, to be used, for whatever means the numen wills.

³²³ M 3: 3834, translated by Mojaddedi.

³²⁴ M 3: 3839, translated by Mojaddedi.

³²⁵ M 3: 3840, translated by Mojaddedi.

³²⁶ Mojaddedi, *Book Three*, 307.

³²⁷ M 3: 3841, translated by Mojaddedi.

³²⁸ M 3: 3843, translated by Mojaddedi.

Following the Hallaj excerpt, Rumi once again pushes back against language's ability to describe the Divine. Regardless of whatever language is used, all human tongues fall short of describing the wholly Other:

Speak Persian although Arabic thrills more;
Love has a hundred languages in store,
But all those languages are dumbstruck when
That Pure Beloved's scent wafts here again.
I'll stop, for the Beloved will speak now—
Be all ear! *God knows what's best anyhow.*³²⁹

Describing the presence of the Pure Beloved as a scent which “wafts here again”³³⁰ articulates the Divine in an experiential way. Unlike touch or vision, which require objects to be felt or seen, scent conveys the invisible, intangible, and potentially erotic and seductive. Furthermore, scent evokes the smell of a loved one's perfume, which lingers long after they have physically left and which constantly draws you back to their presence. Scent is coy; it dances through the air and draws us towards something absent, yet which we crave. Similarly, God's numinous eruptions into the human world leave lingering traces of Divinity that emanate outwards and are only perceptible to those capable of discerning God's perfume. Rumi then states that the “Beloved will speak now,” transitioning to Arabic but not citing the Qur'an. Is this the Beloved speaking through Rumi? If it is God speaking, then God references themselves, asserting that God knows best. Yet the odd interjection of this statement is made more confusing when the narrative continues. Rather than “being all ear,”³³¹ the narration continues. Even after expressly saying, “I'll stop,”³³² Rumi continues to write. Adding to the confusion, the rest of the section

³²⁹ M 3: 3844-3846, translated by Mojaddedi.

³³⁰ M 3: 3845, translated by Mojaddedi.

³³¹ M 3: 3846, translated by Mojaddedi.

³³² M 3: 3846, translated by Mojaddedi.

focuses on the inability of language to convey experience and the failure of intellectual perception to grasp God:

The Loved One's beauty is the lover's teacher,
His face their notebook, lesson, and class lecture.
They're silent, but their inner repetition
Rises up to His throne and seat in heaven.
Their lesson is to whirl in ecstasy,
Not to read texts or spout philosophy.
The 'chain' of this group is His musky tress,
Their 'circle case' concerns His curls no less.
If someone asks about 'the purse's case',
Then say: 'God's treasure's not found in that place.'³³³

Lovers have no teacher but the beauty of the Loved One. Everything that they need to learn, "their notebook, lesson, and class lecture,"³³⁴ resides in the face of God. The lovers do not need to discuss God, they do not need to "read texts or spout philosophy,"³³⁵ nor will they find God in the chain, circle case, and purse's case puzzles of the scholars;³³⁶ "Their lesson is to whirl in ecstasy."³³⁷ It is only through movement, absorption, and "inner repetition"³³⁸ that the human approaches God.

The Lover remains unmoved by the methods of scholars. For him:

Mere knowledge couldn't burden this Bukharan
Who'd concentrated on the Sun of Vision.
Whoever's found true vision through seclusion
Shuns knowledge gained through theory and tuition;
If someone's seen the beauty of the soul,
He won't be moved by sciences at all;
Vision is knowledge's superior, so
Most men succumb to this world and down below.³³⁹

³³³ M 3: 3849-3853, translated by Mojaddedi.

³³⁴ M 3: 3849, translated by Mojaddedi.

³³⁵ M 3: 3851, translated by Mojaddedi.

³³⁶ Mojaddedi, *Book Three*, 307.

³³⁷ M 3: 3851, translated by Mojaddedi.

³³⁸ M 3: 3850, translated by Mojaddedi.

³³⁹ M 3: 3857-3860, translated by Mojaddedi.

The Lover unwaveringly orients himself towards God. Seeing the beauty of God prevents the inclination of the mind towards science and faulty forms of knowledge. The Lover recognizes that vision of God brings superior understanding as compared to the mundane knowledge of physical things, which instead chain the human soul to earth. Trapped on earth and unaware of how to find God, the souls of humanity are limited by their need to rationalize the world; the most vital attributes of God lie deep within God's non-rational nature.

The counselor previously mentioned the difficulty of journeying to Bukhara, hoping it would frighten the Lover from departing. Lovers, however, fear nothing of the physical world, for all of these difficulties are but forms, whose true meaning lie in formlessness, and so:

That lover's heart throbbed as he wept blood tears,
Heading fast to Bukhara with no fears.
Scorching sands felt to him like silk, so cool,
And the great Oxus seemed a little pool;
Wilderness seemed a rose garden--he'd fall
From laughter like a rose that's grown too tall.
Candy's from Samarkand, but his lips found
It in Bukhara, and to it felt bound.
Bukhara, you who'd boost intelligence,
Removed my faith and knowledge all at once.
I'm crescent-like, for I seek the full moon;
In this world's waiting line, I want him soon.
Bukhara's skyline came within his sight
And passion made that black form brilliant white.
He fell flat out unconsciously suddenly,
His mind flown to the source of mystery.
Men dabbed his head and face then with rosewater,
Not knowing the rosewater of his lover.
He'd seen a hidden rose garden; love had
Cut him off from himself like one gone mad.
You're not fit for such breath, your heart is stone;
Though cane, you have no sugar of your own.
You follow just the brain that you still bear;
Of *armies you can't see* you're unaware.³⁴⁰

³⁴⁰ M 3: 3862-3873, translated by Mojaddedi.

The journey of the Lover, initially articulated as dangerous by his counselors, is depicted with ease:

Scorching sands felt to him like silk, so cool,
And the great Oxus seemed a little pool;
Wilderness seemed a rose garden--he'd fall
From laughter like a rose that's grown too tall.
Candy's from Samarkand, but his lips found
It in Bukhara, and to it felt bound.³⁴¹

The paradox within this passage is evident; burning sand becomes cool silk, the great river Oxus becomes a small pool, dangerous wilderness transforms into a rose garden filled with laughter. Even the word Bukhara tastes like candy on the Lover's lips. The counselors, symbolizing the inability to discern outward form from inward meaning, perceive the journey as treacherous, but the Lover's power of discernment is greater. For the Lover, movement towards God is never painful; it is distance that brings about suffering. Rumi employs paradox further when he writes of how:

Bukhara, you who'd boost intelligence,
Removed my faith and knowledge all at once.³⁴²

Known as a city filled with knowledge, Bukhara has in fact removed knowledge from the Lover. Lost in dizzying, singular focus, the Lover cannot pursue anything but his Prince. Rumi reiterates this at the end of the section when, speaking to an unknown person, he concludes:

You're not fit for such breath, your heart is stone;
Though cane, you have no sugar of your own.
You follow just the brain that you still bear;
Of *armies you can't see* you're unaware.³⁴³

³⁴¹ M 3: 3863-3865, translated by Mojaddedi.

³⁴² M 3: 3866, translated by Mojaddedi.

³⁴³ M 3: 3872-3873, translated by Mojaddedi.

Those who still have a brain, who still rely on the faulty crutch of intellect and ego, are not fit for breath. Their hearts have turned to stone, incapable of feeling the presence of God and being drawn to the numen. Rumi's use of Arabic in the last line is a reference to a Qur'anic passage, sura *at-Tawbah* or the Repentance, which he will interpret in a section towards the end of "The Dropsical Lover." Within this sura, Satan tells the Quraysh that he will aid them in their fight with the Muslims. When the time comes for the battle to take place, however, Satan flees after seeing the hidden army of angels flying above the Muslims. The Quraysh are left without the promise of victory because they trusted in Satan, who represents the ego. Further within this passage, Rumi writes:

Heed what the Prophet counselled long ago:
'Between your two sides is your fiercest foe.'
Don't pay attention to its pomp, but flee,
For, Satan-like, it quarrels endlessly.³⁴⁴

The ego, like Satan, will quarrel with the soul endlessly if humans let it. Therefore, we must flee to God from our fiercest foe, the ego that lies within, and seek refuge in God's presence. Referencing sura *at-Tawbah* not only primes the reader for the exegetical passage to come later, but also depicts the inability for those stonyhearted people to discern forms. Lacking discernment, like the Quraysh who were tricked by their own ego, they rush headlong into war with an invisible army of angels. This is not the death that the Lover seeks, for it is reckless and ego driven. Rather, the Lover seeks the Beloved in hopes that the Beloved will kill duality so the two may finally become one.

