Pregnant with God: The Poetic Art of Mothering the Sacred In Rumi's Fihi Ma Fih

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Studies of Rumi can no longer stay on the fringes of humanities where Persian literary history is respectfully, but passively, shelved for specialized scholarship. Specialization is vital to ensure that the quality of such studies is not compromised to please the massive Rumi lover readership. However, as a world-class thinker concerned with issues relevant to our painfully compartmentalized world, Rumi has to be brought to the center of larger ethical, philosophical, and methodological debates particularly those of a reformist nature. He is a true child of an adventurous and cosmopolitan Islam. His daring acts of subversion, in relation to the principles of speculative mysticism in the *Masnavi* (27,000 couplets) or in his exuberant songs of love in the *Divan* (over 35,000 verses) are not signs of disloyalty to this tradition. They are indications of a freedom and maturity that the cosmopolitan minds of many master thinkers in the medieval Muslim world demonstrated. We, in Persian literary studies, can choose to keep these treasure houses to ourselves by limiting our Rumi ruminations to issues of manuscript edition and variant readings. Or, we can make such important textual studies the foundation of broader debates that heed the relevance of Rumi to our current lives. [1]

This essay opens a new treasure house in the populated neighborhood that forms Rumi's poetic discourse on the art of sacred making. This time, the riches belong in *Fihi ma fih*, his sermons in prose, which have hardly been noticed much less understood. Known in English as the *Discourses of Rumi*, these informal sermons have fallen through the cracks mostly due to our selective looking habits, the tendency to ignore what fits in a "less significant" formal category.[2] The exploration of the *Fihi ma fih,* here*,* will lead to debates on poetic subversion, re-envisioning gender paradigms, and developing effective models of communication among other things. I will provide something of a context before looking at the *Discourses.* As my contextualization unfolds into a brief appraisal of our current attempts to make sense of Rumi's poetry, I will add to the mix a few observations on medieval Sufi perception of gender, which will prove relevant to what I intend to show when we delve into the *Discourses* themselves.

Finding the Elephant in the Dark

Jalal al-Din Mawlavi (1207-73), known to the English-speaking reader as Rumi, requires little introduction.[3] His devotion to the mystical way and emphasis on development of the self, though often torn from their religious/historical context, are equally well known. Even his affinity with the fundamentals, if one dares use the term, of the Islamic belief system repeatedly shines through heroic New Age attempts to free him from the "shackles" of the "despotic" religion and honor him instead with the "universal" mantle of spirituality. Despite the flood of publications, either giddy with devotion and wonder, or obsessed with analysis and scholarly nitpicking, much remains unsaid. Many feel that the existing translations of his works are inadequate. Others fear that the facts of his life and the dynamics of textual transmission of his works are not properly understood. Still others would like to set his lopsided popular portrayal right by demonstrating that he was as firmly rooted in his religious tradition as are trees in the soil that keeps them alive. None of these desires are likely to remain unfulfilled for very long. With time, and at the rate that his works are being translated and studied, there should soon be an abundance of styles and approaches among the English renderings for all tastes. The infusion of his world-view, his creativity, and his artistry with Islamic knowledge and devotion is likely to find adequate representation as well. Or, rather, with the wide range of translations and studies of his works becoming available, denials of his affinity with Islam will soon be more ridiculous than disturbing. Indeed, that much will be clear by the end of this short essay even with its literary orientation and lack of emphasis on religious conviction.

Can we place his many-colored poetic legacy into meaningful categories and conceptual structures that shed light on the intricacies of these works and make them more accessible? This is a question likely to keep us busy for some time. Coleman Barks, the most widely read translator of Rumi into English, has argued that any such categorization would impose limits on the poet's creativity, which he has described as the "continuous fountaining from beyond forms." He opens his translation of the randomly selected poems with the observation "the design of this book is meant to confuse scholars who divide Rumi's poetry into the accepted categories."[4] Delightful as the idea of confusing the scholars is, it does not justify the assumption that all categorization is rooted in pedantic nitpicking. Neither can anyone deny that "the darkness around us is deep."[5] What of the general Western reader who is removed from the literary culture of medieval Islam with layer upon layer of misperception? In a way, the situation (and Stafford's darkness evoked here) remind one of Rumi's story of the elephant that people touched in the dark in the hope of guessing what it looked like. With the touch-in-the-dark approach and in the absence of categorization, thousands of readers may never know what a magnificent beast it was they did not get to see. Still, many such readers will remain loyal despite the lack of cultural/religious references or access to larger poetic contexts. They will continue to be overjoyed with the beauty of the randomly collected snippets from the *ghazals*. Light years away from guessing the size or the magnificence of the elephant, these readers will continue to celebrate what they have touched in the dark. Perhaps categories are not, here, as redundant as they first look.

Rumi fans of the more academic background are not necessarily better off. They suffer frequently from a converse

syndrome, that of category admiration. They have a difficult time recognizing as significant, poems that are not included in his long versified didactic composition, the *Masnavi*. To them, Rumi was/is the towering master devoted primarily to the teaching of his religious/mystical doctrine. As far as they are concerned, the *Masnavi* ought to be the sum total of what he produced deliberately, the work that had substance and ultimately mattered to him.[5] Perhaps he wrote a few exuberant love poems in moments of intoxication. But how much significance could he have attached to these frivolous unconventional songs in which he did not always bother to follow the current standards of meter and prosody? Besides, did he not often seem suspicious of the efficacy of poetry? Did he not criticize devoting too much time to it?

For yet others, myself included, it is hard to even find a definable space to fit in. We seek a space not walled up with a category-oriented vision, yet cannot remain heedless of organizing tools that are indispensable in the border shifting neighborhoods of his poetry. Then comes the either/or moment, the define-Rumi's-true-contribution if you know better. Of course the didactic cannot be underestimated. How can one look up at the elephant that just about fills the field of vision and not see it standing there? And yet, how can one ignore the fact that the lyrical ventures, the mystical/poetic activity in the *Divan*, are the heartbeat of the elephant? These verses are exquisitely carved mirror pieces each reflecting a different face of their creator. The mosaic of struggle, pain, joy, and wonder that they come together to make is not to be missed. They are a whirling crowd, a lively metropolis with landscapes and laws of its own. On this continent, the didactic, the mystical, and the poetic are not just connected to one another. They are one and the same.[7]

Understanding these affinities and interconnections is crucial. Yet, it does not simplify the exploration of the city. Pathways have to be charted and maps drawn out. Granted, there is a recognizable thread of creativity that runs through everything. But understanding the generic features and conventions is key to entering the concentric universes built around each creative center, each generic prototype. The *ghazals* will resist conceptualization or categorization, as will any lively art form. They will mock, as would flooding rivers, the fragility of any fence built to draw borderlines around their tendency to overflow. What, then, is the point in imposing on them a structure they will defy, a structure that will bring little order to their unruliness? Wouldn't such conceptual structures hereby blind us to the subtleties of his adventurous cutting and pasting of conventions? Aren't we, in effect, using such rules only to desensitize ourselves to nuances of difference and change?

