Volume Two: Exegesis

The Transformative Power of Text:

The Case of the Sufi Poetic

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgment has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Signature ________________

Alice Melike Ülgezer

Date ____________________
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The Transformative Power of Text: The Case of the Sufi Poetic

Introduction

This exegesis is a response to an often heard critique of my novel whose readers would suggest that my writing style was ‘un-Australian’, not meant in a derogatory sense but due to the length of my sentences, my rich images and florid language, the suspension of ‘reality’ and the non-linear narrative. It also was suggested that I had been influenced by ‘magical realist’ writers such as Salman Rushdie and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. This always perplexed me as I was not familiar with the work or the cultural and political contexts of Indian or South American magical realist traditions.

Born in London, yet denied a British passport due to my father’s birthplace, Kurdistan, I grew up in Melbourne with my Australian mother. I didn’t however grow up with the parental link of my father that ‘other’ aspect of my cultural heritage, its language, country or culture yet I came to identify myself as Turkish Australian even though I grew up in cultural, linguistic and emotional exile from it. When I did see my father, somewhat sporadically and unpredictably, he infused my internal landscape with a cryptic coda of visionary stories peppered with music, saints, seers and prophets. Creatively he drew from his Islamic faith and Turkish folkloric traditions which resulted in stories redolent with mysticism and his own allegorical, allusive and idiosyncratic vision. This imbued me with a sense of reverence and mystery and an understanding that his story telling ability came from a place of creative spiritual intuition. His stories illuminated my
cultural and spiritual heritage as well as profoundly shaping my own creative production of poetic text.

It is this heritage which shaped the exegesis and novel which follow. In them I draw together these influences into a creative argument, locating myself in relation to this discursive cultural and spiritual heritage by examining what it means to me both creatively and intellectually.

The exegesis also examines the transformative power of text, specifically through the lens of the Sufi poetic and in particular *The Mathnawi* of Rumi. It explores the writing, reading and experience of text from a Sufi perspective, through the lens of its own discursive tradition and nomenclature.¹ This is not to discount other scholarship but rather it is hoped that this study will offer a glimpse of the Sufi poetic as it is experienced from within itself, to those unfamiliar with it and its context. In order to approach this examination, the key terms - transformation, text, Sufi and poetic - are considered and explored. Throughout this discussion I will also explore my creative thesis *Allah on the Soles of his Feet* (herein referred to as my novel) and practice, allowing the exegetical work to engage in a conversation with the creative work.

The exegesis is structured into four chapters. Chapter One, *The Word: From Utterance to Ink* traces the origins of the discursive aural/oral tradition of Islam, and in ¹

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¹ Ideas of the experience of text through the lens of the Sufi poetic were discussed and explored in conversation with Redha Ameur, lecturer in Islamic Studies (Great Texts of Islam: Qur'an and Hadith, June 2010) at The University of Melbourne.
particular Sufism, demonstrating that the tenets of the Sufi path, which aim at the ultimate annihilation of the seeker in the divine beloved\(^2\), are *necessarily transformative*. It is provided as a background for readers unfamiliar with the area and as a foundation from which to define the Sufi Poetic.

Chapter Two, *The Longing*, illuminates the Sufi poetic by examining and drawing from *The Mathnawi* of the ecstatic Muslim mystic, Mawlana Jalal ud-Din Rumi (d.1273). An esoteric epic of poetic verse, *The Mathnawi* was the fruit of Rumi’s mystical experiences and was given the honorific title of al-Qur’an in Persian, by the great Persian mystic poet Jami\(^3\) (d.1492). It was written / recited in classical Persian in a state of intoxication and recorded by his scribe, Husam ud-Din Chelebi. *The Mathnawi* draws its title from the poetic form it employed, that of the rhyming couplet of which there are 25,700, amassed in six books.\(^4\) Rumi's poetic creation was a direct response to his yearning to be closer to the divine beloved and to his overwhelming divine nostalgia and sense of metaphysical homelessness. In the following excerpt, which opens his epic, he describes the evocative music of the *Ney*, or the reed flute.

Listen to the song of the reed how it tells a tale, complaining of separations-

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\(^2\) The divine beloved, in a Sufi sense, can be understood as the ontological source of all existence, the divine creative matrix or source. The idiom of lovers was employed by Sufi poets as poetic literary symbolism to express in relative secrecy (due to their perceived threat to orthodox belief and praxis especially in the first few hundred years of the spread of Islam) their yearning to return to the ultimate ontological and creative source.

\(^3\) Jami is most famous for his allegorical and poetic tale of star crossed lovers, *Yusuf and Zulaikha*.

Saying, “Ever since I was parted from the reed-bed, my lament hath caused man and woman to moan
I want a bosom torn by severance, that I may unfold (to such a one) the pain of love-desire
Every one who is left far from his source wishes back to the time when he was united with it.”  

The source Rumi refers to is not a corporeal one bound by borders and flags but rather an incorporeal one. Even though the reed yearns for its reed bed and Rumi for divine reunion, both have found a home, albeit temporarily, or voice through text. *The Mathnawi* is a prime example both in its creation and its textual form of the Sufi poetic.

A key element in the creation of *The Mathnawi* was Rumi’s relationship with a wandering dervish, Shams ud-Din Tabrizi. Their relationship served as a sort of microcosmic font or corporeal manifestation of Rumi’s longing for the divine beloved as Shams became Rumi’s muse. The role of the muse and the transformative effect of their relationship will serve as a segue to introduce the discussion of the author’s, (my) own, creative process and the relationship to my novel. The role of my own muse will also be discussed, especially the discursive culture of storytelling (told often in languages other than English, such as Turkish, German and Arabic), that I grew up within. The visionary states perceived through the imaginative faculty of Rumi and my father, have infused my own creative practice. Through engaging with various philosophers and scholars, both

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6 There are many accounts of the meeting of Shams and Rumi. One that I have heard from my aunt is as follows: Rumi was teaching a group of students by a creek in Konya when a strange man entered the circle and took the precious old books Rumi was using and hurled them in the water. Rumi was aghast and reprimanded the man harshly who then challenged him by saying: ‘What use are these books in your life? If you really want to be a teacher, you should have no use of books as you would live your word.’ Forgetting his books floating on the water Rumi was transfixed and fascinated. The stranger of course was Shams who had travelled about the region in search of a true spiritual teacher.
Sufi and non-Sufi, and the positing and exploring of a Sufi poetic, I hope to illuminate and contextualize both my creative practice and creative thesis, offering an alternative approach to the creation of and engagement with text.

In the early days of the expansion of Islam the philosophical texts of Plato and Aristotle were translated into Arabic. Their ideas influenced the Muslim intellectuals, philosophers and mystics who translated and studied them throughout the Islamic world. Rumi’s metaphysics in particular were influenced by neo-Platonic ideas of emanation.⁷ It is on this basis that Chapter Three, *Kashf: Unveiling a Sufi Poetic* explores the dynamic between the visionary epistemology of Plato, as articulated thought his dialogues and the allegory of the cave in *The Republic*, Aristotle’s ideas of *mimēsis, diegesis* and *tekhne*, as outlined in his *Poetics*, and the Sufi notion of *kashf* (lit. Arabic uncovering, disclosure, unveiling, revelation, illumination) as expressed by al-Hujwiri, an 11th century Persian Sufi scholar, in his treatise on Sufism *Kashf al-Mahjub* (The Unveiling of the Veiled) or the unveiling of the divine beloved. The ideas of Plato and Aristotle and the notion of *kashf* are discussed in terms of their significance and applicability to the Sufi poetic and literary experience.