³⁴⁴ M 3: 4069-4070, translated by Mojaddedi.

The Lover, now entering Bukhara, is warned against showing himself. His friends yell at him to flee, but the Lover stands firm. In such close proximity to his Prince, how can the Lover feel anything but unspeakable bliss? Rumi continues:

He entered in Bukhara happily,
Near his beloved and tranquillity,
Like drunken mystics who all gladly race
To heaven, telling the moon: 'Let's embrace!' All the Bukharans told him, 'Get away!
Don't let a soul see you. You cannot stay.
That angry ruler's looking for you here
To take his vengeance for each passing year.
Don't walk towards your own blood--don't rely
On clever words and spells: you're going to die.
You were the great *sadr*'s deputy before,
His master engineer--not any more.
After committing treachery, you fled,
So having got free why come back instead?
You fled grief using so much trickery--
Has fate returned you or stupidity?
Your intellect scorns Mercury, but fate
Makes fools of learned intellects--just wait!
Hares who hunt lions have no luck--where is
Your cunning and unrivalled cleverness?
Destiny's spells are numerous times as great;
Fate makes the open field a narrow strait.
There are a hundred paths and sanctuaries,
But they are blocked by dragon-fate with ease.³⁴⁵

Once again, the Lover is chastised for approaching the Prince, yet here it is done through the Bukharans' description of the Prince. The Prince is described as an angry ruler, one who is filled with vengeance and whose vengeance grows for each passing year that the Lover has been away from the Prince. The Prince, as a metaphor for God, is misunderstood by the Bukharans. Rumi's God is not angry. To depict the numen as angry is to place it in entirely rational and reductionist terms; to view God as any one individual thing is to cling to a single image. In God's unity, however, God can never be static but is instead everything at once. Furthermore, the use of "for

³⁴⁵ M 3: 3874-3885, translated by Mojaddedi.

each passing year"³⁴⁶ portrays God as marking the time it takes the Lover to reach God's presence. Like their depiction of God as angry, this runs contrary to Rumi's understanding of God. God is not concerned with how long it takes the soul to reach the Divine, nor where the soul comes from, so long as we come.

To the Bukharans, the Lover is not using his intellect. Once an intelligent man capable of tricking grief, the Lover is now stupid and, like a hare hunting a lion, will have no luck in avoiding death. For those who are not familiar with Rumi, this appears to be a straightforward metaphor: rabbits cannot hunt lions. Additionally, lions are predators and rabbits are prey; there is no reason for a lion to fear a rabbit. Many lines prior to this story, however, in the first book of the *Masnavi*, Rumi tells a story of *How a Hare Killed the Tyrannical Lion*. The hare asks if the lion will hold him up so he can see down a well:

The lion came and held the hare so near
That he proceeded, purged of all his fear,
They both peered down to find the enemy--
Their own reflection was all they could see:
The lion saw cast on the water there
His own reflection next to a plump hare—
Thinking he'd found his foe, he then leapt in,
Which meant the hare could go back to his kin!
His foe fell in the pit of his own crime--
His sins came back to haunt him one last time!³⁴⁷

The reader would have presumably read this story prior to reading “The Dropsical Lover,” which comes later in the third book of the *Masnavi*. Yet even if Rumi’s audience is not familiar with his rendition of this story, they would be familiar with the story of a hare killing a lion. The original story comes from the Panchatantra, a collection of animal fables from ancient India. While Rumi is drawing on a story previously told within the *Masnavi*, he is also drawing on a collective

³⁴⁶ M 3: 3877, translated by Mojaddedi.

³⁴⁷ M 1: 1313-1317, translated by Mojaddedi.

literature to frame his theology within a well-known narrative. This not only allows his story to appeal to those already familiar with the Panchatantra stories, but also shows Rumi's mastery and literacy with ancient literature. Aware of this story, the reader is then able to see the fault in the logic of the Bukharans who misunderstand this metaphor. The lion flung himself into the well, unable to discern his reflected form from the form of another lion. The hare, however, was not so easily tricked and, *because of his "cunning and unrivalled cleverness,"*³⁴⁸ the rabbit escapes. The Lover, like the rabbit, is discerning, whereas the Bukharans, like the lion, are not. The Lover knows he marches towards death, but knows this death to be a transformation whereby he may move closer to God. The Bukharans cannot comprehend that death is anything but the cessation of life. Devoid of the intimate knowledge of *baqā'*, the Bukharans see *fanā'* and shrink back in fear.

The next two sections of the story of "The Dropsical Lover" are the climax of the narrative, wherein the Lover goes before the Prince. Finally responding in full to the Bukharans who dissuaded him from seeking the Prince, the reader is given the most insight into the Lover's present state of mind:

'I suffer now from dropsy,' he then said.
 'Water draws me, though I know I'll be dead.
 None suffering dropsy can flee water still,
 Though they know from experience it will kill;
 My hands and belly swell, but can't abate
 My love for water. It's a sorry fate.
 When asked about my inner state, I'll say:
 "Would that the sea still flowed in me today!"
 Belly, get burst by water! Now if I
 Die from this, it is a good way to die.
 I envy water I see in the stream.
 "I wish I were in its place now," I dream.

³⁴⁸ M 3: 3883, translated by Mojaddedi.

With body swollen, drum-shaped, I compose
 Rhythms for love of water as a rose.
 If Gabriel sheds my blood, like soil below
 Gulp after gulp I'd swallow what would flow.
 I drink blood like the earth and embryo;
 While I'm in love, this is all that I know.
 I boil above the flame like pots of stew
 And drink blood all the time as dry sands do.
 I now repent that I tried trickery
 To flee what his rage wished to do with me.
 Let me spur on his rage at my drunk soul;
 He's Eid; the slaughtered beast is my small role.
 Whether the buffalo should sleep or feed,
 We nurture it before we make it bleed.
 Moses' cow's tail once resuscitated--
 Likewise my parts revive the liberated.
 Moses' cow was sacrificed; God willed
 Its small tail to revive one who'd been killed:
 He sprang up from the spot where he lay dead;
"Strike him with part of her!" the Lord had said.
Slaughter this cow, my friends, if your decision
Is to revive the souls that have true vision.
 On death, I left being mineral then grew
 And changed from plant to animal form too,
 Then died to that, to be a human here--
 When did death make me less? What should I fear?
 I'll die to humanness at the next battle,
 Then spread my wings and soar above each angel:
 I must transcend the angels' status too--
All perishes except God's face proves true.
 Sacrificed, I'll die to the angel then
 And go beyond imaginings of men.
 I'll then be Non-existent, and I'll hear
"To Him we are returning" sound so clear.
 Death is one thing agreed on by mankind;
 Water of life is very hard to find.
 Leave this side of the stream just like a lily,
 Like dropsy sufferers, seek out death greedily.
 Water they seek means death, yet they won't rest
 Till they can drink it. *God knows what is best.*
 Cold one who loves material comforts, you
 Flee the Beloved scared for your life too.
 Even girls think you're shameful--look above
 As spirits celebrate the sword of love.
 You've seen the stream--empty your jug inside!
 How can that water now escape outside?

When the jug's water enters, it's effaced;
Once in the stream and merged, it can't be traced.
Its essence stays; its attributes have gone--
It won't be less or ugly from now on.
I've hung myself like this on his palm tree,
Because I'd fled--it's my apology.'