Obviously, there are no clear answers! Yet, somehow the attempts, the doubts, the back and forths are what is meant to happen. They are not just means of achieving answers, but goals in themselves. The basic building blocks of Rumi's poetic universe are "engagement" and "play." Critical engagement with his work is one form of plugging into this universe, that is if criticism can protect itself against pedantic obsession with irrelevant details and stay free, eager to play, and ready for surprise. Otherwise, it will be as burdensome as "the wooden leg of the logicians" Rumi often complained about.[8] Perhaps the answer is not in applying or not applying categories. It is in seeing the impermanence of such tools and the need for adjusting them to face the challenge that these poems present. Besides defying any organizing impulse and opting for chaos or assigning tightly defined generic identities, there is a third answer: understanding the poems as subjects of critical inquiry and tools for refining critical perception at the same time. Serious works of art have always functioned as challenging opportunities for redefining norms and shifting familiar paradigms. Such opportunities come about when the horizons are expanded beyond the binary alternatives of discarding all defining notions, or remaining captives of definition. They come about through adopting a moving posture. Turning in circles in Rumi's concentric universes, as he illustrated with whirling, is one way to stay centered while moving. From that whirling vantage point, his works are poetic cohabitations of stability and change. They are not one or the other.

The Hare Skipping on the Borders of Discourse

Let us look at a concrete example. Numerous anecdotes in the *Masnavi* illustrate the cohabitation of the didactic, the lyrical, and the spiritual. One such example is that of the lion and the hare in which Rumi allowed "unexpected" outbursts of lyricism in the midst of such serious sounding theological debates as that of *jabr* (predestination) versus *ikhtiyar* (free will). In this story, in the first *daftar*, the hare used his wisdom to trick the greedy lion and pushed him into a well. The elimination of the despotic lion provided an opportunity for a commentary on the superiority of the greater *jihad* (struggle) with the inner enemy as compared to the outer aggressor. The same occasion entailed the happy reunion of the hare with the other beasts, which in turn gave rise to a lyrical dance taking Rumi's imagination "skipping" with the "joyous hare to the meadow." The meadow echoed in its untamed beauty the freedom of the hare particularly in the green trees bursting out of their earthly prison to "dance in the breeze." From dancing trees it was a short distance to "dancing" souls "freed from the prison of the body" in the "air of divine compassion."[9] Ironically, it was our search for patterns that led us to the skipping hare as well as to the shifting borders of discourse, which we would have missed otherwise. Searching for patterns in his work will, more often than not, lead to patterns that were created to be dismantled or transformed. It will lead to examples of artistry in form and concept turned carefully against themselves. The patterns, therefore, mark Rumi's personal search for values and capacities that provide the opportunity to be subverted. These include the language, the agency of the author, even the sacred seemingly hard to trifle with. Such defining notions were altered, taken apart, mixed, matched, and ultimately recombined. The result was a poetic enterprise that teased limitation with the help of paradox and worked its way to clarity through chaos and confusion. Many a reader of Rumi has therefore found answers in not finding any. Many a reader has returned for more answers nonetheless.

Not all, who returned to play more, were lured back with elusive *ghazals* residing at the intersection of poetic worlds. Many came back to listen to his sermons in uncomplicated prose, sermons I referred to at the beginning of this essay. In Persian, these discourses were first known as the *Asrar al-Jalaliyah*, and later as the *Fihi ma fih*.[10] Informal, episodic, interactive with an immediate audience, and certainly not authored in the careful sense in which versified pieces would

be committed to writing, Rumi's sermons have functioned as little openings providing incidental access to his complicated worldview. They have been used for the purpose of contextualization or settling controversial issues when poems did not supply sufficient clarifying facts.[11] What has, in the process, received little critical attention is the *Fihi ma fih,* the sermons themselves. A work that deserves to be appreciated for its own thematic freshness, mastery of communication skills, intellectual and aesthetic contributions, has been reduced to background material. Whether these sermons were collected with reasonable care or large lacunae, they provide us with rare glimpses of a Rumi similar and yet different from the one speaking the technical language of the *Masnavi* or the exuberance of the stormy lyrics.

In the *Fihi ma fih,* his sharp humor, precision poetic imaging, and overpowering sincerity formed the familiar back ground. Against this background, many unorthodox visions were gently but surely presented. Because of Rumi's ease in communication, the depth of what was presented in these casual exchanges is not apparent in the first instant. Here, the understanding of the oral and informal nature of the genre is key to decoding the message. So is the appreciation that its audience did not consist of a select few or a handpicked circle of disciples. It included a wide range of people with varying social, religious, and educational backgrounds. He used a language free from philosophical knots and made use instead of allusions to concrete, accessible examples.[12]Adopting flexible teaching strategies, useful to any of us in the classroom today, he made sure that the uncomplicated pedagogical style did not compromise the seriousness of what he conveyed. As the audience sat physically close watching intently to learn something of the art of nurturing the self, Rumi gave his crucial lesson in honesty by personal example. Opening up to the crowd in moments of pain and vulnerability, he allowed them to observe the ways in which a range of human emotions including suffering and sadness could turn into fertile learning experiences. In a metaphorical sense, he climbed down from the pulpit and mingled with all present regardless of learning, social standing, or other differentiating factors.[13]

I shall now set out in pursuit of specific goals. Observing the unperturbed learning environment he managed to construct in these sermons is one. His teaching habits came close to what we now understand to be "modern" interactive pedagogical techniques aimed at eliminating anxiety and reaching diverse audiences. The main focus of this search, however, will be the content of the sermons with attention to the specific conceptual models Rumi built to make his notions of the sacred—and the human interaction with that sacred—comprehensible to his listeners. Here, the lucidity and precision of his poetic image making to convey mystical concepts are notable. There is yet another set of knots to untie: his recurrent and deliberately gendered metaphors. The gendered nature of the images and metaphors through which he portrayed the sacred, I argue, is not just refreshing but intentionally provocative. He chose womanhood, ability to nurture, and the privilege of childbearing as metaphors for the sacred in order to underscore the vital, personal, and evolving nature of the sacred. It becomes clear, as we explore, that making use of such unconventional images in the sermons (gendered or otherwise) was part of a series of subversive strategies to cross borders and open new horizons. These were/are horizons usually clouded with conventional perceptions of such categories as gender, faith, or learning that privilege some at the cost of others. Finally examples from the *Fihi ma fih,* demonstrate that Rumi could not have achieved his level of success in constructing such effective and consistently evolving models of communication except through possibilities available in the simultaneously simple and enigmatic language of poetry. In other words, although he spoke in prose, the end result bordered on highest levels of poetic expression.[14] In sum, the sermons are replete with examples remarkable in their pedagogical, theological, and poetic contributions. Furthermore, irrespective of their varying emphasis and uneven lengths, the anecdotes have one common denominator: they are delightful.