Chapter Four, *Imagining Beyond the Frontier*, illustrates the ways in which the Sufi experience of text is different from other approaches/ways of producing and engaging with a text. A significant part of this difference lies in the role of imagination in

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⁷ These ideas were articulated and discussed by Dr. Muhammad Kamal, senior lecturer in Islamic Studies at The University of Melbourne, in his subject which I completed in semester two, Ethical Traditions in Islam, in 2009.
the creation of text. The imagination, in a mystic sense, is an intuitive faculty with which
to perceive an ontologically real place/site/realm, an intermediary realm or a transcendent
hinterland if you will, which exists between the corporeal and incorporeal worlds. In
creation the poet/writer inhabits a space somewhere between the corporeal and
incorporeal worlds. In order to explore this intermediary realm the work of the French
orientalist scholar Henri Corbin (d.1978) will be employed. Further, the intuitive faculty
as espoused by the philosopher Henri Bergson will be examined as a key to this realm.
Finally, in order to demonstrate an integral trope of the Sufi poetic, that this experience of
the writer/reader is an ontologically real one rather than a flight of fantasy, I will draw
upon the scholarship of Corin Braga\textsuperscript{8} which hinges upon the distinction between
imaginary, imaginaire and imaginal. It was through the imaginative intuitive faculty that
Rumi was able to inhabit the intermediary realm, moving between the cross currents of
his internal topography and external visionary states to re-emerge totally transformed by
the presence and voice of his muse and the text of his \textit{Mathnawi}.

In addition to this exegesis I present my novel, \textit{Allah on the Soles of his Feet}. The
novel is an autobiographical, narrative fiction and is set between Melbourne and Istanbul
and between the past (1915 in Istanbul and 1978 in Afghanistan) and the present.
It opens with a mystic inspired short story, \textit{The Black Horse and The Bride}, which is
reminiscent of the invocations included at the beginning of Sufi tales (for example the
‘proem’ or Song of the Reed, as it is known, that opens Rumi’s \textit{Mathnawi} which was

\textsuperscript{8} C. Braga is the Assoc. Prof. PhD Director of Phantasma, The Center for Imagination Studies, Chair of the
Department of Comparative Literature, Faculty of Letters, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca,
Romania.
quoted above). The story introduces themes of longing, nostalgia, travelling, both physically and metaphysically and unrealised love. Its non-linear narrative and discursive style further reflects the tradition of storytelling in my Turkish family as it resonates with the undercurrent of mysticism.

In concluding the exegesis I will draw together my ideas regarding the transformative powers of text within the Sufi poetic. I will demonstrate this by attesting to the validity and integrity of creative visionary experiences wherein the word and poetics are a revelatory experience of unveiling. Further I will assert that Rumi and his Sufi poetic are as relevant today as they were in his own time. The following passage from my novel illustrates this. The character of the Turkish Sufi Aunt questions the narrator on her knowledge of mysticism.

…she asks me, “Have you read Leyla and Majnoun? Have you read Rumi’s Mathnawi?”
I reply that I have read the former and only bits and pieces of the other and at this she challenges, “Tell me, what was the Mathnawi about?”
I fumble about in shredded German, Turkish and Arabic and eventually resort to frustrated English…
“No-no!” she retorts. “That’s not it! That’s not it all.”
And she smiles that smug woolly smile as she launches into her explanation.
“You ask me how honey tastes and I can say it is sweet like sugar and delicious like such and such and beautiful like such and such and you will nod your head and say ahk ahk but do you know the taste of honey? No. Not until you have tried it for yourself. Only then will you know the taste.”

A. M. Ülgezer, *Allah on the Soles of his Feet*, p.234
It is this direct experiential empiricism that shapes the Sufi poetic and my fascination with it. Like honey, it needs to be experienced to be truly known. Through my creative practice I engage with this poetic which is mediated by distance, both linguistic and geographic. And, as I listen to and recount the stories of my father and flirt with the frontiers of my imagination, I create a sort of marriage with myself, fusing the duality of my ancestry.
CHAPTER ONE

The Word: From Utterance to Ink

The discursive aural/oral tradition of Islam/Sufism

The role of the word, both written and uttered, in Islamic faith and praxis is the initial focus of this chapter in which I will trace the faith from its inception to its mystical heart, concluding with an examination of the impact of this on my own creative work.

The spiritual heritage of the Islamic faith shares the prophetic genealogy of both Judaism and Christianity. Throughout al-Qur’an, Judaism and Christianity are referred to with familiarity as ‘People’ or ‘Family of The Book’. To an extent one could suggest from this perceived commonality that Islam inherited the association and relationship of divine manifestation/revelation and the word, as it also understands itself to be a religion of The Book. However, the particular relationship of Islamic belief and praxis to Book and the written word is quite distinct from the other Abrahamic faiths. This perhaps is due in part to the rich heritage of oral storytelling culture in pre-Islamic Arabia which profoundly shaped the self-perception and identity of the Arabs as an oral culture.  

10 [The Arabs] possessed a language which was distinguished for its extraordinary rich vocabulary. In the absence of painting and sculpture, they had cultivated their language as a fine art and were justly proud of its enormous power of expression. The poets and orators who could make an effective and aesthetic use of its wonderful resources were held in especially high esteem among them.'
However with the perceived revelation of the Word of God told through the prophet Muhammad, the revered role that story tellers and poets enjoyed in pre-Islamic Arabia was to change forever. This is clearly illustrated in al-Qur’an, in the final section of the chapter entitled *The Poets*. They are described as 'wander[ing] distracted in every valley' and practicing not what they say. Further, those who enjoy their poetry are accused of straying to evil.\textsuperscript{11} To survive as a *bona fide* prophet Muhammad needed to distinguish himself as something more than a mere inspired poetic seer. The result of this violent demarcation was that 'the development of …religious verse in the Islamic world took a considerable time.'\textsuperscript{12}

Once Mohammed has successfully established himself as a genuine prophet, al-Qur’an came to be considered as the miracle of Islam, the unmediated and direct word of Allah or God spoken to the Prophet Muhammad (much as the body of Christ is considered the theophany of Christianity). Thus the words themselves are considered sacred, revelatory and to possess great power. The word is the divine primal address of Allah preceding the human word as it states in al-Qur’an, "Am I not your Lord?"\textsuperscript{13} Language is perceived ultimately to spring from a divine origin and its role is understood to be the revelation of this origin.

It is written in al-Qur’an that in the beginning God said, Be! And it was. The word here is presented as being responsible, along with the intent of God, for the creation of

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\textsuperscript{13} Y. Ali (ed.), *al-Qur’an al-Karim*, as above, (7:172)
the universe. It has been invested with the primordial power of creation, realization and transformation as it is uttered directly by God. Thus it can be understood that the word came from God, and coupled with intention, ignited creation.