He touched his head and face then to the floor
Before the *sadr*, with eyes about to pour.
Expectantly, all people looked ahead--
Would he burn him or hang him there instead?
'He'll show this wretched man who's desperate
What time shows men who are unfortunate.'
Like moths, he saw the flames as light, then he
Gave up life by approaching foolishly.
Love's candle has a very major difference,
It's radiance in more radiance in more radiance;
The opposite of candles with flames' heat,
It looks like fire, but is completely sweet.³⁴⁹

The Lover begins by using the analogy of “dropsy,” or edema, to articulate the state of the Sufi soul in desperate search for the Divine. The Lover knows that his dropsy is killing him but craves more and more water. The Lover then exclaims:

“Would that the sea still flowed in me today!”³⁵⁰

The Lover’s body, like a jug, contains water from the sea. The water remains apart from the ocean, however, and it causes his body pain. The Lover’s exclamation further references the imagery of God as the ocean. For, as we have already seen, “When you smash the jugs, the water is one.”³⁵¹ The Lover craves to be a stream, to be able to flow into the ocean. Within the metaphor of Lover as stream and God as ocean, Rumi muses on the relationship between the Sufi soul and God. For a Sufi, separate existence is agony, it is dropsy, and the only release is for the

³⁴⁹ M 3: 3886-3923, translated by Mojaddedi.

³⁵⁰ M 3: 3889, translated by Mojaddedi.

³⁵¹ *Divan* 32108, in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 8.

soul to flow into the great ocean of God. Yet the Lover, while still alive, will use his pain to make something beautiful for God:

With body swollen, drum-shaped, I compose
Rhythms for love of water as a rose.³⁵²

Even through his agony, the Lover can only think of God. Using his pain, he will make his swollen body into a drum to sing praises of the very thing that is killing him. Expanding upon the metaphor of the human body as an instrument that sings the praise of God, the above line directly references “The Song of the Reed.” Rumi’s use of these two analogies reiterates the simple truth that shapes Rumi’s own life: human existence is suffering and pain, but while we suffer we must find ways to make music, to dance, and through our singing we come closer to God. As we come closer to God, suffering paradoxically transforms into bliss. The outward form of pain, still perceived by the Bukharans, is nothing but “love for water.”³⁵³

The sad truth of the Lover’s present situation is that he can never be a stream. The release he craves will never come because he is human, he cannot become water and flow back to the ocean. This realization marks the turn in the story from the analogy of dropsy to a passage of violence:

If Gabriel sheds my blood, like soil below
Gulp after gulp I’d swallow what would flow.
I drink blood like the earth and embryo;
While I’m in love, this is all that I know.
I boil above the flame like pots of stew
And drink blood all the time as dry sands do.
I now repent that I tried trickery
To flee what his rage wished to do with me.
Let him spur on his rage at my drunk soul;
He’s Eid; the slaughtered beast is my small role.

³⁵² M 3: 3892, translated by Mojaddedi.

³⁵³ M 3: 3887, translated by Mojaddedi.

Whether the buffalo should sleep or feed,
 We nurture it before we make it bleed.
 Moses' cow's tail once resuscitated--
 Likewise my parts revive the liberated.
 Moses' cow was sacrificed; God willed
 Its small tail to revive one who'd been killed:
 He sprang up from the spot where he lay dead;
 "Strike him with part of her!" the Lord had said.
Slaughter this cow, my friends, if your decision
*Is to revive the souls that have true vision.*³⁵⁴

The Rumi most often found in American bookstores would never say this. Coleman Barks' Rumi does not drink blood, even metaphorically. Rumi's use of violent language is charged, potent, and conveys the force of the Lover's pain. The Lover would rather be slaughtered, like a cow on Eid, than remain trapped and separated from God in human form. Begging Gabriel to shed his blood, the Lover proclaims that he will drink his own blood. The violence of this passage does not mean that God wants to kill the Lover. Do not be like the Bukharans who cannot discern form from meaning; the form is violence, but the meaning is entirely love.

The Lover's wish to be a cow at Eid, as well as Moses' cow, speaks to the Lover's wish to serve a larger purpose, to be a tool used by God to bring about God's will; the Lover surrenders himself to God fully, without hesitation. According to sura two of the Qur'an, *al-Baqarah* or the Cow, Moses is instructed to slaughter his cow for the purpose of reviving a dead body.³⁵⁵ The tail of the cow is then used to beat the dead corpse, bringing it back to life. Rumi's reference to *al-Baqarah* depicts the way in which death acts as a process that grants life, and not just as the cessation of being. The Lover, like Moses' cow, will be sacrificed to grant new life, or restore life to a dead corpse. The Lover does not fear dying, because he knows that all things return to God:

³⁵⁴ M 3: 3893-3902, translated by Mojaddedi.

³⁵⁵ Mojaddedi, *Book Three*, 307.

On death, I left being mineral then grew
 And changed from plant to animal form too,
 Then died to that, to be a human here--
 When did death make me less? What should I fear?
 I'll die to humanness at the next battle,
 Then spread my wings and soar above each angel:
 I must transcend the angels' status too--
All perishes except God's face proves true.
 Sacrificed, I'll die to the angel then
 And go beyond imaginings of men.
 I'll then be Non-existent, and I'll hear
 "To Him we are returning" sound so clear.³⁵⁶

Death does not make us less. We do not diminish when we die but rather ascend in spiritual rank. The Lover has no need to fear because death will only transform his soul further, transmuting his existence until it becomes pure gold. Upon becoming human, we are poised to grow nearest to God, to ascend the nine heavens and enter Formlessness. Yet each ascension is characterized as a battle, mirroring the battle of the ego and the soul, and connotes struggle to overcome every level of being. Rumi then alludes to the sura *al-Qasas*, or the Stories, which is an assertion of the singularity of God. In Arabic, Rumi writes of the truth of the ascension of all things towards God, for "All perishes except God's face."³⁵⁷ Quoting the same sura three lines later for further emphasis, he adds "To Him we are returning."³⁵⁸ The constant perishing of all things save God means that, in order to gain immortality, one must dissolve into God. The entire universe emerges from God's declaration of being. The return to God is inevitable for all things, but distance from God is suffering and so knowledge of the Sufi path hastens the soul towards God. The Lover cannot stand the suffering of distance from his Prince, and so he does not fear death because it releases him from the suffering of human form. In Formlessness, the Lover will hear

³⁵⁶ M 3: 3903-3908, translated by Mojaddedi.

³⁵⁷ M 3: 3906, translated by Mojaddedi.

³⁵⁸ M 3: 3908, translated by Mojaddedi.

nothing but the voice of God, resounding and pure; the Lover is only made complete when he is obliterated.

The Lover then returns to the motif of water and dropsy, asserting that existence is one side of a stream, and Non-Existence is the other. He then says that we must leave the bank of existence in pursuit of Non-Existence greedily, like one who suffers from dropsy:

Death is one thing agreed on by mankind;
Water of life is very hard to find.
Leave this side of the stream just like a lily,
Like dropsy sufferers, seek out death greedily.
Water they seek means death, yet they won't rest
Till they can drink it. *God knows what is best.*
Cold one who loves material comforts, you
Flee the Beloved scared for your life too.³⁵⁹

Rumi returns to the imagery of water, relying on it to convey the Lover's need to be near his Prince. In the first two lines, Rumi plays on the assumptions of his audience, positioning death as something agreed upon by humanity. In this way, he posits a fact that his reader can agree with, only to turn the fact on its head and use it to argue his own point further. In the first line, we see this as follows: humanity agrees that death is a singular thing, namely cessation of life, and water that grants immortal life is hard to find. Yet the outward form of this line is not Rumi's inward intent. Water of life is hard to find because all water is death; all water necessitates drowning. Yet for a Sufi like Rumi drowning is not negative, but rather a release from the suffering of existence. For Rumi, water "is always the symbol of the Divine—but not everyone understands its secret."³⁶⁰ These two lines are evidence that Rumi is constantly trying to convey this nuance to his readers. Rumi continues, returning to the motif of the Lover with dropsy, writing that those with dropsy seek death greedily. Dropsy sufferers know that drinking water will kill them, yet

³⁵⁹ M 3: 3909-3912, translated by Mojaddedi.