Rumi and the "Manhood of Servitude"

As gender will occupy a significant portion of this discussion, a clarification is necessary. The Sufi perception and articulation of gender in and around Rumi's time was shaped with predictable patriarchal notions common to medieval cultures. Despite their comparative willingness to break out of conventional categories, Sufis were not exceptionally liberated in this respect. This is discernible from the visibly gendered language in which their speculative thoughts and practical advice were expressed. In the *Mirsad al-'ibad min al-mabda' ila al-ma'ad*, Najm al-Din Razi's (thirteenth century) classical Sufi guidelines for self realization, where the essence of guidance in a proper Shaykh was described as latent, the true *mardan-i rahash* (*men* on His path) were said to be alive with life of a different nature.[15] There were more explicit articulations of the special place of *manhood* on the path. In a passing anecdote, in the same work, the sister of the celebrated Sufi martyr Mansur Hallaj (d. 922) was described as not veiling her face properly. When she was warned about this, she simply explained that there was no need for such precautions because the entire city of Baghdad was devoid of a proper *man* adorned with the *rajulliyat-i 'ubudiyat* (the manhood of proper servitude). In an even more significant passage, Razi described the process of human creation and evolution in ways that brought the gender difference to the surface:

> From the marriage of *ruh* (the soul) and *qalib* (the body) two offspring were born: *nafs* (the animal soul) and *dil* (the heart.) The heart was a boy who resembled his father the soul, and the animal soul was a girl who resembled the earthly body of her mother. The heart was full of desirable spiritual attributes, whereas all that was found in the animal soul was earthly and base. However, since the animal soul was born from both the body and the soul, she did inherit *baqa' (subsistence)* which was the attribute of the soul as well as other desirable qualities which belonged to spirituality.[16]

Here, the condition of the humanity's feminine animal soul was curable, because she was capable of receiving good things from the soul. Furthermore, she had the capacity to learn from the heart through companionship. The nature of the images, however, left little doubt as to the location and source of goodness. Viewed against this backdrop, it is not surprising that Razi's contemporary poet and Sufi hagiographer 'Attar (d. 1220), in his *Memorials of the Sufi Saints* "The Tadhkirat al-awliya'," felt compelled to promote a Sufi as distinguished as Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah (d. 801) to honorary manhood before her biography could be included among those of men re-

corded in the memorials:

> And if I be asked "why did you include her biography among those of men?" I shall reply: "the Chief among prophets, peace be upon him, has said 'God shall not look at your forms.' Matters, therefore, do not depend on appearances but rather on intentions…when a woman is a man on the path of God, she cannot be called a woman.[17]

This less than flattering promotion was an improvement on the space that 'Attar's predecessors al-Kalabadi (d. 990) and al-Qushayri (d. 1072) had devoted to Rabi'ah in their major works dedicated to the doctrines of Sufism. In their works, she was represented with a small number of quotes and no individual biographical entries.[18]

The above observations, however, are not feminist frustration with Muslim mystics' sensitivity (or rather the lack there of) to gender. For one thing, as Annemarie Schimmel demonstrates in *My Soul Is a Woman,* the spectrum of Sufi articulations of gender is broader than what is presented here.[19] For another, any criticism of these views would need to be placed in the broader world context. Should that line of inquiry be pursued, chief architects of other faiths would compete fiercely with our Sufi figures. Thomas Aquinas, for example, is even less flattering when theorizing on the creation of women. According to Aquinas, the woman's earthly nature was not created to unite with the celestial male soul or any other force of goodness to balance the course of human evolution. The creation of women was a rather unfortunate accident. Paraphrased by Uta Ranke-Heinemann in her provocative *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven,* Aquinas argued:

> According to the basic principle that "every active element created something like itself," only men should actually be born from copulation. The energy in the semen aims, of itself, to produce something equally perfect, namely, another man. But owing to unfavorable circumstances women, i.e. misbegotten men, come into existence…Thus at her birth every woman already has a failure behind her…the adverse circumstances causing a man to beget something not as perfect as himself include, for example, moist south winds, which bring to birth a person with a high water content…[and] because there is a higher water content in women, they are more easily seduced by sexual pleasure.[20]

Against this background, 'Attar and his Sufi contemporaries, would be absolved of insensitivity to gender issues. However, measuring the pervasiveness of patriarchy is not here the purpose. Rumi is bound to have shared many of the culturally traditional views of his contemporaries. After all, he was steeped in both the religious and the literary traditions in which he had been educated.[21] But, as we shall see, he adopted the feminine image in the sermons to achieve an entirely different purpose: re-sanctification of a forgetful world too accustomed to ignoring its ties with the nurturing sacred.

Opting For the Informal Genre

The *Fihi ma fih* was the safe and informal poetic universe in which Rumi refashioned the sacred as the baby that came to this world from the deepest and least known corners of our own being. Not to be merely revived in the human memory, the nurturing sacred needed to be brought into this world in the manner that babies are. In other words, it had to be located, acknowledged, valued, and nurtured by us imperfect beings before it could nurture us. Only if we understood our profound responsibility and agency in mothering the sacred, could it be realized and activated to come into existence and play its nurturing role. Women, therefore, were not misbegotten men who were sentenced to endure the hassles and pains of their bigger share in human reproductive functions. Rather, by virtue of sharing in this vital and godly function, they had first-hand experience in the process that mirrored the act of sacred making.

It is safe to say Rumi did not construct the metaphor for feminist reasons. Neither was subverting the dominant gender role paradigms his first act of subversion. Perhaps his resistance to dominant concepts, forms, and values was rooted in his dynamic personal nature or the unusual events of his early childhood.[22] Or, it might have been his acute poetic awareness of the emotional and intellectual potency of paradoxes that fueled this ever-present tendency to subvert. Whatever the explanation, something helped him locate a whirling force, a moving center, a rebellion in the calmest and most ordinary-looking of images and ideas. Women with their vulnerabilities and strengths, with their ability to nurture life in their very bodies and to withstand the pain of bringing it into the world were suitable candidates. There had to be more to their presence than just being the lesser sex. Wasn't it delightfully paradoxical that the lesser sex shared instances of God's productive and life-generating privilege? Rumi took the carnal image of the feminine and turned it against itself.