The revelatory power of the spoken word is evident at the very inception of Islamic faith when Muhammad was ordered, \textit{iqra'}, Read! Or Recite!, to which he replied that he did not know how to read or recite, three times, before then doing so. This initial origin of utterance to and from an illiterate man lends itself to significant reverence for the spoken word, the living voice. The utterance is a direct mode of imparting and receiving esoteric knowledge.

The spoken word also acts as the initiatory and binding agent of the individual to the faith as they profess their belief with the \textit{shah\=ada}; \textit{l\=a il\=a\=ha il\=a 'Ll\=a\=ah Muhammad ras\=ul Allah}, (lit. There is no god but God and Muhammad is his Prophet). The first part can also be understood as; there is no reality but God. This utterance is invested with the utmost authority and is demonstrative of the beginning of the individual’s journey in their commitment to Islam. It is invested with power that can potentially transform the individual as they return to it throughout their daily lives to meditate upon its meaning. Schimmel refers to the \textit{shah\=ada} as the ‘verbal heart of Islam’\textsuperscript{14}. Further, for many Sufis across all the \textit{tariqat}, the first half in particular is used in \textit{zikr} (lit. Arabic remember, and in this case, the remembrance of God) ceremonies. For example, \textit{l\=a il\=a\=ha il\=a 'Ll\=a\=ah} may be repeated hundreds of times with a view to inducing trance-like states wherein the seeker desires to taste a moment of re-union with the Divine. As it states in a \textit{hadith}

qudsī\textsuperscript{15}: I am the companion of him who recollects me.\textsuperscript{16} Schimmel notes that ‘the poets of Turkey who followed Rumi…often compared the heart to a tree which … moves …by the breeze of love and is nourished by the water of zikr…\textsuperscript{17} Utterance becomes a crying out to the divine beloved redolent with nostalgia. The repetition becomes a way into and beyond the word itself, inducing a state of trance in the sound and rhythm of pure unveiled meaning. The act of the call to prayer five times daily attests to the revered position of the spoken word in Islamic praxis both in a communal and private sphere, as does the heeding and obedience of the call to prayer demonstrate the importance of internalizing and embodying what one has heard.

A final example of the esteem given to the spoken word in Islam is the commitment to memory of al-Qur’an and the recitation of it. The hafez (lit. Arabic for one who has committed to memory, and more specifically committed the sacred text to memory) is revered for their skill and piety and considered to inhabit a spiritually elevated position beyond those of the faith who have not committed it to memory. In the act of utterance and re-citation it is as if the hafez is trying to re-capture and re-create the original moment of revelation through the power of creative imagination, rhythm and sound. By memorising the text the hafez internalises and incorporates its ideas and idiom as part of his or her own inner private language and landscape. As the Orientalist scholar, Kenneth Cragg, states; "to have a literature thus scrupulously by heart is to think instinctively in its idiom and its context."\textsuperscript{18} Through the employment of the speech act the

\textsuperscript{15} Hadith qudsī also known as sacred hadith are referred to by Schimmel in her Mystical Dimensions of Islam, as ‘traditions that contain some extra-Koranic divine revelations’ p. 221
\textsuperscript{16} A. M. Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, as above, p.169
\textsuperscript{17} A. M. Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, as above, p.168
hafiz attempts to transport themselves to the moment of revelation. They attempt to re-imagine it, to re-create it and hence to have a more direct experience of the text. With this act of intuitive imagination they participate in and contribute to the living reality of their faith, linking themselves to the beginning of the tradition and creating an unfolding of it into the present. Here the act of utterance is a path to the divine beloved. The imaginative and intuitive faculty is the way to move along that path.

It is through the Divine origin of the word and hence of al-Qur’an and Islam, the memorization and recitation of it and the shahāda or ‘verbal heart’ of Islam, among other aspects of the faith and praxis that Islam can be understood to be ‘characterized by an almost entirely oral approach to its scripture.’

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A Brief introduction to Sufism

Sufism, the mystic heart of the faith, is saturated by this discursive oral/aural tradition. Further the genealogy of its poetic, as expressed by Rumi, can be understood in this context. In order to approach Sufism it is worth resting for a moment on the notion of mysticism as pertaining to something mysterious, often ineffable that is ‘not to be reached by ordinary means or by intellectual effort,’ but by closing the eyes as the Greek root *myein* suggests and apprehending with another visionary faculty.²¹

Regarding the origins of Sufism, there is much conjecture both within the Sufi and Muslim communities and beyond them. Some Muslim scholars believe Sufism to be foreign to Islam and assert that it developed under the influence of Christian Gnosticism, Hindu Vedantinism and Neo-Platonic philosophy.²² Others believe the contrary, that it is the heart of Islam and that this can be attested to by the practices and beliefs of the Companions of the Prophet, one example being the poverty and asceticism of Abu Bakr (the Prophet’s father-in-law and one of his closest companions and advisors). Still others believe it to have blossomed as a response to the rapid expansion of the Islamic Empire. In this context the so-called (they were named in retrospect) Sufis responded to what they saw as the dry observance of exoteric law and the misbehavior of the Caliphs (resulting from the intoxication of wealth and power). In the early development of Sufism ascetic

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²¹ A. M. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, as above, p.3
²² For further reading on this please refer to the introduction of: M. T. Stepaniants, *Sufi Wisdom*, State University Press New York, Albany, 1994
practices prevailed. They were (and often still are) characterized by an attempt to strip away worldly trappings such as pride, greed, vanity, lust, wealth, personal ambition and instead turn toward the inner spiritual dimension of faith.

The origins of Sufism can also be speculated upon via the etymology of the Arabic word *tasawwuf* or Sufism. As al-Hujwiri, an eminent medieval scholar and authority on Sufism, (whom Rumi quoted at length in his *Mathnawi*) summarises in his treatise on Sufism:

Some assert that the Sufi is so called because he wears a woolen garment (jāma-i sūf), others that he is so called because he is in the first rank (saff-i awwal), others say it is because the Sufis claim to belong to the ashāb-i Suffa (the people of the bench who gather around the Prophet’s mosque. Others, again, declare that the name is derived from safā (purity).  

Another definition is that it springs, etymologically, from the Arabic word sūf for wool, as the early Sufis were distinguished by wearing harsh woollen cloaks as an ascetic practice of self-mortification to move beyond the pain and irritation of form as they ignored the rough wool on their skin. Of their own origins, the Sufis themselves have a saying:

The seed of Sufism was sown in the time of Adam
It germinated in the time of Noah
Budded in the time of Ibrhāim
Began to develop in the time of Moses
Reached maturity in the time of Jesus
And produced pure wine in the time of Mohammed

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24 Relayed to me orally by my aunt in Istanbul, specific origins unknown.
Broadly, as it is impossible to describe in detail here, Sufis have been demarcated by scholars and commentators, traditional and contemporary, as sober and intoxicated. The former are characterized by ascetic practices such as those mentioned above and have been described as ‘possess[ing] nothing and...be[ing] possessed by nothing.’ The latter are characterized by attaining states of enraptured trance, under the influence of which the individual can often transgress the orthodox boundaries of practice as they express the ecstasy of their vision. Here it is pertinent to quote Rumi at some length.