³⁶⁰ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 76.

they return again and again to the riverbed for more. These lines mirror a common theme for Rumi wherein the dropsical water-seeker represents the Sufi soul and the water represents the Divine:

Created water reminds the poet of the water of life, the water of grace and many other beautiful and life-bestowing things which are sent down, like rain, from heaven to refresh the world.

What is the call of water? It is like the call of Israfil, quickening the dead, or like a dervish in the days of religious almsgiving, or like the sound of freedom for a prisoner, like the breath of the Merciful which reached the Prophet from Yemen, or like the scent of Joseph's shirt which cured Jacob's blindness.³⁶¹

The call of water is like the angel Israfil's trumpeting, which signals the Day of Reckoning and the end of the created world. Towards Israfil's call the Lover runs, for the water holds liberation from the prison of created form. The last line of the quoted section above plays upon the difference between the "cold ones" who cannot recognize the outward forms and the Lover who rushes towards death. The cold ones love material comforts, or the outward and false forms, and flee the Beloved scared for their lives. The Lover similarly flees, but instead flees the comforts of materiality for death. By plunging himself into the Beloved's river, the Lover returns to God; it is a universal truth that all rivers flow towards the Formlessness of the Ocean.

The Lover ends his address to the Bukharans by deploying violent imagery to articulate his need to go before the Prince. Rumi writes:

Even girls think you're shameful—look above
As spirits celebrate the sword of love.
You've seen the stream—empty your jug inside!
How can that water now escape outside?
When the jug's water enters, it's effaced;
Once in the stream and merged, it can't be traced.

³⁶¹ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 76.

Its essence stays; its attributes have gone—
It won't be less or ugly from now on.
I've hung myself like this on his palm tree,
Because I'd fled—it's my apology.³⁶²

The spirits above, in the skies of the heavenly spheres, celebrate the sword of love upon which they throw themselves willingly, over and over again, dying constantly in the presence of God. The outward form of the Lover is a jug and his only goal is to empty himself of all contents, returning them to the water from which they came. In effacement within the water, the Lover becomes traceless: "Its essence stays; its attributes have gone."³⁶³ For the Lover, all outward forms are ugly because they act as veils, which hide the beauty of God. Upon total submersion in the water, the essence of the Lover will no longer be ugly or less than, but total and replete with splendor. In apology for distancing himself from the Prince, the Lover says, "I've hung myself like this on his palm tree."³⁶⁴ Mojaddedi decides not to capitalize the pronoun since he believes it to be referring to the Prince, yet an alternative reading of this line could be an assertion of the soul's wish to hang herself on God's palm tree. As the last line of the Lover's address to the Bukharans, we can interpret the ambiguity of subject and referent to be evidence of the Lover's near-complete submersion in God's waters.

Ending his address to the undiscerning Bukharans, the Lover goes before the Prince.

Prostrating himself in front of the Prince, forehead on the ground before his feet, Rumi writes:

He touched his head and face then to the floor
Before the *sadr*, with eyes about to pour.
Expectantly, all people looked ahead—
Would he burn him or hang him there instead?
'He'll show this wretched man who's desperate
What time shows men who are unfortunate.'

³⁶² M 3: 3913-3917, translated by Mojaddedi.

³⁶³ M 3: 3916, translated by Mojaddedi.

³⁶⁴ M 3: 3917, translated by Mojaddedi.

Like moths, he saw the flames as light, then he
Gave up life by approaching foolishly.
Love's candle has a very major difference,
It's radiance in more radiance in more radiance;
The opposite of candles with flames' heat,
It looks like fire, but is completely sweet.³⁶⁵

Bowed before his Prince, the Lover begins to weep. The weeping lover is a motif deployed by many Sufi poets to articulate states of desperate need and abandon, but it also reiterates the importance of water. Like rain, the Sufi's tears are a mercy, and "the tears of the lovers are likewise comparable to the blissful rain which causes the garden to open its blossoms in spring."³⁶⁶ Like the garden which blossoms through the merciful rain, so too does the human soul blossom when in the presence of God's heavenly waters. While the Bukharans contemplate if the Lover will burn or hang, the Lover, weeping at the Prince's feet, purifies his soul through every tear shed. By assimilating the thoughts of the Bukharans into the interaction of the Lover and the Prince, Rumi can play with perspective to compare the thoughts of a purified soul in pursuit of God to those undiscerning and ignorant to God's presence:

'He'll show this wretched man who's desperate
What time shows men who are unfortunate.'³⁶⁷

The Bukharans believe that death is something that comes to unfortunate men after a long time. This situates death as an inevitable entity which must be avoided, but which will eventually arrive. Yet the Lover knows, as does Rumi, that death is not something to be avoided but to be sought constantly for it is the only way to improve one's soul. Through taking the perspective of the Bukharans, Rumi conveys what his readers should not do: misunderstand death as something that must be avoided. Instead, Rumi guides his readers to be like the Lover who, like a moth, flies into the flames.

³⁶⁵ M 3: 3918-3923, translated by Mojaddedi.

³⁶⁶ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 80.

³⁶⁷ M 3: 3920, translated by Mojaddedi.

As we have already seen, only the human soul is moth-like. Unlike Gabriel, who could not pass the Lote Tree of the Far Boundary for fear of burning his wings, human souls do not fear the burning flames. Like moths, human souls gladly steer towards fire, perceiving the light as God, and give up their lives foolishly, again and again. Yet what Gabriel and the Bukharans do not understand is that:

Love's candle has a very major difference,
It's radiance in more radiance in more radiance;
The opposite of candles with flames' heat,
It looks like fire, but is completely sweet.³⁶⁸

The Lover's narrative ends abruptly, with his head on the ground before the Prince's feet. The story of the Lover will continue, however, for the next thousand lines in manifold different narrative arcs. Each arc expands upon what it means to be in union with God. From the mosque that kills its sleeping visitors all the way down to the flea who asks Solomon to punish the wind, each story brings the reader closer to experiencing union. Within the prism of these stories, Rumi hopes that the ineffable experience of union might become effable; perhaps, through the refracted interjections and expositions of each story, transposed on top of and erupting from within one another, the reader can begin to touch the indescribable.

Rumi never speaks of what occurs within union. He writes copiously, articulating different aspects of union in hopes that his bewildering poetry might breed experience or, at the very least, bring the reader closer to union with God. Rumi brings to life the experience of union without ever disclosing what happens within God's presence. Left in suspension, the reader hears story after story of annihilation and subsistence, never once touching upon what happens to the Lover.

³⁶⁸ M 3: 3922-3923, translated by Mojaddedi.

For us to analyze each of these stories line by line would miss the point: like the danger of the images that whirl about in union, to attach ourselves to any one of these stories is to miss the totality of the experience. When Rumi returns to the Lover, he is unconscious on the ground. Out of compassion, the Prince revives the annihilated Lover and, rising from the ground bewildered, the Lover begins to overflow with language in praise of the Beloved:

Wherever you find blood drops, realize
By looking closely that they're from my eyes.
My speech is thunder, and its booming sound
Wants all the clouds to rain down on the ground.
Speaking or weeping—I'm torn by these two:
Should I now speak or weep? Which should I do?
If I speak now, I can't keep weeping too;
If I don't speak then how can I praise you?
My eyes weep blood from my heart, king—behold
What has poured out of my eyes; don't be cold!³⁶⁹

Like Rumi, our Lover cannot articulate the experience of union. Invoking language rife with images of nature, pain, and sorrow, the Lover cannot decide if he should praise the Beloved or weep. The imagery of weeping and rain returns here, mirroring the mercy of God, which comes down to the earth from the heavens. Here, at the end of our story, we are left with the Lover standing beneath the clouds as rain cascades downward from the spheres above. Our Lover looks onward, mouth agape, eyes distant, desperately searching for words that will never come.

³⁶⁹ M 3: 4710-4714, translated by Mojaddedi.