Re-envisioning the Feminine Carnal Image

Let us start our sifting of the *Fihi ma fih* for textual illustration with one of Rumi's less conspicuously subversive moves. In one of the sermons, he presented a rather discrete anecdote that touched on many of the issues to which we have alluded here. Let us use the anecdote as the springboard for getting to more central issues and developed discussions. In the sermon in question, Rumi embarked on an isolated feat of *tafsir* (Qur'anic commentary), during which he gently relocated the sacred. In the process, he exercised his regular habit of border crossing. The simple and unpretentious tone of the commentary concealed the depths of the modification he instigated. *Inna nahnu* nazzalna *al-dhikr wa-nahnu lahu lahafizun* (We have sent down the *remembrance* and we are its protector), declared God in the Qur'anic verse that formed the subject of his commentary.[23] Rumi informed his audience that the concept of *dhikr* (remembrance) here, is understood traditionally by the commentators to refer to the Qur'an itself. "That," he then concurred, "is just fine, but there is the other possibility…." Even before we know his reading, the suggestion that one can offer new ways to comprehend the mind of God was significant. He presented new options to be added to the conventional repertoire of Qur'anic commentary, an indication that he favored a dynamic encounter with such verses. To say the least, he demonstrated an openness to multiple readings of the scripture. Paraphrasing God, he then spelled out, in unhesitating terms, his personal reading, which was to be added to the existing hermeneutic canon: "…meaning We [God] have placed in you a jewel, a quest, an inner desire. We shall be the guardian of [that treasure] and will not let it go to waste."[24]

The new reading had significant implications beyond

sanctioning multiple interpretations. Its second implication was placing humanity as the carrier of the sacred on equal footing with the Qur'an, the site of the divine revelation. It might have seemed more courageous if Rumi had replaced the conventional reading of the verse with his own innovative one. While that could have been a more controversial move, keeping the old reading was certainly a more empowering strategy. That God could refer to his "eternal and uncreated" word and to the human inner quest concurrently through the same metaphor elevated humanity not just to companionship with the divine but to sharing in the mysteries of the pre-eternity. Here, the orality of the genre and the anecdotal nature of the commentary came to Rumi's aid. It made his unconventional reading less of a detectable target for a potential opposition. Yet, despite its brevity, the resonance of the corrective note was felt in various domains including that of interfaith equality of humanity. As long as the verse in question was understood to refer to the Muslim Holy Scripture the Qur'an, all who did not honor this scripture were excluded from access to the divine bounty. According to the traditional reading, Muslims could choose to share the treasure with others, but they had the privilege of being the primary recipient/owner of the gift God handed over to humanity and protected from the ravages of time. Re-defining this everlasting gift in terms of the human inner quest, Rumi turned the tables using the Qur'an itself as a testimony to the partnership of all in receiving the divine bounty and therefore to the equality of all.

There was yet another significance to the image through which the above anecdotal commentary unfolded. It made use of the act of depositing, planting, or impregnating. A divine seed-like source of energy was placed in human beings whose potency remained protected by God. On a biological level, it mirrored the human reproductive function. From a theological perspective, the divine re-generation had its metaphorical roots in Christ's immaculate birth sanctioned by the *Qur'an*.

Indeed, in *Fihi ma fih* the metaphor of the sacred impregnating humanity developed into a central and recurring trope. The carrying of the *dhikr* was one of many maternity-centered narratives that prepared the audience for making sense of the evolutionary journey of the sacred in the human inner world. Ultimately, we were all Marys impregnated with the seed of God and potentially entitled to a Jesus of our own if we learned to allow the pregnancy to go through its full term. We did not just worship and obey God; we "mothered" Him in a very real sense. In this mysterious, and productive state of affairs, the *awliya'* (friends of God), or saints, were pharmacists, physicians, nurses, wet nurses, and the road maps that directed us to the hospitals in which we would give birth, even the construction workers renovating the lodging of our bodies to make room for the new arrival. They were certainly not legal specialists measuring punishments for our every deviation from the path, nor were they aloof dispensers of divine wisdom preaching from the heights of a pulpit. Generally speaking, in this art of nursing/nurturing the divine, judgment did not hold a central place. Indeed, at times, it was more beneficial for judgment to be avoided if it led to guilt/hesitation and hindered growth. Take the feeling of extreme hopelessness caused by guilty self-blame, for example. It could be fatal. No one could afford to let the umbilical cord of "hope," the connection with the source of all life, with God, to be severed:

> Hope is the road that leads to safety. If you do not travel that road, at least step onto it. Do not say I have committed evil. Walk the road to truthfulness and decency, and evil shall not remain. Decency is the rod of Moses, evil is the sorcerers' doing. When decency arrives, it devours them all…if you have done wrong, you have wronged yourself, your wrong doing does not affect Him.[25]

These reminders themselves echoed affectionate maternal warnings not overly harsh to a child's transgression, yet not willing to allow him to harm himself. In a sense, saints and guides "mothered" us through the struggle to be liberated from futile self-blame, guiding and nourishing us into the maturity of spiritually productive lives. It was all a circular and interrelated process. While mothering us, these guides provided models so we could comprehend the intricacies of our own maternal dealings with God. Due to its significance, the theme resurfaced through gradually evolving models in the *Fihi ma fih*. However, let us first look at the safe—one might say maternal—learning environment in which Rumi, the mother/physician, presented his unconventional metaphors of pregnancy with the sacred. This was not a discourse in theory but rather a practical training in which the audience was to be prepared for giving birth.

In his attempts to create an intimate and nurturing classroom setting, Rumi did not pretend to be on equal footing with his audience. Neither did he overlook greed, wrongdoing, or ignorance of his pupils in order to win their trust or confidence. The pupils were scolded if the need for a strong hand was felt. The reply to Amir Mu'in al-Din's request for a wish-fulfilling prayer quoted earlier was a case in point.[26] At all times, he remained on a higher level, the guide, the mace bearer, and the one connected to God/the Truth in a completely unabashed though non-condescending manner. A number of conditions made this proud self-presentation acceptable and even attractive to his audience. For one thing, he revealed his own saintly moments of despair and vulnerability. He confessed to his own need to give in order to be relieved from the pain of fullness in moments of intoxication. For another, he possessed enough compassion that shined through multiple levels of saintly superiority and rendered differences insignificant:

> When intoxication takes control, the intoxicated does not look at the discerning faculties of those present. [Such an intoxicated one does not look to see if there] is anyone to deserve his/her words or not? Fullness means overflow, as in the case of a breastfeeding mother who suffers the pain of breasts filled with milk. She will gather the puppies of the neighborhood and feed them all [to relieve herself of pain].[27]

This frank expression of difference was compensated for by the readiness to feed all, an invitation not contingent upon personal merit or achievement. Rewards of motherly feeding included special treats for regular attendance and mingling with "truth seeking friends," an act that Rumi counted among the *a'zam-i mujahidat* (greatest of endeavors). The "Beautiful example" of the prophet was evoked to further justify participation. "Mustafa," said Rumi in one sermon, "attempted to gather people in crowds because the collectivity of souls

can achieve great results the like of which is not possible in solitude."[28] We may assume that the invitation to join the crowd and the sense of safety he wished to foster in the audience met with success. Not only did people gather where he spoke, but also from the *Fihi ma fih* itself, we know that some felt safe enough to fall asleep as he spoke. Instead of feeling offended, or admonishing the sleeper, he used the occasion to articulate a point of mutual trust, namely giving priority to understanding the signals as opposed to venerating their carrier. Guides were to be heard rather than put on a pedestal. In this regard, he viewed himself as the guide and the dispenser of the signal of safety as the crowing of the cock or the barking of the dog would signal the arrival of the traveler. As a gesture of humility, the new metaphor countered the earlier assertions that had elevated him to a saintly position:

> If anyone falls asleep when I speak, that is not a sleep caused by heedlessness but by a sense of safety. A caravan is traveling on a difficult and daunting road in the dark of night. They keep going for fear of the harm that may come from the highwaymen. With the barking of a dog, or the crowing of the cock, they know they are in a village. They stop to take rest…my words are rooted in civility and safety. They are accounts of prophets and God's friends. Souls sense the affinity [in these words] with those they know. They [the souls] feel safe, and shake their fears because the scent of hope, and of the Friend, emanate from these words.[29]

Sleep, induced by a feeling of safety in his presence, was acceptable. But it was not presented as a way to counter fear. We were fearful children that mother's soothing words could put to sleep, but staying asleep to avoid growing up was not an option. Our fears were too real to ignore. We had to face them and understand them for what they truly were. Our fears were the results of inability to transcend our smallness, a leap we could handle only through connecting with the God inside, the one we were pregnant with. The irony was that the pregnancy itself was one source of insecurity and fear. How does one tell a child, "You are both the child and the mother, Indeed you are the world; nothing is outside you." And how much harder the comprehension will be if one added, "and the day on which to give birth is near."

To break the news, Rumi started at a simple place. He began by demonstrating that the entire universe was in the same dilemma, the paradoxical duality of Godliness and smallness. Overwhelmed by and fearful of this duality, feeling the immense weight of the sacred with which they were pregnant, all beings ran in fear and confusion. Yet the fear and confusion were one side of a coin the other side of which was joy. The running between the poles was the dynamism, the fuel, and the force that propelled everything forward. When blooming, buds run towards "flowerness," and when ripening, sour grapes run towards "sweetness." Our souls ran in the same way, except their blooming and ripening was even harder to see. There were other problems. Not only were we children pregnant with God, but our inner and outer worlds were shrouded in mystery making comprehension of things even more difficult. We could not change the conditions of our being in the world much, but we could perceive and use these conditions to our advantage. In so doing, our rationality was a valuable tool because we lived in a world that, in many respects, acted predictably, mirroring our rational perception. Such was the predictability of the results of our actions in the world that it could be understood through the metaphor of sounds bouncing off a mountain. The mountain only echoed back the words we spoke to it. If anyone "sang like a nightingale to the mountain," it was impossible that the mountain would echo the harsh "voice of a donkey in return."[30] However, this was unfortunately (or fortunately) not the whole story. If our entire story could have been reduced to a rational perception of our conditions in the world, the matters would have been simpler, but where rationality took us was not far enough. Our rational faculties had been created to doubt and to find fault with things (*in nafs-i adami mahall-i shubhah va ishkal ast*). In themselves, *'aql* (the human rationality) and its product *shubhih* (doubt) were good because they looked behind suspicious closed doors and tested the safety of the routes we chose to reach desired destinations. Unchecked, however, doubt could hinder all movement including the fearful running propelled with the inner quest to unite with the inner divine. In other words, what was wrong with our rationality was its arrogance, the misguided self-confidence that claimed possessing the key to all closed doors. Once unleashed, it was unstoppable. The point was not to discard rationality but to recognize its limits:

> Rationality *'aql* is so useful as to provide you with the direction to the residence of the King. Once you reached that threshold, divorce the *'aql* because from this point on it will be a hindrance, a thief. Once there, surrender yourself to him [the King], for the moments of doubt and questioning are over.[31]

Here Rumi used one of his most accessible illustrations to articulate the complicated notion of the limitations of rationality based on division of labor and expertise rather than the baseness of the faculty of *'aql* in and of itself. The matter, he explained, is rather simple. When taking material to a tailor to make a garment, you use rationality to find the direction to the tailor's shop. Once there, however, you surrender your material to the tailor allowing him/her to exercise fully his/her dress making expertise. Why should we give our rational faculty more than its responsibilities and expertise permit?

Establishing the limitations of the faculty of rationality, however, did not make mapping the road to the sacred inner self easier. How would the caravan fare on the dark and difficult road if it relied solely on the signals coming from the crowing cock, and the barking village dog? What if the caravan never found its way to the vicinity of the village? Fortunately for us, still more ironies surrounded the condition of our being-in-the-world. The inadequacy of our rational faculty as a tool facilitating the journey ahead was not cause for disappointment or despair. If we developed the ability to see the bigger picture, the limits of human reasoning were cause only for celebration. We were mysterious, multidimensional beings who lived in an equally mysterious and multidimensional world. Rationality was a small part of this vast operation capable only of scratching the mystery at the surface. There was a world of plenitude beneath the outer shell. If we stayed fascinated by or bound to the surface, we had aimed low. Wouldn't it be a pity to "arrive at the sea, with all the pearls and the riches in it, and be satisfied with a jug of salty water?" The neighborhoods of rationality were too small, too limiting. Soon there would be no places left unex-

plored.[32] The answer was to take whatever action possible, "to come and go" as it were, to dive into the sea of mysteries and not sit idly for things to be rationally resolved. The biggest of all errors would be passivity and inaction:

> You are not less than the earth. The earth is transformed with plowing, digging, and turning over. It is then enabled to grow greenery. If left untouched for a time, it becomes hard. When you sense the longing in yourself, come and go [do something about it]. Do not ask: "what benefit is going to come out of this?" You take action, the benefit will become apparent.[33]

Ambiguity played a significant part in every step of this evo lutionary journey. It was there to provoke awe and wonder. Take God, for example, He was to be our aid, the answer to our pleas for clarity and purpose, yet he was shrouded in mystery Himself. He "encompassed all," so anything you tried to add to Him was a "detraction" from His perfection. Like the mathematical unit "one," which is a part of every number and without which no number can be imagined, God was alone and singular, yet all life was alive with His presence.[34] How would such an omnipresent and compassionate God expect the members of this caravan lost in the dark, the hungry puppies not able even to feed themselves, to find the destination? How could they be expected to comprehend such overpowering mysteries, let alone solve them? It was time for *the awliya'* (the friends of God), the saintly mothers and the feeders of the puppies, to intervene. Their superiority and ability to bring about change in ordinary human beings was justified as concretely as the role of the metaphorical tailor had been earlier. Weren't we all made of clay? Yet, God had given some of us, the human versions of clay, the power to use our rational strength to do things to the lesser forms found in our living environment. We used the lesser clay versions to build houses, to make clay jars out of them, and to turn them into bowls from which to eat. Why should it be surprising if among the clays-turned-human, God had given some superiority over others? In terms of awareness and ability to act, we were to them as clay jugs and cups were to us. These molders of human clay could give us shape and purpose as we did the objects we made. The clay/potter analogy was perhaps the most extreme as far as the agency of the saints and the passivity of the recipients were concerned. Rumi balanced the picture by introducing other analogies that placed us at the other end of the spectrum of agency. After all, one of the aims was to demonstrate the paradoxes of our concurrent helplessness and power. The star analogy was an interesting counter example where our agency took center stage. Indeed, our God-appointed feeders and guides often helped in the way that distant stars and silent road maps do. While they showed us the way to unravel the mystery, we were the ones who deciphered the message, read the map, penetrated the silence of ignorance, and ultimately found the way:

> A traveler looks at the stars and finds the way. Do stars ever talk to him? No. As soon as he looks at them, though, he knows the right way from the wrong and arrives at his destination. Such are God's Friends, you may look at them and they may bring about a change of course [in your life journey]. Without a word, a discussion, or an argument, goals may be attained [and] destinations reached.[35]

It is not hard to imagine audiences easing into the comfort of well-fed puppies falling asleep in the hope of finding a guiding star, or surrendering happily to the freedom of the clay/potter analogy, relinquishing agency for struggle and growth. Before that happened, however, came the shocking news of the pregnancy. Not only were the lost and hungry puppies close to their goal, but they also embodied it. To be precise, they were pregnant with it. If they could not see or feel the closeness, it was due to the closeness itself. The combination of joy and pain that accompanied the conflicting and mysterious condition led to confusion and the illusion of distance. Knowing that one was not just close but indeed at the destination, yet not able to live the closeness, was a triumph as well as a tragedy. How was one to nurture this God buried like a treasure in the ruin of one's being and let it permeate all of life? It required the ability to grapple with a paradox that overpowered the rational mind. This "being there" was so close to being lost. There were other problems as well. The house of one's being in its present condition was often not fit to host the royal visitor whose presence had to be received properly before His growth and birth materialized. Even if one succeeded to explain to a child that s/he was pregnant, and with, of all beings, God, how would one add the news that the nursery was too small? Could anyone accept that their entire existence was to be renovated to become fit for the royal arrival, without losing all hope? In such critical moments as this, would the rationality help find the house of the tailor and leave the dressmaking to the expert? Or, would it interfere in every step performing its "fault-finding and doubting" responsibility? Wouldn't instinctive fears warn against such false hopes and imaginary reconstructions of the self to make things right for the arrival of the king? Wouldn't one be more likely to lose the way and never get near enough to hear the dog and the rooster of the village of safety?

The answer to these and many similar questions were neither simple nor necessarily hopeful. What Rumi possessed was not final answers but a powerful poetic medium that remolded colorful anecdotes into effective solutions. In the safety of the interactive environment that put some members of the audience to sleep, he redefined concepts, stretched imaginations, and helped the travelers see the destination at the end of the dark road. What persuaded was his poetic logic:

> The larger the number of the guests, the bigger the house, the more elaborate the decoration, and the more the food that is to be prepared for the inhabitants. Don't you see that when the child's body is small his/her thoughts, which are guests in the house of the body, are suitable for the house? S/he is concerned with none other than milk and the wet nurse. As s/he grows, the guests of thoughts increase to include the rational faculty, perception, differentiation, and the like. The house [of the body] is expanded [too]. When the guests of love arrive, they do not fit in the house. They tear the house down and rebuild it from the foundation. The King's royal curtains, decorations, the army, and the entourage do not fit in the house.[36]

Meeting the King made the demolition of the house worthwhile. Still, to be able to go through with the demolition, the confidence of the audience was periodically renovated. They were empowered with the sense of agency articulated in a language aware of the engaging intensity of paradoxes. Here,

Rumi came very close to what he had often done in his lyric compositions. He empowered the audience by evoking their weakness. The hindrances on the path were many, but one's personal weakness was not one of them. Rumi argued with conviction that properly understood and utilized weakness could turn into a fountain of strength. Where "lions, tigers," and other fierce creatures "trembled with fear," what strength could be expected of a feeble human? Were His light "to shine unveiled, none would remain; the heavens, the sun, or the moon."[37] Yet, the same awe-inspiring light was itself the source of life. Shone indiscriminately on all existence, it was there to heal, to gladden the hearts, and to bring all dead to life. If that end were not achieved, this would only be due to human foolish attachments that shielded him/her from the light. Humans with, their ties to their belongings, their entanglements in the web of greed and ambition, and layer after layer of guilt and self-blame they managed to wear, covered their being and deprived themselves of the life-giving rays of this light. God was not about to abandon his bounteous, all-embracing love and imitate the human, selective, and fleeting manner in love and generosity. He was not about to choose some of us over the others. As the giver *par excellence*, and like the sun that immersed the world indiscriminately in its light, God shone on all, except on those whose cloudy skies prevented them from receiving the rays of the sun. These were those wrapped in layers of attachment. Alas, clouded were the hearts and minds of those who carried their ambitions and belongings:

> If you are able to go completely naked before this sun, all the better, for this sun does not burn but brightens your skin…and should you not be able to be completely naked, at least wear less so you may taste [the warmth of] the sunshine…for a long time have you been accustomed to sour tastes. For once, try something sweet.[38]

Learning to peel off these layers was not easy. The practice of *sadaqah* (charity) had been established for this purpose. God wanted humanity to taste the refreshing experience of giving and lean naturally toward freeing itself from the extra layers of attachment. After that, nothing hindered the exposure to the life-giving sunlight. Besides, His divine aids were at work to ease the burden at all times. Was the soul not "the bird that took wing with the strength of His remembrance"? Weren't the winds carriers of "the ashes of hearts aflame with love" dancing and calling out to others? If not so, who brought "the glad tidings of love and renewed it at every instant"?[39] The greatest irony on the difficult road of God/human exchange was the ease with which one could play the game of running in His direction blind-folded for the simple reason that He was equally eager to play. Had he not planted in the human heart, indeed in the entire universe, the seed of play—the source of which was His own playfulness—this persistent quest for Him would not have infused all life. The sense of play and surprise was endless. For example,"unlike other things which one had to seek in order to find, with Him, seeking was the sure sign that one had already found the object of one's longing."[40] Once there, one joined the collectivity of lovers with whom loneliness and separation had no meaning. "Whosoever belonged to us and became intoxicated with this wine," said Rumi in one sermon "shall be with us wherever s/he may go, and shall be in our company whomsoever s/he spends time with."[41]

This promise of unbreakable attachment and of drinking from the fountainhead of giving and companionship was perhaps the most attractive of promises that kept the community of seekers eager and connected. Even in the New Age revival of his poetry in the English-speaking world, this message of togetherness and hope overshadows any other, for it counters loneliness, alienation, and despair.[42] Then, as in its contemporary renderings, his promises of togetherness were indiscriminate. All who desired and sought could reach if they fulfilled one condition and one condition alone: love. Love was the cure for the ailment of "doubt and fault finding" of the *'aql* (rationality) just as perseverance sustained the advances on the dark road. Love was the strength that enabled the feeble human being to take the plunge into the sea of mysteries and face the overpowering presence that made lions and tigers tremble. And it was not an easy condition because it could not be the self-righteous, selectively dispensed love given to a carefully selected few whose well being nurtured the ego of the giver of the affection. Rather, it was all-embracing, and unconditional, something of the generous sunshine that fell on all except those shielded by their own cloudy skies:

> Wherever you are, and whatever state you are in, strive for being a lover, for being in love. When love became your property, you shall always be in love, in the grave, on the day of judgment, in the garden of Eden, and till the end of time. If you planted wheat, wheat shall grow in the fields, wheat shall be in the store, and wheat shall emerge from your oven.[43]

Time was short and the news of pregnancy too important to be ignored. In the absence of mother's care and awareness, the well being of the baby was in danger. True, this baby was none other than the inner treasure that God had promised in the Qur'an to guard against the ravages of time, but to unearth and use the treasure was a decision that only the owner could make. If unborn, the baby could return to its divine origin leaving the mother deprived and forever ignorant of the opportunity that would have enriched, indeed transformed, her life. Here, Rumi used an effective poetic tech nique with multiple levels of impact. On the one hand, he revived the metaphor of pregnancy and utilized its fine constituent elements:

> A human being, whatever state s/he may be in, his/her inner *sirr* "secret" is occupied with the divine. Occupation [with the affairs of this world] does not prevent him/her from maintaining this inner connection. This is just like the state of a pregnant woman. Whatever state she is in, tranquility, strife, eating or sleeping, the baby in her womb continues to grow, to gain strength, and to develop its sensual apparatus though the mother is unaware of it.[44]

Secondly, he fortified the poetic analogy with a new Qur'anic allusion, which affirmed the metaphor of pregnancy. In the process, he fulfilled a third purpose, namely solving a hermeneutic point of discussion and dispute. The Qur'anic verse seventy-two from the chapter Ahzab had declared God to have offered His *amanah* (trust) to the mountains, the heavens, and the earth. These elements, overcome with fear, had all refused to carry the divine trust. Humanity, unjust and ignorant of the magnitude of the responsibility, had shouldered God's trust.[45] The verse contained a double edge, a paradoxi-

cally productive combination of weakness and strength. On the one hand, the Qur'an had placed humanity above the mountains, the heavens, and the earth in bravery and in eagerness to respond to the divine call. On the other, the scriptural use of the adjectives *zalum* (overly unjust) and *jahul* (overly ignorant), had presented the human bravery in unfavorable lights. Poets from the Muslim world had found the verse a fertile source of conjecture on the human folly and haste in grappling with the risky hazards of love. Some like Hafiz of Shiraz (d. 1389) had tried to balance humanity's shortcoming in knowledge and fairness by highlighting its capacity for passionate love bordering on madness.[46] Rumi added the verse to the mix that constituted the conditions and outcomes of the pregnancy with the divine. While making use of the verse to substantiate the allegory itself, he used the pregnancy as the cure for the conditions of ignorance and injustice. Thus, he continued the above discussion:

> In the same way, humanity is the carrier of that *sirr* "secret." [This is stated in the Qur'anic verse] *Wa-hamalaha al-insan, innahu kana zaluman jahula* "and humanity carried it for it [humanity] was extremely unjust and ignorant." However, God the ever lasting will not abandon the mother in injustice and ignorance. The [biological] form that a human being carries in pregnancy is capable of camaraderie, love, and companionship. What surprise is it if the divine secret that s/he is pregnant with leads to love, and companionship [that overcomes such undesirable conditions]? [47]

Then, to illustrate the true nature of the pregnancy, Rumi pushed the metaphor to a further stage, one resonant to Muslim ears. He established a direct connection between the human condition of carrying God inside and its Qur'anically sanctioned prototype, the immaculate birth:

> Our body is a Mary and we each have a Jesus. If the pain of childbirth is induced, our Jesus will be born. In the absence of that pain, Jesus shall return, taking the hidden route it used to come to us, to its source…[Nothing will happen to the Jesus] we, however, shall remain deprived and unable to benefit from him.[48]

A number of goals had been achieved. A theologically literalist and limited position, one that shied from breaching the Qur'anic pronouncement of the transcendence of God beyond giving birth or being born, had been poetically overcome in the above passages.[49] Rumi had stepped down from the pulpit, wearing his garb of the mother/physician feeding and literally putting to sleep a horde of fearful, hesitant, and unruly children. Using an astonishing range of pedagogical skills, he had driven home the complicated theological story of our intimate dealings with God through the unlikely metaphor of the pregnancy with the divine. In the process, he had presented his audience with delightful short sketches in which lyricism empowered simple anecdotal prose. Above all, he had subverted with finality the standard mystical analogy that naturally associated the divine with masculinity and the carnal soul with the feminine.

NOTES

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[1]The *Masnavi* was edited with English translation and commentary by Raynold A. Nicholson and first published in London (Luzac, 1925-40). For a critical edition of the *Divan* see (Amir Kabir, 1976) edited by Badi' al-Zaman Furuzan'far and entitled *Kulliyat-i Shams ya Divan-i Kabir.*

[2]See, *Fihi ma fih* (Amir Kabir, 1983) edited by Badi' al-Zaman Furuzan'far. The first English translation by A.J. Arberry appeard in 1961 (London: Murray). A 1993 translation under the same title, by Thackston Wheeler, U. uses a more accessible English (Atlantic Highlands, J.J.: Humanities Press International). As in my previous experience in writing about the lyrics, I have found it more effective to make my own translations of anecdotes from the *Fihi ma fih*.

[3]For an interesting biographical account, see Annemarie Schimmel, *I am Wind You Are Fire: The Life and Work of Rumi* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992).

[4]The above allusion is not meant as a categorical rejection of Barks's translations some of which are eminently fresh and readable. Nonetheless, the reader should be aware of the incompleteness of many of the selections as well as their omission of cultural references particularly those of a religious nature. See, *The Essential Rumi: Translations by Coleman Barks with John Moyne* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995). For Rumi's story of the elephant in the third *daftar*, see *Ikhtilaf kardan dar chigunigi va shikl-i pil* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Safi'alishah, 1375/1996), 394.

[5]In "A Ritual to Read to Each Other," the contemporary poet William Stafford finished his classic plea for communication with the phrase quoted in this paragraph. See *The Way It Is: New & Selected Poems* (Saint Paul: Gray Wolf Press, 1998), 76.

[6]Rehder understands the popularity of the work to be a result of its length, see Robert M. Rehder "The Style of Jalal al-Din Rumi" in *The Scholar and The Saint: Studies in Commemoration of Abu'l-Rayhan and Jalal al-Din Rumi*, ed. Peter J. Chelkowski (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 281.

[7]Fatemeh Keshavarz, *Reading Mystical Lyric: The case of Jalal al-Din Rumi* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 18-30.

[8]Rumi, The *Masnavi*, **I:2128.**

[9]Rumi, The *Masnavi,* verses 1339-47 and 1373-89.

[10]See the brief introduction by Furuzan'far to the Tehran edition; Rumi, *Fihi ma fih*, ix.