What is to be done, oh Muslims?
For I do not recognize myself,
I am neither Christian, nor Jew... nor Muslim,
I am not of the East, nor of the West, nor of the land, nor of the sea...
My place is the Placeless, my trace is the Traceless...
One I seek, One I know, One I see, One I call.

Incorporating, yet moving beyond shari'a or Islamic Law, as extrapolated from the traditions of the Prophet, the Sufis focused their attention on the tarīqa (lit. Arabic way or path) the mystical path and the haqīqa or the Truth (lit. Arabic truth) and found within themselves the way to Eternity. The aim of each path (despite significant differences in practices and divergent specificities of belief), then and now, ultimately is to achieve an intimate state of reunion with the divine beloved and accordingly to attain immediate and direct knowledge (of the divine beloved) rather than that attained through

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25 Described by A. M. Schimmel, in Mystical Dimensions of Islam, as above, p.15
26 An example being the martyred Sufi saint and mystic Mansūr al-Hallāj who was killed in Baghdad in 922 AD for proclaiming, “I am the Truth!”
27 A. Iqbal, Life and Work of Muhammad Jalal-ud-din Rumi, Kitab Bhavan, New Delhi, India, 2003, p.140
28 In English, the term tarīqa is also used interchangeably with the word ‘order’ to describe different Sufi communities.
29 A. Iqbal, Life and Work of Muhammad Jalal-ud-din Rumi, as above, p.141
scholarship. In this state of re-union the individual loses all notion of duality and multiplicity and instead is overwhelmed by unity. As al-Qur’an says: ‘Wherever you turn, there is the face of God’. The ultimate result of this re-union is the annihilation of the seeker’s nafs (lit. Arabic self, understood here as the appetitive or animal self dominated by base desires and lusts) resulting in subsistence on the divine beloved’s will.

This path to re-union came to be defined by maqamāt (lit. Arabic stations). These can be understood as progressive points or grades along the spiritual path. Their number varies according to the different orders, yet all represent a process of spiritual and moral transformation. The first according to al- Hujwiri is repentance, then conversion, renunciation, trust in God and so on. These are considered hierarchically in relation to their proximity to God and are achieved by the sheer effort and will of the adept who aims to ‘graduate’ from one station to the next. Each station can be viewed as an unveiling and revealing of the divine.

Along the tarīqa the seeker or adept may also experience what are known as hāl (lit. Arabic state) or states; fleeting moments of visionary spiritual and very often poetic intoxication. These states are seen as gifts from God as opposed to being achieved through sheer spiritual discipline and effort. They have been described by the Persian mystic Junayd (d.910) as ‘flashes of lightning.’

30 For more information on ibn-Arabi, the Andalusian Sufi master and his doctrine on The Unity of Being, see: H. Corbin, trans. Manheim, R., Creative Imagination in the Sīfism of Ibn ʿArabī, Princeton University Press, N.J., 1981
The annihilation of the seeker, mentioned above, can be understood as the annihilation of the self in the divine and is known as fanā, (lit. Arabic passing away, cessation of being, extinction of individual consciousness, receding of the ego, obliteration of the self)\textsuperscript{34} According to Rumi, it is also the goal of the mystic; "I am in flight (from myself): rising and departing is my occupation for ever."\textsuperscript{35} The term fanā was first employed by the above mentioned Junayd, a so-called sober Sufi, as was the term baqā (lit. remaining, survival, continuation of existence after life)\textsuperscript{36} which describes the return from this transformative experience wherein the seeker, emptied of their nafs now lives and subsists entirely through the divine as the divine lives through them. There is however much debate, which al-Hujwiri discusses at length in his Kashf al-Mahjub, as to the specificities of the ontological and semantic nature of these terms.

The whole process of striving to attain such intimacy with the transcendent divine involves the refinement of one’s character, both spiritually and morally. This process in Islam is known as the inner jihad (lit. Arabic struggle) and is characterized by grappling to overcome being governed by one’s nafs. This struggle can manifest in rituals of self-mortification and the dispelling of the desire for worldly possessions.

Further, the striving to be nearer to God includes the recitation of al-Qur’an and sacred litanies, the performance of the samā’ (lit. Arabic hearing) (Sufi meetings in which sacred texts are recited with musical accompaniment. Also used to describe the whirling/spinning ritual which was institutionalized by Rumi’s order of the Mevlevi

\textsuperscript{34}H. Wehr, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, Librairie du Liban, Beirut, 1974, p. 729
\textsuperscript{36}H. Wehr, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, as above, p. 69
dervishes and compared by Rumi to workers treading on grapes as “an act that brings the spiritual wine into existence”37), playing music and singing, ritual invocations and the repetition of the names of God, all of which aim to give form to the ineffable by interweaving gesture, sound patterns and meaning, thereby, creating a sense of intimacy between the seeker and the sought.38

Sufi practices of reaching to the divine also include the art of letter mysticism or *hurufism* (*huruf* lit. Arabic letters) wherein letters and the art of writing are endowed with symbolic and esoteric meanings. In *hurufism* letters become signs which point to and praise the divine. For example, the groups of detached letters which precede twenty-nine chapters of al-Qur’an have been used as a mystical template to extract the hidden inner meanings of the chapters. The detached letters may be assembled into a word which is then used as a tool for divining these meanings. An example of the sacred significance given to letters is reflected in the following poem which relates the individual Arabic letters of Adam’s name to the physical forms of prayer.

When you stand up, an alif is formed, 
In bending behold: a dāl is made;
When you have prostrated, a mīm takes shape:
That is, I tell you, to perceive man – Adam.39

Adam is highly regarded as the first prophet in Islam as well as being the Arabic word for man. This excerpt demonstrates the intimate dynamic in Sufi praxis of gesture and embodiment, word and utterance. It points to the surpassing of belief from

37 A. M. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, as above, p.183
intellectual conviction to a fully integrated, incorporated, internalised and visceral experience of faith.

Secret languages were also ‘developed [by the Sufis] from the mystical interpretation of the letters of the Arabic alphabet in order to conceal their thoughts from the common people’. 40 The letters and words themselves are revered in so far as they are the "vessels of revelation…and yet [they] constitute something different from God; they are a veil of otherness the mystic must penetrate…”41 to reach a place beyond letters, words, alphabets and form. Text, the word itself, can even be perceived as ‘a messenger [itself] from God, as Nasir-i Khusraw (d.1088) the mystic Persian poet and philosopher stated.’42 This notion of word being messenger is reminiscent of a character like Hermes and is further demonstrative of the supple nature of text within a Sufi context. This utterance, as an action of the body, points to a new approach to text, one that is based on a visceral experiential empiricism, where the frontiers between word and utterance relax into the flesh, where the body and even the cosmos may be read as a text.