Conclusion

Faith's candle always rises just the same;
It doesn't melt like those that have a flame
And seem like light but burn those who come near—
This looks like fire, but roses greet you here.
That one seems friendly, but burns body parts;
This one at union gives pure light to hearts.
The flame of pure light's form to those who're present
Is light, but it seems fire to those who're distant.³⁷⁰

To sum up Rumi's Sufism with one of his most potent metaphors, the human soul is a moth in constant search for the light of God, hurtling with abandon into the flames of union. Unlike Gabriel, we may burn our wings endlessly. Having accepted the Trust, we are God's regents on Earth. As stewards of creation, our sole duty is to unveil the created forms, following the river back to its endless ocean. And though we seek fire, for the lover of God the flames are not pain but gardens of roses, pure light and rain which stream through the windows of our soul. In God's presence, the unity of existence is palpable. There is no outward form, no difference, no paradox, because within Formless eternity everything is God. For the uninitiated, distant souls, the outward form of union is burning suffering.

Paradox necessitates duality, but within the presence of God there can be no duality. All forms melt away and the only thing left is God. Therefore, while we might read difference, or paradox, in Rumi's writing, every single verse has one meaning, one purpose, and that is to guide us towards God. Paradox aids in the reader's journey through Rumi's *Masnavi* much the same way confusion aids the Sufi in tasting the presence of God. Furthermore, paradox contains something inherently numinous. The comparison of difference carries within it a sense of the uncanny, of the wholly other, that leaves us bewildered. Within Rumi's paradox, the reader

³⁷⁰ M 3: 4376-4379, translated by Mojaddedi.

moves beyond mere language and wades, like the Queen of Sheba, into the tiled floor of Solomon's palace. Within paradox, reading becomes experiential.

Otto believed that, while the numen resides beyond and outside of human existence, it was capable of entering into the human plane. At one point, Otto suggests that the numen can be drawn from its wholly Other abode and into our frame of existence through the creation of "numinous objects." Otto writes that "the 'wholly other' will attach itself to, or sometimes be indirectly aroused by means of, objects which are already puzzling upon the 'natural' plane, or are of a surprising or astounding character."³⁷¹ Following Otto's logic, the construction of a puzzling object within the natural plane can beckon the numen to it. Continuing this point later on, Otto cites Stonehenge as an example and how the purpose for creating such a structure "may have well been originally to localize and preserve and, as it were, to store up the numen in solid presence."³⁷² In this way, I believe Rumi's *Masnavi*, like Otto's Stonehenge, works to localize and solidify the numen. In no way am I asserting that the *Masnavi* contains God, for that would be *sherk*. Rather, I view paradox within Rumi's *Masnavi* as inspiring within the reader, through the conveyance of some sort of numinous energy, a touch of what it might be like to experience union with the wholly Other.

Those familiar with Rumi's poetry know that one can never return to the same passage twice. Whenever we engage with the text, we bring something new to the reading. In the same way, the multivalence of Rumi's writing draws out different emotions and thoughts from the reader. Within the context of reading the text, the experience is made fresh and new with every return. Rumi's poetry, like many other sacred texts, is uniquely protean compared to non-

³⁷¹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 28.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 68.

religious texts. Like the shifting tiles of Solomon's glassy court, the verses of Rumi's *Masnavi* are constantly moving, overlapping, subverting, and subsuming one another to form an endlessly shifting mosaic of text. In many ways, the nature of Rumi's poetry mirrors the final point of union wherein images and attributes, often differing greatly from one another, whirl about within the singular presence of God. Perhaps, through the disciple's reading of Rumi, the danger of union will lessen. Reading Rumi's poetry primes the disciple for bewilderment, foregoing the fatal mistake of attaching their focus to a single image of the Imageless Divine.

Even for the non-Sufi, Rumi's poetry teaches us the importance of confusion. In many schools of Western thought, paradox and bewilderment are viewed as problems that need to be solved. Take, for example, linear storytelling. So accustomed to a beginning and an end, stories become predictable. The reader follows the normative, linear arc and arrives succinctly at the end, where all strands of the story come together. While some readers may prefer the reliability of these stories, linear storytelling ignores the more ambitious reader. When reading Rumi's *Masnavi*, the interwoven and overlapping narratives necessitate that readers not only pay attention, but also weave each narrative strand together for themselves. Perhaps the emphasis on unitive experience in Sufism inclines Sufis to embrace paradox and confusion, which is emblematic of union with God, in their writing. It is thus obvious that when one writes about union, the language employed by the author would be one that induces within the reader a sense of confusion and paradox. Additionally, overlapping narratives are often definitive of medieval Persian literature. Thus, reading Rumi within the context of Muslim Persian poetry allows for the appreciation of the *Masnavi's* wayward narratives. As we have seen throughout this paper, paradox serves the purpose of opening up language, converting a stagnant text into a multi-dimensional experience. To clarify Rumi's writing risks stripping it of its numinous quality.

Furthermore, paring his poetry down to a single phrase or point is not only reductionist but also a complete misunderstanding of the text's, and Rumi's, intention.

Let us now conclude with some thoughts, both academic and non-academic. For scholars of religion, Rumi's *Masnavi* opens up fields of uncharted inquiry. Within the scope of this paper, we have seen ways in which the reading of texts can be categorized as experience. As Orsi emphasized within his discussion of the Tradition of More, Religious Studies is in dire need of a reemphasis on surplus experience. Through our ability to read texts as experience, the Tradition of More opens onto a fertile field of deep textual analysis still in need of mapping. We must balance the need to read Rumi in his Muslim and Persian context with the recognition that the *Masnavi* is a text that has appropriated Rumi's original intent and now speaks with its own voice. Within Rumi scholarship, further points of inquiry could be a larger study of various themes or images that recur throughout his poetry, an exploration of gender within his writing, as well as further line-by-line analysis of the many narratives within his *Masnavi*. Analyzing the way Rumi plays with Islamic tenets, sometimes promoting and other times criticizing them, would also be a worthwhile endeavor. Of personal interest to me, however, is Rumi's use of water imagery as it relates to Islam, but also Jewish mysticism, as well as further analysis of sacred violence within the *Masnavi*.

On a less academic note, Rumi's writing serves to remind his audience of the importance of difference. In his emphasis of paradox, we find a more subtle argument: we should not seek absolutes, but the spaces between. Love is powerful, but when contrasted and experienced alongside grief, sorrow, violence, and suffering, it becomes something entirely new; love experienced in difference becomes sacred, it becomes holy. Emotive experience does not occur in absolutes, but within the small pangs of doubt that seep into our happiness. For those who are

distant from God, any sense of suffering or pain is a tribulation. For those earthly lovers, however, the entire world is a constantly unfolding garden; behind every flower hides the face of God, never perishing.

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Appendices

Appendix A

“The Dropsical Lover” consists of 1,049 lines, which Mojaddedi divides up into forty-nine subsequent sections. In my attempt to analyze “The Dropsical Lover,” I have divided all forty-nine subheadings, based on their content and title, into fifteen narrative arcs and four exegetical sections, including the arc of “The Dropsical Lover.” Below you will find a list of every section title, according to Mojaddedi’s translation, with corresponding line numbers.

Appendix B consists of an image, created with the help of Damaris Chenoweth, to visually represent the way in which Rumi moves between different narrative arcs. Finally, Appendix C is every section of “The Dropsical Lover” that I have identified as part of the Lover’s narrative arc.