[11]The famous passage *dar vilayat va qaum-i ma az sha'iri nangtar kari nabud* (In my homeland and among my people there was no occupation more contemptible than *sha'iri)* is the most often quoted example. Schimmel uses this passage to argue in favor of Rumi's contempt for poetry whereas De Brujin argues that the term *sha'iri* here has little to do with the act of poetic expression. It instead refers to the profession of composing poetry to find a patron or resorting to various means to please one. Rumi, *Fihi ma fih,* 74; Schimmel, *I am Wind You are Fire,* 34. J.T.P. De Bruijin, *Of Piety and Poetry: The Interaction of Religion and Literature in the Life and Works of Hakim Sana'iof Ghazna* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983), 155-60.

[12]To explain that one would value anything only to the degree that one is able to benefit from it, Rumi used the ex-

ample of children playing with walnuts as marbles. Such children, he exclaimed, will not exchange a hollow walnut with fresh walnut kernel or with walnut oil because all they know of walnuts is that they are round objects one can play with, Rumi, *Fihi ma fih,* 81.

[13]One such instance included a gentle reproach for Amir Mu'in al-Din Parvanah, the governor, who had asked for prayer from Rumi to get certain wishes fulfilled. Rumi prayed that God grants the Amir those wishes and "others which he does not know enough about to even wish" for, if that happened, he would be ashamed of his earlier ones. See Rumi, *Fihi ma fih,* 131.

[14]It has been brought to my attention that the interplay between prose and poetry as reflected in the *Fihi ma fih* are complex and should not be presented in the simple terms of prose that has acquired poetic characteristics. I agree. The *Fihi ma fih* is one of many examples that demonstrate the line between the genres in question to be more blurred than we admit. In other words, even in its pre-modern manifestations, Persian poetry worked through nonmetrical, formally unconventional genres when the context demanded. Unfortunately, the scope of the present essay does not permit a fuller discussion of the dynamics of exchange between poetry and prose in Persian literature.

[15]Najm al-Din Razi, *Mirsad al-'ibad min al-mabda' ila al-ma'ad* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Sana'i, n.d.), 136. Also known as Najm-i Dayah, the author of *Mirsad* is known for rebuking 'Umar Khayyam, the author of the *Rub'iyyat,* for his skepticism concerning the existence of another world, al-Din Razi, *Mirsad*, 18. His *Mirsad*, aimed at "explaining the practical implementation of religion, arriving at station of certitude, training of human animal soul, and learning God's attributes" has remained an influential work since its composition. For an English rendition of the work, see Hamid Algar, tr. *The Path of God's Bondsmen from Origin to Return: A Sufi Compendium by Najm al-Din Razi* (New York: Delmar, 1982). For a recent study of the concept of manliness in Sufi literature, see Arley Loewen's Ph.D. thesis entitled *The Concept of Jawanmardi (manliness) in Persian Literatur and Society,* dept. of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, University of Toronto, 2001.

[16]Algar, 68 and 99.

[17]'Attar, Farid al-Din, *The Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, ed. and introduction Nasir Hayyiri (Tehran: Intisharat-i Chikamah, 1361/1982), 42. For a selection from the entries in English, see A.J. Arberry, *Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-awliya' "Memorial of the Saints."* By Farid al-Din Attar. Reprint (London 1990).

[18]Al-Kalabadhi did not place Rabi'ah among the famous Sufis listed in his second chapter. He did, however, refer to her three times in the body of the text. See, *Kitab al-ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-Tasawwuf "The doctrine of the Sufis,"* trans. A.J. Arberry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 12, 83, 93, and 159. al-Qushayri made seven brief references to Rabi'ah in his classic *Risalah* "Principles of Sufism," trans. B.R. Von Schlegell (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1990), 10, 37, 77, 166, 265, 282, and 340.

[19]Schimmel looks at examples of female representation in a wide variety of literature produced in the Islamic world. These range from Quran and Hadith-related writings to popular Sufi tales, see *My Soul Is a Woman: the Feminine in Islam*, trans. Susan H. Ray, (New York: Continuum, 1997).

[20]Uta Ranke-Hinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: Women, Sexuality, and the Catholic Church, trans.* Peter Heinegg (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 187.

[21]The *Masnavi* contains anecdotes in which women are not portrayed in favorable lights. There are many, like the woman climbing the pear tree in the fourth *daftar,* who betray husbands and blind them with trickery. See Rumi, *The Masnavi*, 710.

[22]For rereading of the childhood events, see, Keshavarz, *Reading Mystical Lyric*, 4-7.

[23]The Qur'an, 5:9.

[24]The Qur'an, 114. The word *gawhar* here translated as jewel can also mean human nature highlighting the familiar and intrinsically human characteristic of the inner quest or desire described here.

[25]Rumi, *Fihi ma fih,* 9.

[26]Rumi, The Masnavi, verses 1339-47 and 1373-89

[27]Rumi, *Fihi ma fih*, 148.

[28]Rumi, *Fihi ma fih*, 64.

[29]Rumi, *Fihi ma fih*, 168.

[30]Rumi, *Fihi ma fih*, 222, 152.

[31]Rumi, *Fihi ma fih*, 112.

[32]Rumi, *Fihi ma fih*, 9, 174-5.

[33]Rumi, *Fihi ma fih*, 215.

[34]Rumi, *Fihi ma fih*, 219.

[35]Rumi, *Fihi ma fih*,; for the analogy of the potter and clay analogy, see Rumi, *Fihi ma fih*, 223-24.

[36]Rumi, *Fihi ma fih*, 158.

[37]Rumi, *Fihi ma fih*, 19.

[38]Rumi, *Fihi ma fih*, 227.

[39]Rumi, *Fihi ma fih*, 175 and 183.

[40]Rumi, *Fihi ma fih*, 189.

[41]Rumi, *Fihi ma fih*, 191.

[42]In the words of a contemporary Rumi enthusiast, "[H]e is radiating to the darkened world the fire of his infinite love and hope urging us all onward," see Andrew Harey, *The Way of Passion: A Celebration of Rumi* (Berkley, C.A.: North Atlantic Books, 1994), 2.

[43]Harey, *The Way of Passion*, 169.

[44]Harey, *The Way of Passion*, 187.

[45]The Qur'an, 33: 72.

[46]*Asiman bar-I amanat natavanist kishid/Qur'ah-yi fal bi-nam-i man-i divanah zadand* (The heavens could not tolerate the burden of the 'trust'/ the game of chance selected a mad one like me), see Hafiz, *Divan-i Khvajah Shams al-Din Muhammad Hafiz-i Shirazi*. Qudsi, ed. (Tehran: Intisharat-i Pirastih, 1373/1994), 141.

[47]Rumi, *Fihi ma fih*, 187.

[48]Rumi, *Fihi ma fih*, 21.

[49]The Qur'an states clearly in the short chapter al-Ikhlas that God "the Everlasting Refuge" has not begotten nor has He been begotten. This would make the idea of pregnancy with God problematic for any literalist reading of the text. See, the Qur'an, 112:3.