The voices of Sufi culture are inflected with a heady longing for divine re-union. They call out in a semiotics of divine nostalgia and homesickness, relying heavily on metaphor, allusion and allegory to describe this journey and experience. Rumi alludes to this relaxing and unveiling of frontiers, the connectedness between all things and the grace in the capacity to experience that connection. Much like the carbon of a pencil knows the creative carbon of the stars:

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40 A. M. Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, as above, p.412
41 A. M. Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, as above, p.411
42 A. M. Schimmel, Deciphering The Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam, as above, p.134
Children love their seashell toys,  
And with them they learn about the ocean,  
Because a little piece of the ocean  
Inside the child, and inside the toy,  
Knows the whole ocean

So what does this mystic visionary and oral/aural culture mean to me as writer? As my novel is autobiographical narrative fiction it is fair for the reader to assume that the experiences of the first person narrator are intimately aligned with my own. My narrator has a continuity of consciousness wherein she begins ‘telling’ the novel before she is born and continues to speak to the reader, remaining a conscious being after she dies. My exposure to Sufi teachings has been primarily oral and imparted to me through the stories of my father and his sister (the above quoted aunt character). To illuminate this oral transmission of mystic knowledge I refer to a section of my novel, Allah on the Soles of his Feet, where the daughter asks her father about his Sheikh.

“So when do you see Ibrahim your Sheikh?” I ask changing the subject. “Is he at a local mosque?”  
“Haha!” he laughs at me. “He dead long time ago Alis! I dunno maybe six hundred year ago.”  
“Oh.”  
"He’s coming from de Samarqand. Somewhere der and he tell me bootiful ting, different ting….Have you heard of the triangle of la illhe illAllah?”  
“No.”  
“la illhe illAllah start between your eyebrows. You hev to shut your eyes and looket der.”  
He closes his eyes and with an index finger pointing to the middle of his forehead he continues.  
“And den your belleh button…and den your right shoulder and den back to here again....”

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He opens his eyes and draws again with his finger.
“Sort of a triangle. Dang dang dang. You hev to do like this. Look I do it now for you.”
He closes his eyes again and says deep and slow showing me with his finger from the start.
“llllllaaaaaa a lllllllaahe illlll Allllllaaaaahhhhh.”
He makes a round of the triangle in a sonorous bass drawing out every syllable before resting on the last one for a moment.
Still beaming he says, "Dat's different, bootiful. My Ibrahim, my Sheikh, he says dis. I'm belong to him...."
“Was your Ibrahim, your Sheikh, was he Sufi?”
“Naqshbandi. He was Naqshbandi. And my name is Ahmet Naqshbandi.”

The spiritually transformative relationship with a long dead or absent Sheikh, saint or even the prophet is not unusual in the world of Sufism. It is regarded with respect and considered entirely valid. The seeker meets the Sheikh through the faculty of their visionary imagination and intuition and through the process of ritual prayer and meditation they receive guidance and counsel. To appreciate the transformative and creative potential of these visionary experiences a new understanding of empiricism is needed wherein the vision itself and the experience of being 'elsewhere' can be understood as the empirical evidence. In her article, *The Book of Visions*, Amira Mittermaier sums up this experience:

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44 A. M. Ülgezer, *Allah on the Soles of his Feet*, p. 61, A Sufi saying relates, ‘there are many ways to kneel and kiss the ground’, the above mentioned *tariqa* of the father, the Naqshbandi, is just one of them. It traces its origins back to Abu Bakr and is prominent in Kurdistan.
45 This sort of transmission of spiritual knowledge is known in Sufism as Uwaisi transmission and supports this concept of the absent Sheikh. It comes from a tale of a man from Yemen named Uwais al-Qarni who had heard about the teachings of the Prophet and so set out to see him. However soon after setting off news came to him that his mother was sick. What could he do? He had to return. The story goes that the Prophet told one of his close companions, ‘there is a man coming from Yemen named Uwais al-Qarni. I won't be alive when he arrives but tell him I have received him and he has my blessings.’ For more information on this please refer to: Attar, *Muslim Saints and Mystics*, (trans.) A.J. Arberry, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1983
The exclusive reliance of social scientists on social networks to trace the dissemination of Sufi contacts and teachings overlooks the possibility of spiritual guidance through dreams and visions.\textsuperscript{46}

To learn about the faith of my father and his family in this creative, demonstrative and visionary way profoundly influenced my approach to creative practice. This nourishing of my visionary intuitive faculty forged a pathway into a transformative creative practice where the ability to surrender allowed me to ‘listen’ to rather than ‘construct’ a text. Throughout my life, my father as a storyteller related his tales of travels ‘elsewhere’. These tales fascinated and inspired my own desire to make similar journeys.

The above quote from my novel also illuminates the Sufi mode of receiving knowledge through the visionary capacity and imparting knowledge through demonstration and oral instruction rather than through text alone. Gesture, breath control, \textit{zikr} and the rhythmic repetition of sacred litanies all combine to induce a trance-like state in the seeker wherein s/he may move closer to unveiling the divine beloved.

Through this remembering or \textit{zikr} manifest in the act of calling out and the embodiment of prayer, the father in my novel yearns for a dynamic reciprocity between himself and his divine beloved. The father’s ecstasy in being heard and his desolation when he is in spiritual exile brings to mind Mikhail Bakhtin’s statement that hell is the ‘absolute lack of being heard.’\textsuperscript{47} For the Sufi then, to be heard by the divine beloved and

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for the voice of the divine beloved to be heard by the seeker in the act of remembrance, results in a state of deep contentment or ecstasy. This is much akin to the creative ecstasy of that 'elsewhere' 'placeless place' the Sufi reaches for, where the father travels to and where I find myself when I obey the call of the pen.

As stated above, often I write blindly, almost as if following some barely effable or audible dictation. The experience of this becomes so integrally woven into the fabric of my being that to be deemed a flight of fantasy seems an apostasy to the self. I remind the reader, my novel opens with the conscious unborn narrator relating her pre-birth experiences. She says:

This is what I remember this is where I have been….Having existed as an infinitesimal spark of light, laying dormant for eons in a space where horizons don’t exist and bound tightly as a knuckle of secrets, I yearned to realise myself.  