“The Dropsical Lover”

1. 3688 – 3701: “Story about the deputy of the Sadr-e Jahan who left Bukhara in fear of his life, only for his love to draw him back there, because a matter of life and death is not major for lovers”
2. 3702 – 3769: “The appearance of the Holy Spirit in human form to Mary when she was naked and bathing, and her taking refuge in God”
3. 3770 – 3790: “The Holy Spirit tells Mary: ‘I am a messenger from God to you. Don’t be agitated or hide from me, for this is God’s command!’”
4. 3791 – 3809: “The vakil resolves through love to return to Bukhara without worrying about his own welfare”
5. 3810 – 3813: “A lover asked her estranged lover, ‘Which city did you find the finest, the largest, and the most magnificent, the most bountiful, and the most heart-expanding?’”
6. 3814 – 3831: “His friends prevent him from returning to Bukhara and make threats. He responds, ‘I don’t care!’”
7. 3832 – 3861: “Due to love, the lover says, ‘I don’t care!’ to his adviser and scolder”
8. 3862 – 3873: “The lover-bondsman turns toward Bukhara”
9. 3874 – 3885: “The reckless lover enters Bukhara and his friends warn him against showing himself”
10. 3886 – 3917: “The lover answer those who reproach and threaten him”
11. 3918 – 3923: “That lover reaches his beloved once he has washed his hands of himself”

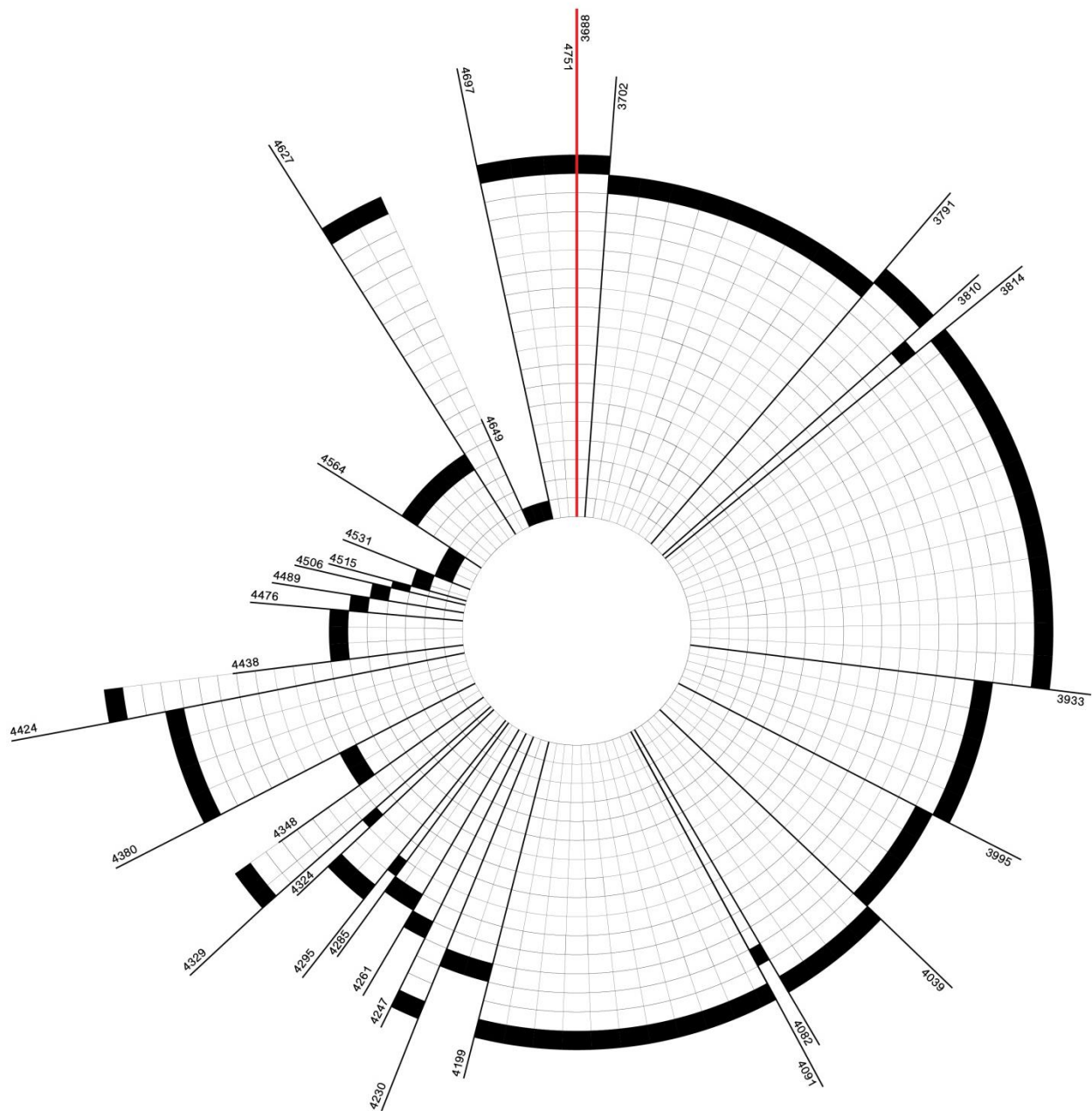
12. 3924 – 3932: “Description of that mosque that kills lovers and of the death-seeking, reckless lover who became a guest there”
13. 3933 – 3939: “A guest comes to that mosque”
14. 3940 – 3947: “The people of the mosque blame that lover guest for wanting to sleep there and warn him of its dangers”
15. 3948 – 3961: “The lover’s answer to those who scold him”
16. 3962 – 3994: “The love of Galen is for the life in this world, for his skill is useful here, and he does not profess any skill that is useful in that other marketplace. He sees himself in the same position over there as ordinary people”
17. 3995 – 4038: “The people of the mosque blame the visitor again for wanting to sleep in the mosque”
18. 4039 – 4081: “How Satan told the Qoraysh: ‘Go to war with Mohammad and I will help you and call my tribe for support and how he fled when the two battle-lines faced each other’”
19. 4082 – 4090: “The scolders repeat their advice to that visitor to the mosque that kills guests”
20. 4091 – 4161: “The visitor answers them and tells the parable of the guard of the cultivated land who, by beating a mere tambour, fended off a camel on whose back they were playing Shah Mahmud’s kettledrum”
21. 4162 – 4198: “Comparison of the believer’s fleeing and impatience during affliction with the agitation and resistance of chick-peas and other such vegetables in the boiling-pot, and their rushing up to jump out”
22. 4199 – 4205: “A comparison exemplifying the way a believer becomes patient once he understands whether tribulation is for better or for worse”
23. 4206 – 4214: “How the lady cook apologized to the chick-pea, and the wisdom in her boiling the chick-pea”
24. 4215 – 4229: “The remainder of that story about the visitor to that guest-killing mosque and his resolve and sincerity”
25. 4230 – 4246: “Mention of the conception of evil thoughts by those who lack understanding”
26. 4247 – 4252: “Explanation of the saying of the Prophet: ‘The Qur’an has an outer and an inner dimension, and its inner dimension has seven inner layers’”
27. 4253 – 4260: “Explanation of how the retreat of Prophets and Friends of God to mountains and caves is not in order to hide themselves, nor out of fear of distraction by people, but instead in order to guide people and to urge them to sever links with the lower world as much as possible”
28. 4261 – 4270: “Comparison of the appearance of the Friends of God and their speech with the appearance of Moses’ rod and Jesus’ incantations”
29. 4271 – 4284: “The exegesis of the Qur’anic verse ‘O hills and birds, repeat his praise!’”
30. 4285 – 4294: “The answer to the one who criticized The Masnavi owing to deficient understanding”
31. 4295 – 4323: “Parable about the foal that refused to drink water because of the clamour by the grooms and trainers”
32. 4324 – 4328: “Remainder of the mention of that visitor at the mosque that killed its guests”

33. 4329 – 4347: “Exegesis of the verse ‘And use your horses and footsoldiers in an assault against them!’”
34. 4348 – 4379: “The talismanic roar reaches the guest in the mosque at midnight”
35. 4380 – 4423: “The meeting of that lover with the Sadr-e Jahan”
36. 4424 – 4437: “How each element attracts its own kind that has been trapped in human form by a different element”
37. 4438 – 4464: “How the soul is attracted, too, to the world of spirits and appeals for its own residence there, and how it is severed from body parts that are a fetter on the spiritual falcon”
38. 4465 – 4475: “The ruining of resolutions is in order to inform Man that He is the Ruler and Conqueror, and that His occasional non-annulment of Man’s resolution and His putting it into effect is in order that desire may lead him to make a resolution, so that next time he can ruin it, and thus warnings can be repeated”
39. 4476 – 4488: “How the Prophet looked at captives and smiled, saying: ‘I marvel at people who have to be dragged to paradise with chains and shackles!’”
40. 4489 – 4505: “Exegesis of the Qur’anic verse ‘If you ask for a decision, the decision has come: O railers, you were saying, “Give the decision and victory to us or Mohammad whoever is correct.”’ You were saying that in order that it might be thought that you were seeking the truth without personal interest; now that we have given Mohammad the victory, you can see who is correct”
41. 4506 – 4514: “The secret reason why God called the Prophet’s return unfulfilled from Hodaybiyya a ‘victory’, saying: ‘We have opened to you a victory.’ In form it was being locked in defeat, but in reality it was an opening up to victory, just as crushing musk appears to be a defeat, but is in fact causing its musky scent to emerge and perfecting its virtues”
42. 4515 – 4530: “Exegesis of the saying of Mohammad: ‘Don’t say I am superior to Noah’”
43. 4531 – 4563: “The Prophet becomes aware of their criticizing him for Schadenfreude”
44. 4564 – 4603: “Explanation of how the tyrant is overwhelmed while overpowering and is made a captive when he gains victory”
45. 4604 – 4626: “The beloved’s attraction of the lover works in such a way that the lover neither knows it nor hopes for it, nor has the occurrence in his mind of it, nor has a trace of that attraction appear inside, except the fear that is mixed with despair and combined with the continuation of seeking”
46. 4627 – 4648: “The flea appeals for justice against the wind in the presence of Solomon”
47. 4649 – 4666: “Solomon commands the plaintiff flea to bring its adversary to court”
48. 4667 – 4696: “The beloved caresses the stupefied lover, so he returns to consciousness”
49. 4697 – 4751: “The unconscious lover comes to his wits again and starts to praise and give thanks to the beloved”

Appendix B

Beginning at the red line and moving clockwise, the image on page 140 follows the story of “The Dropsical Lover” as it weaves through multiple narrative arcs. There are eighteen concentric circles, each representing a different narrative arc or exegetical section. The numbers on the outside represent the line number of every new section, so that the reader can follow along with their own *Masnavi*. Moving chronologically through “The Dropsical Lover,” we begin with the story of the Lover and descend into subsequent arcs, until we ultimately return to conclude with the Lover.

Interestingly, the image supports the idea that Rumi’s writing circles an indescribable reality that is never explicitly stated. Instead, we follow multiple stories that relate to the Truth but which eventually lead us back to where we first began. In many ways, I think this image also mirrors “The Song of the Reed” and the human soul’s journey on earth: beginning in Formlessness, we are stripped from the reed-bed and flung into creation, only to return to God at the end of our story.



Appendix C

Chapter V consists of a textual analysis of a section of Rumi's *Masnavi* entitled "The Dropsical Lover." In an attempt to emphasize the experience of reading Rumi for oneself, I have quoted in full the sections which will be the focus of Chapter V. I urge the reader to experience the nuance of the story for herself and, should she so choose, seek out a copy of Rumi's *Masnavi* to read the story in its entirety. Taking place over a few thousand lines, reprinting the story here would be far too large of an endeavor. As such, the below section represents an amalgamation of the first eight sections of "The Dropsical Lover" and is in no way complete. It is my hope, however, that the below sections will provide a small taste of Rumi's larger work and perhaps inspire others to read Rumi for themselves.

***Story about the deputy of the Sadr-e Jahan who
left Bukhara in fear of his life, only for his love to
draw him back there, because a matter of life and
death is not major for lovers***

Bukhara's *sadr* once had a slave who hid
When he was blamed for what another did.
Confused, for ten long years he roamed and ran
In deserts, mountains, and through Khorasan.
After ten years his yearning meant that he
Could not bear separation endlessly.
He thought, 'I cannot take more banishment.
Nothing heals feelings of abandonment.'
These lands are barren now from separation;
Dirt gives the water its discoloration.
The life-increasing wind gets filled with sickness
And fire turns ground beneath us into ashes.
Even heavenly gardens face disease:
Leaves yellow, rot, then drop off from the trees.
Separate from friends the intellect feels low,
Just like an archer with a broken bow.
This separation made hell-fire so scorching,
And it makes old men's limbs continue shaking.

If I talk of this spark-like separation
 Until the end I'll have said just a fraction.
 Don't breathe a word about its burning then—
 Just say, '*Lord, save me!*' and say it again.
 Imagine what it's like to be apart
 From things here that bring joy inside your heart:
 Others enjoyed what you enjoy here, friend,
 But it still fled them wind-like in the end—
 Don't love that thing. It will soon leave you too.
 Escape from it before it flees from you!³⁷³

*The vakil resolves through love to return to
 Bukhara without worrying about his own welfare*

Leave Mary's candle lit, because that lover
 Whose heart's aflame is going to Bukhara
 Impatiently and in a blazing furnace—
 Read in the tale of the great *sadr* to learn this.
 Bukhara stands for knowledge's true source;
 All who possess it are Bukharans of course.
 When near the shaikh you're in Bukhara too,
 So don't look down on that place seen by few.
 Its ebb and flow forms such a major hurdle
 That none reach this Bukhara but the humble.
 Happy the man whose *self is brought down low!*
Stubbornness ruins others. It's your foe.
 The exile from the *sadr* had torn apart
 The lover's soul's foundation part by part.
 He said, 'I will return to faith once more
 Although I was an infidel before.
 I'll go back there and fall down at the feet
 Of the great *sadr* whose thoughts are always sweet.
 "I've flung my soul before you!" I will say,
 "Revive me or chop off my head today!"'
 Being dead and slain near you, O moon of graces,
 Is better than being king in other places.
 More than a hundred times I've tried this out—
 Without you my life won't taste sweet, no doubt.
My wish, sing me the tune of Resurrection!
Kneel, she-camel! My joy has reached perfection.
Earth, swallow up my tears. They will suffice.
Soul, drink the pure draught straight from paradise.
Welcome, my Eid! You've come back like last year.
O breeze, how sweet is what has wafted here.

³⁷³ M 3: 3688-3701, translated by Mojaddedi.

'Farewell, my friends! I've headed out,' he said,
 'To that *sadr* whose commands are all obeyed.
 Each moment I'm more roasted in the heat,
 But, come what may, I'll go and not retreat.
 And though he makes himself so stony-hearted,
 Towards Bukhara my soul has departed,
 That is the seat of my beloved king—
 "Love of one's homeland" means no other thing.'³⁷⁴

*His friends prevent him from returning to
 Bukhara and make threats. He responds, 'I don't
 care!'*

'You clueless one!' a counsellor then said,
 'If you can, think about what lies ahead:
 Ponder your past and future rationally!
 Only moths burn themselves so passionately.
 How will you reach Bukhara? You're insane
 And should be bound in prison with a chain.
 The angry *sadr* champs iron as he tries
 To find your whereabouts with twenty eyes.
 He's sharpening a knife for you alone—
 He's like a starving dog and you're the bone!
 You have escaped him once when God let you,
 So why head back to gaol? What's wrong with you?
 If you had gaolers chasing now, we'd say
 You'll need to use your wits to get away,
 But nobody is chasing you at all,
 So why yourself create an obstacle?'
 A secret love had kept him prisoner;
 But this was not seen by that counsellor.
 A hidden gaoler chases gaolers too—
 If not, why do these curs act like they do?
 Into their souls the king of love's rage came,
 Forcing them to a thuggish life of shame:
 His rage strikes, saying, 'Beat him!' On account
 Of hidden thugs I've wept a huge amount.
 Whomever you see in decline, though he
 Appears alone, a thug's his company.
 If he knew of God's presence, he would moan
 And rush to the Most Powerful Sultan's throne,
 Scattering dust on his own face in shame,
 For refuge from the frightening demon's aim.

³⁷⁴ M 3: 3791-3809, translated by Mojaddedi.