The pre-birth experiences of the narrator are told as the remembering and re-collecting of an uncreated self and are resonant with the assertion of Socrates to Meno, in the Platonic dialogue of the same name, that there is no such thing as teaching and learning, only re-collection. In the philosophical journey between Socrates, Plato and Aristotle rests a long conversation about the self and self-expression. The Platonic and Aristotelian notion of mimēsis and its relation to the Sufi poetic will be explored in more depth in Chapter Three. The birth of my narrator and the resultant trajectory of her life is hinged upon the

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48 A. M. Ülgezer, Allah on the Soles of His Feet, p. 4
49 Plato, Meno, in The Essential Plato, (trans.) B. Jowett, with an introduction by A. de Botton, Quality Paperback Book Club, New York, 1999, p. 443 “the soul…[is] immortal, and having been born again many times, and having seen all things that there are, whether in this world or the world below, has knowledge of them all.”
notion of refusing to forget what went before. This awareness of recollecting is fraught
with the responsibility and affliction of the past and is a key throughout my novel. Thus
the modality of words beyond the syntax of reason, both uttered and textual, heard and
read, open the way into transformative, revelatory experiences, be they of one's own
creative soul or that of the divine beloved.\textsuperscript{50}

In order to understand words in this way we must push past our corporeal
understanding of them and turn to a Sufi poetic. Rumi allegorizes this neatly in his
parable of the boatman who was rowing a grammarian across a stretch of water. Full of
pride, the grammarian turned to the boatman and asked him if he had ever studied
grammar. The latter replied that he hadn't to which the grammarian retorted; 'You have
wasted half your life!' The poor boatman took the chiding with silent grief. A little later
[when] the boat was caught in a storm the boatman asked the [grammarian] if he knew
how to swim. The grammarian replied that he didn’t, to which the boatman replied; 'Now
you have lost all your life!'\textsuperscript{51}

This parable exemplifies my approach to my own creative work which is
informed by what I have learned and what I intuitively understand from my background.
In my novel, \textit{Allah on the Soles of his Feet}, the narrator travels from Melbourne to
Istanbul where she meets the ‘other’ half her family. There she learns about her Islamic
heritage and the Sufi practices of her aunt. She participates in \textit{zikr} sessions, is shown how

\textsuperscript{50}The nexus between one's creative soul and the divine beloved is a porous, supple border. 'Rumi
recommended that the Sufi seek God within himself, not in heaven.' A. R. Arasteh, \textit{Rumi: The Persian,
\textsuperscript{51}A. Iqbal, \textit{Life & Work of Muhammad Jalal-ud-Din Rumi}, as above, story both rendered and quoted
directly from p.185
to pray, wear a head scarf and is told a multitude of stories whose characters she almost collides with. In the following extract the narrator speaks of her aunt.

She holds out a piece of cloth she has cut clandestine from the *Kaa’ba* and gives it to me to kiss then presses it to the centre of my forehead...She gives me prayers to say each morning and tells me Allah called me like a bird to Istanbul...just like Rumi calls people to come to him."^52

The discursive tradition of orality and aurality within Islam and Sufism has infused the culture of story telling of my family in Istanbul who seem to have a parable for almost everything; from explanations of certain dishes that were eaten by Noah on his ark to allegorical tales of the importance of cooking chickpeas slowly, to the learning by heart of al-Qur'an and Sufi poetry. It is this influence and its transformative effect, both creatively and spiritually, on my own creative work and that of the key text, *The Mathnawi* of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi that I examine in the following chapters.

^52 A. M. Ülgezer, *Allah on the Soles of His Feet*, p. 236
CHAPTER TWO

The Longing of Sugar: The Mathnawi of Rumi

Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi or Mevlana (lit. Our Master) as he is fondly referred to by his admirers was introduced to me by my father’s Sufi sister in Istanbul who would translate and interpret his poetry and parables from her native Turkish into German. As I hadn’t learnt German formally since school, my comprehension wasn't fluent. Much of the poetic nuance would have been lost in translation however my aunt, being a natural teacher, found ways to demonstrate and embody the text, imparting kernels of spiritual knowledge.

She tells me Allah drops golden coins for her and that he sent me like a bird to this city, a bleary blue archipelago. Just audible her lips move in prayer. But I am not a good Turkish girl and I do not know how to pray. She tells me to ask Mevlana, “Immer fragen, Immer fragen”… Everything I do in this house is in accord with the pulse of the clock. Looking up at it Hala tells me she doesn’t hear tick tock tick tock. She hears Allah Allah. You can hear this too if you want [and] she laughs…

The aunt’s observation alludes to a point of contention amongst the Sufis, that of immanence and transcendence. It may also have been her interpretation of the Qur’anic statement: Whithersoever ye turn, there is Allah's countenance. This divine infusion into the sphere of the domestic and the every day is one of the many themes of Rumi's

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54 A. M. Ülgezer, Allah on the Soles of his Feet, p. 179
work as he wrote about; ‘A Man and a Woman Arguing,’ ‘The Dog in the Doorway,’
‘The Lame Goat,’ among countless other poems.\textsuperscript{56} The site of the seemingly banal
becomes an opportunity for spiritual discipline and learning rendering it accessible
beyond an elect circle of pupils to a far broader audience.

Rumi was born in Balkh, northern Persia (contemporary northern Afghanistan) in
1207 and died in Konya (a town in contemporary central south eastern Turkey) in 1273.
His father Baha'uddin, a respected Islamic scholar and mystic, led the family on a twelve
year migration, (likely due to the imminent arrival of the Mongol army), across Iran,
Syria, Iraq and Turkey, eventually settling in Konya. I have travelled across parts of these
areas, always with a book of Rumi’s poetry. As I criss -crossed borders and my passport
filled up with stamps I internalized the words of Rumi as I heard and read them standing
in his footprints.\textsuperscript{57} Upon the death of his father Rumi assumed his father's teaching role
and lived the life of a respected religious teacher until his meeting with a wandering
dervish Shams ud-Din (lit. Arabic the sun of religion) Tabrizi. This friendship profoundly
re-configured Rumi both spiritually and creatively and led to the mystic poet we know
today.

It is worth noting briefly in this discussion the two texts which preceded the focal
text, \textit{The Mathnawi}. Firstly, \textit{Divan-i Shams-i Tabrizi} is an homage to his beloved muse
and spiritual supernova, Shams. By employing Shams’ name in the title, Rumi alludes to
the spiritual union experienced in their friendship. It is a testament to the sheer love and

\textsuperscript{47, 73, 144} respectively
\textsuperscript{57} Perhaps it is only legend that on this journey the family met the Persian Sufi poet Farid ud-Din Attar
(d.1221) and gave the young Rumi a copy of his \textit{Asrar-name, or Book of Secrets}, as he is said to have
foretold Rumi's spiritual potential.
admiration Rumi felt for Shams as he reflected; 'What I thought of before as God, I met today in person.' This intimate friendship however incited jealousy amongst Rumi's pupils and Shams was driven from Konya a number of times. Rumi's Divan is redolent with the longing and grief he felt from these absences and finally that which he felt upon the mysterious death of Shams. I have often thought about the relationship between Rumi and Shams and the creative power in their union and separation. Growing up, my father's presence was unpredictable as sometimes I would not see or hear from him for a year at a time and other times he would appear unannounced bursting with stories and songs from his travels which would fascinate and inspire me.

Rumi's second textual poetic work is Fihi Ma Fihi, (lit. Arabic In it what is in it) also known as Table Talk. It is a series of discourses and teaching stories with pupils. From the playful title it can be understood that Rumi was suggesting that one gleans from a text according to one's needs, hence that it contains multiple meanings contingent upon the context and capacity, in this case spiritual, of the reader.

Rumi’s friendship with Shams was the spiritual engine for the creative production of his most influential work and the fruit of his mystical experiences, The Mathnawi. It was regarded so highly that Jami (d.1492) the great Persian mystic poet gave it the honorific title of al-Qur’an in Persian. Shams was a catalyst and urged Rumi to burn the textual expression and manifestation of his faith and emerge from the fire to live and embody the mystic words he had been teaching for so many years as a Sheikh in Konya. Before the appearance of Shams in Rumi's life, Iqbal asserts that "there [was] no evidence

\[58\] J. Baldock, The Essence of Sufism, as above, p. 175
\[59\] Although difficult to prove definitively, the death of Shams is believed by some to be the result of Rumi’s pernicious and envious pupils and son.
of [an] inclination towards poetry" and that "the earliest poems which have been traced belong to the period when Shams left him for the first time, probably in the year 1245."  

Thus Rumi’s longing for divine love and mystical re-union and his friendship with Shams transformed him into one of the greatest and most prolific of mystic poets.

In his vast esoteric and exegetical epic Rumi echoes the words of al-Qur’an as he reflects on his own text; ‘(Even) if (all) the forests should become pens and (all) the ocean ink, (yet) there is no hope of bringing the Mathnawi to an end.’ This is a direct allusion to one of the final verses in the eighteenth chapter of al-Qur’an.

Say: "If the oceans were
Ink (wherewith to write out)
The words of my Lord,
Sooner would the ocean be
Exhausted than would the words…

For me, Rumi’s Mathnawi, as a spiritual text, is highly accessible and further a poetic key to the esoteric aspects of al-Qur’an and indeed of all spiritual texts. As my own creative and poetic writing has a spiritual component the text of Rumi has been like a guide for me as I traverse both my inner and outer landscapes.

The weave of The Mathnawi is rich with inter-textuality and combines lyrical commentaries and references to al-Qur’an and hadith, legends of Sufi saints, Biblical and Old Testament characters, such as Noah, Adam, Abraham, Elijah, known in Sufism as al-Khidr or Hizr the Green Man etc. as well as employing the rich heritage of folkloric tales.
for example, that of Layla and Majnoun. It is redolent with symbolism, an extreme case being the lurid tale, *The Importance of Gourd Crafting* and metaphor, for example the conversation between a chickpea and a cook, *Chickpea to Cook*. According to Schimmel, "The Mathnawi contains almost every conceivable mystical theory known in the thirteenth century." Yet she continues, "it is next to impossible to build up a mystical system from its tales and parables; every interpreter has found what he sought, from pantheism to personal mysticism, from enraptured love to law-bound orthodoxy."  

For me this vast scope of stories and their interpretations is similar to the scope of stories my father and his sister have told me. There is a difference between their interpretations yet there are also convergences. My father told me stories of the way *jinn* visit people in prison and of *Hizr* going to a specific mosque in Istanbul every Friday to pray. My aunt told me of the way the Greek soldiers were not afraid of the Turkish soldiers but of the angels they saw looming behind them on the battle fields, the way Muhammad would wipe his bowl clean with a piece of bread and the importance of love beyond form. Regardless of the disparity between these two characters their stories hum with an underlying similarity, that of a total infusion of the spiritual in every facet of their life.

It is a common contention that *The Mathnawi* was composed at the request of Rumi's *Khalifa* (lit. Arabic successor, caliph) and scribe, Husamuddin Chelebi, for “a

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64 Rumi, *The Essential Rumi*, (trans. & ed.) C. Barks & J. Moyne, as above, p. 181 and p. 132 respectively  
65 A. M. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, as above, p. 316  
66 H. Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, as above, p. 257
short 'teaching' poem, like that of other cultures.\textsuperscript{67} Far from being pithy however, (it took nearly twelve years to dictate 25,700 verses\textsuperscript{68}) it is vast in scope both conceptually and actually. The text of Rumi's \textit{Mathnawi} was seeded by his relationship with Shams, watered by the grief of its sudden severance and blossomed with the preserving sustenance of his scribe Chelebi’s ink, who recorded the words as they fell from his lips in states of divine intoxication and trance. Its narrative structure is non-linear, digressional and playfully discursive teeming with stories which are interrupted, discontinued and re-kindled later. Farooq Hamid has described reading the \textit{Mathnawi} as being 'confronted with a work which lacks a telos, a work that 'is seemingly muddled in its narrative progression' and one lacking in an "organic" ending.\textsuperscript{69} However these stylistic tropes merely attest to the immediacy of the visionary creative process and suggest an ineffably vast topographic tableau of Origin.

I am so small I can barely be seen.
How can this great love be inside me?
\textit{Look at your eyes. They are small,}
\textit{But they see enormous things.}\textsuperscript{70}

This is similar to what Socrates believes and states in the early Platonic Dialogue, \textit{Ion}. 'All good poets…compose their poems not as works of art, but because they are

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\textsuperscript{67} J. Baldock, \textit{The Essence of Sufism} as above, p. 173 \\
\textsuperscript{68} A. Iqbal, \textit{The Life \\& Work of Muhammad Jalal-ul-Din Rumi} as above, p.180 \\
\textsuperscript{69} F. Hamid, ‘Storytelling Techniques in the \textquote{Masnavi-yi Ma\'nawi} of Mowlana Jalal Al-Din Rumi: Wayward Narrative or Logical Progression?’, \textit{Iranian Studies}, Vol. 32, No. 1, Winter, 1999, p. 28. \textit{Telos} as Hamid states was first defined by Aristotle in his \textit{Metaphysics} and \textit{Ethics}. It can be understood in the context of plot as ‘not for the sake of something else, but for whose sake everything else is; so that if there is to be a last term of this sort, the process will not be infinite…’ \\
\textsuperscript{70} Rumi, \textit{Unseen Rain, Quatrains of Rumi}, (trans. \\& ed.) C. Barks \\& J. Moyne, as above, p.40
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inspired and possessed….for not by art does the poet sing, but by power divine.\textsuperscript{71} A quatrain of Rumi’s illustrates the surrender of the poet when possessed by creative love:

Let the lover be disgraceful, crazy, absent minded. Someone sober will worry about events going badly. Let the lover be.\textsuperscript{72}

The resonance between Rumi and Socrates’ concept of inspired poetry will be explored further in the following chapter.

The request of Chelebi for a teaching poem clearly tickled a latent need in Rumi to communicate his transcendent migrationary states and stations in a textual poetic medium. \textit{The Mathnawi} is best thought of as addressing the spiritual traveler (lit. Arabic \textit{sālik}) to stimulate their spiritual transformation.\textsuperscript{73} \textit{The Mathnawi} sprang from Rumi's longing for and experiences of re-union with the divine. In states of visionary rapture and ecstasy he would sing and recite verses to his scribe who diligently recorded them, and whose praises are sung copiously throughout.

\begin{quote}
O Ziya'u 'l-Haqq (Radiance of God), Husamu 'ddin, thou art he through whose light the \textit{Mathnawi} hath surpassed the moon (in splendour).\textsuperscript{74}
\end{quote}

Rumi's love of and gratitude for his scribe are evident throughout the text. If Shams caused the flowering of Rumi's experience of divine love then the request of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{72} Rumi, \textit{Unseen Rain, Quatrains of Rumi}, (trans. & ed.) C. Barks, & J. Moyne, as above, p.7.
\end{footnotesize}
Chelebi’s can be seen as the transforming of that into the perfume of poetic text. From Rumi’s response to this request it is reasonable to assume that he desired to satiate the thirst of a readership with a text that possessed spiritually transformative powers, a text that would resonate beyond the utterance of an instant or the confines of ink and paper. A text that had the potential to become an internalized seed bed, a spiritual and ethical work space for the reader/listener, not only an entertaining tale but a space through which to transform and encounter other realities.