You're less than ants, but you thought you might be
 A prince; that's why, blind fool, you couldn't see.
 These false wings filled you up with self-deception
 And drew you to a harmful self-destruction.
 You can fly high if you keep your wings light,
 But if they're muddled there's no hope for flight.³⁷⁵

***Due to love, the lover says, 'I don't care!' to his
 adviser and scolder***

'How long will you advise me? Please refrain,
 For I've been tied up with a heavy chain
 That's harder to endure than your advice.
 Your expert didn't know love and its price:
 The jurists have no teaching they can offer
 About how love increases pain we suffer.
 Don't threaten me with death, for desperately
 I thirst for my own blood. What's death to me?'
 Each moment a new death is found by lovers;
 Their deaths are not one kind; they've many others,
 For Guidance's Soul gave lives by the score:
 Each moment he will sacrifice some more.
 Since for each he gets ten in compensation:
 'Ten of their like'—recite this revelation.
 'If that Beloved sheds my blood, I'll throw
 My life before home, dancing as I go.
 I've tested it. Death is this life for me--
 When I leave life it's for eternity.'
Murder me, murder me, my trusty friends!
In being killed there's life that never ends.
Eternal Soul, you who make all cheeks glow,
Draw up my soul to union You bestow!
Love for my lover roasts my bowels, but still
If He wants to walk on my eyes, He will.
 Speak Persian although Arabic thrills more;
 Love has a hundred languages in store,
 But all those languages are dumbstruck when
 That Pure Beloved's scent wafts here again.
 I'll stop, for the Beloved will speak now--
 Be all ear! *God knows what's best anyhow.*
 If lovers should repent, beware, for they
 Will teach drunk on the gallows come what may.
 This lover may be going to Bukhara,
 But teachings aren't what he is chasing after—

³⁷⁵ M 3: 3814-3831, translated by Mojaddedi.

The Loved One's beauty is the lover's teacher,
 His face their notebook, lesson, and class lecture.
 They're silent, but their inner repetition
 Rises up to His throne and seat in heaven.
 Their lesson is to whirl in ecstasy,
 Not to read texts or spout philosophy.
 The 'chain' of this group is His musky tress,
 Their 'circle case' concerns His curls no less.
 If someone asks about 'the purse's case',
 Then say: God's treasure's not found in that place.'
 If there's talk of types of divorce, don't you
 Find fault, as this evokes Bukhara too.
 Mention of things has special influences,
 As attributes have their own substances.
 You prosper in Bukhara with you virtues,
 But being truly humble is what frees you:
 Mere knowledge couldn't burden this Bukharan
 Who'd concentrated on the Sun of Vision.
 Whoever's found true vision through seclusion
 Shuns knowledge gained through theory and tuition;
 If someone's seen the beauty of the soul,
 He won't be moved by sciences at all;
 Vision is knowledge's superior, so
 Most men succumb to this world down below—
 They see this world as theirs and so immediate,
 But think the other world is bought on credit.³⁷⁶

The lover-bondsman turns towards Bukhara

That lover's heart throbbed as he wept blood tears,
 Heading fast to Bukhara with no fears.
 Scorching sands felt to him like silk, so cool,
 And the great Oxus seemed a little pool;
 Wilderness seemed a rose garden--he'd fall
 From laughter like a rose that's grown too tall.
 Candy's from Samarkand, but his lips found
 It in Bukhara, and to it felt bound.
 Bukhara, you who'd boost intelligence,
 Removed my faith and knowledge all at once.
 I'm crescent-like, for I seek the full moon;
 In this world's waiting line, I want him soon.
 Bukhara's skyline came within his sight
 And passion made that black form brilliant white.

³⁷⁶ M 3: 3832-3861, translated by Mojaddedi.

He fell flat out unconsciously suddenly,
His mind flown to the source of mystery.
Men dabbed his head and face then with rosewater,
Not knowing the rosewater of his lover.
He'd seen a hidden rose garden; love had
Cut him off from himself like one gone mad.
You're not fit for such breath, your heart is stone;
Though cane, you have no sugar of your own.
You follow just the brain that you still bear;
Of *armies you can't see* you're unaware.³⁷⁷

***The reckless lover enters Bukhara and his friends
warn him against showing himself***

He entered in Bukhara happily,
Near his beloved and tranquillity,
Like drunken mystics who all gladly race
To heaven, telling the moon: 'Let's embrace!'
All the Bukharans told him, 'Get away!
Don't let a soul see you. You cannot stay.
That angry ruler's looking for you here
To take his vengeance for each passing year.
Don't walk towards your own blood--don't rely
On clever words and spells: you're going to die.
You were the great *sadr's* deputy before,
His master engineer--not any more.
After committing treachery, you fled,
So having got free why come back instead?
You fled grief using so much trickery--
Has fate returned you or stupidity?
Your intellect scorns Mercury, but fate
Makes fools of learned intellects--just wait!
Hares who hunt lions have no luck--where is
Your cunning and unrivalled cleverness?
Destiny's spells are numerous times as great;
Fate makes the open field a narrow strait.
There are a hundred paths and sanctuaries ,
But they are blocked by dragon-fate with ease.³⁷⁸

***The lover answers those who reproach and
threaten him***

³⁷⁷ M 3: 3862-3873, translated by Mojaddedi.

³⁷⁸ M 3: 3874-3885, translated Mojaddedi.

'I suffer now from dropsy,' he then said.
 'Water draws me, though I know I'll be dead.
 None suffering dropsy can flee water still,
 Though they know from experience it will kill;
 My hands and belly swell, but can't abate
 My love for water. It's a sorry fate.
 When asked about my inner state, I'll say:
 "Would that the sea still flowed in me today!"
 Belly, get burst by water! Now if I
 Die from this, it is a good way to die.
 I envy water I see in the stream.
 "I wish I were in its place now," I dream.
 With body swollen, drum-shaped, I compose
 Rhythms for love of water as a rose.
 If Gabriel sheds my blood, like soil below
 Gulp after gulp I'd swallow what would flow.
 I drink blood like the earth and embryo;
 While I'm in love, this is all that I know.
 I boil above the flame like pots of stew
 And drink blood all the time as dry sands do.
 I now repent that I tried trickery
 To flee what his rage wished to do with me.
 Let me spur on his rage at my drunk soul;
 He's Eid; the slaughtered beast is my small role.
 Whether the buffalo should sleep or feed,
 We nurture it before we make it bleed.
 Moses' cow's tail once resuscitated--
 Likewise my parts revive the liberated.
 Moses' cow was sacrificed; God willed
 Its small tail to revive one who'd been killed:
 He sprang up from the spot where he lay dead;
 "Strike him with part of her!" the Lord had said.
Slaughter this cow, my friends, if your decision
Is to revive the souls that have true vision.
 On death, I left being mineral then grew
 And changed from plant to animal form too,
 Then died to that, to be a human here--
 When did death make me less? What should I fear?
 I'll die to humanness at the next battle,
 Then spread my wings and soar above each angel:
 I must transcend the angels' status too--
All perishes except God's face proves true.
 Sacrificed, I'll die to the angel then
 And go beyond imaginings of men.
 I'll then be Non-existent, and I'll hear
 "To Him we are returning" sound so clear.

Death is one thing agreed on by mankind;
 Water of life is very hard to find.
 Leave this side of the stream just like a lily,
 Like dropsy sufferers, seek out death greedily.
 Water they seek means death, yet they won't rest
 Till they can drink it. *God knows what is best.*
 Cold one who loves material comforts, you
 Flee the Beloved scared for your life too.
 Even girls think you're shameful--look above
 As spirits celebrate the sword of love.
 You've seen the stream--empty your jug inside!
 How can that water now escape outside?
 When the jug's water enters, it's effaced;
 Once in the stream and merged, it can't be traced.
 Its essence stays; its attributes have gone--
 It won't be less or ugly from now on.
 I've hung myself like this on his palm tree,
 Because I'd fled--it's my apology.³⁷⁹

***That lover reaches his beloved once he has washed
his hands of himself***

He touched his head and face then to the floor
 Before the *sadr*, with eyes about to pour.
 Expectantly, all people looked ahead—
 Would he burn him or hang him there instead?
 'He'll show this wretched man who's desperate
 What time shows men who are unfortunate.'
 Like moths, he saw the flames as light, then he
 Gave up life by approaching foolishly.
 Love's candle has a very major difference,
 It's radiance in more radiance in more radiance;
 The opposite of candles with flames' heat,
 It looks like fire, but is completely sweet.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁹ M 3: 3886-3917, translated by Mojaddedi.

³⁸⁰ M 3: 3918-3923, translated by Mojaddedi.