The Sufi poetic as it is manifested in *The Mathnawi* resonates with orality and aurality as the reader, the scribe and even self-reflexively, the speaker, are addressed, cajoled, reprimanded, questioned or soothed and reassured. Largely it presents itself as the record rather than the product of an oral process.\(^{75}\) Its discursivity and non-linear structure\(^{76}\) is reminiscent of the way in which it was created, in inspired fits and starts, burning all night with inspiration or silent for days. Rumi relates the reason for the postponement of the coming of the second book of his *Mathnawi*:

…part of the reason of its postponement is…namely that if all the Divine Wisdom…be made known to His slave, the slave (absorbed) in (contemplation of) the benefits of that act will be left without the power to perform it…\(^{77}\)

The production of Rumi’s text; its manifestation through the creative process of spiritual travelling and the role of his muse and scribe, all transformed him from a

\(^{75}\) S. G. Safavi, & S. Weightman, *Rumi’s Mystical Design: Reading The Mathnawi, Book I*, as above, p.226

\(^{76}\) For further reading on the structure of *The Mathnawi* please refer to: S. G. Safavi, & S. Weightman, *Rumi’s Mystical Design: Reading The Mathnawi, Book I*, as above. This is a new and seminal work which posits that there is an overall hidden synoptic mystical design to Rumi’s *Mathnawi*. Unfortunately it is beyond the scope of this research to examine it in more depth.

deskbound theologian/religious scholar/teacher to an ecstatic maestro poet, storyteller and metaphysician who spoke with the authority of someone who had actually experienced what it was he wrote of, someone who had actually traversed the spiritual realm. Through the process of textual creation Rumi moved closer, unveiling his divine beloved. As we read his text we partake in and witness this poetic process as it transforms him. Imagining our way into the text in a creative and intuitive hermeneutics requires of the reader that he or she must undress and cloak themselves in the skin of the text. He instructs his readers/listeners to; ‘Listen to the presence inside poems. Let them take you where they will.’

The text for Rumi was the flames of the fire that burnt him up and from which he emerged totally transformed to subsist on different nourishment. We read the ash of that burning.

Happy have I become
Ever since I changed into a piece of fire
And with this fire
I will burn my house and dwell in the desert

My novel is divided into four chapters, each of which is prefaced with an opening poem. All together the poems form a suite and are the result of dream visions, the ash that settled on the page in ink. One of the poems is as follows:

The
Pen
That
Lit
The

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78 Rumi, Unseen Rain, Quatrains of Rumi, (trans & ed.) C. Barks & J. Moyne, as above, p. 37
79 A quatrain of Rumi I memorized and heard rather than read, many years ago, hence no formal reference
Fire
Made
The
Bird
Fly
From
The
Tree

The metamorphic burning which Rumi refers to and further the listening to the presence inside a poem is something which resonates with my own writing process, particularly when writing the suite of poems, the unborn narrator section and the final underwater scene in which the narrator transforms. Rumi let himself be annihilated by this fire of transformation;

In the shambles of love, they kill only the best…
Don’t run away from this dying.
Whoever’s not killed for love is carrion.

The **Mathnawi** was the final contribution and communication of Rumi's mystical experiences at their peak, before his death in 1273, wherein he had "learnt to perceive and internalize as his own, the soul and knowledge of Shams…he [came] to see himself both as the lover and the beloved." This dialogue with the 'other', whether s/he or it may be Shams, Husamuddin Chelebi, or the Divine, is key in the examination of the

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80 A. M. Ülgezer, *Allah on the Soles of His Feet*, p. 3
82 F. Papan-Matin, ‘The Crisis of Identity in Rumi’s Tale of the Reed’, *Comparative Studies of Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 2003, 23(1 & 2) p.248
transformative power of text in the case of the Sufi poetic and further in the alchemical process of the passing away of the mettle of the self in *fanā* and accordingly the subsistence of the Sufi in *baqā*. Such a dialogue though, with the o/Other is not necessarily dependent upon utterance to convey meaning as Rumi refers lovingly to Shams often as the silent one and further to silence itself thus; 'Consider what God chanted into the ear of the earth, so that it became regardful and has ever since remained silent.' ⁸³ The friendship of Rumi and Shams was a microcosm of the macro-mystic Friendship with and annihilation in the divine. After the sudden severance Rumi learnt to internalize the experience of Shams as a part of himself.

Sometimes afraid of reunion, sometimes of separation: You and I, so fond of the notion of a *You* and an *I*, should live as though we’d never heard of those pronouns. ⁸⁴

The opening poem of *The Mathnawi* about the lamenting reed can be read 'as an assertion of the presence of Shams in the person of Rumi.' ⁸⁵ Further, as Rumi was able to return and communicate his experiences, *The Mathnawi* 'can be read as a medium for portraying [his] grand metaphor for separation and union: the eradication of all divisions and multiplicities through the cleansing fire of ecstasy,' ⁸⁶ the utter annihilation, the loss of self.

The blurring of identity between the lover and the beloved is touched upon in my novel. The narrator after having listened to the aunt’s story of Leyla and Majnouon and

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⁸⁴ Rumi, *Unseen Rain Quatrains of Rumi*, (trans. & ed.) J. Moyne & C. Barks, as above, p. 77
⁸⁵ F. Papan-Matin, 'The Crisis of Identity in Rumi’s Tale of the Reed', as above, p. 246
⁸⁶ F. Papan-Matin, ‘The Crisis of Identity in Rumi’s Tale of the Reed’, as above, p.252
been instructed in silent prayer finds herself wondering, ‘Am I Leyla or Majnoun? Leyla or Majnoun Leyla or…’\(^8^7\) and she trails off into a reverie about the identity and role of the lover and beloved.

As I do not having a fluent grasp of Persian (the original language of The Mathnawi) or Turkish, I am very interested in how my novel came to be infused with the poetic tropes discussed above. As stated previously, the presence of my father throughout my life has been sporadic and unpredictable. At times his absence almost became a presence in itself and I internalized the torn hem of his stories, threading them with my own. At other times I felt I was merely his scribe attempting to record the overflow of his visions related to me in English, peppered with Turkish and Arabic. Despite and perhaps in part due to, the vagaries of his absences my father was the muse for my novel. The longing which arose from these absences, became transmuted into a spiritual longing as the narrator and I began to reach beyond form. The following extract from my novel describes the father’s arrival in Istanbul. He has not been there for twenty years and it is the first time both he and the narrator are there together.

He is hoisting himself up the Cypress tree limb by limb, the assiduous ascent and it sways ever so slightly with his weight and the evening breeze that has picked up…
"Alis," he calls now through the silent eiderdown of snow. "In de olden days Angels walked around with de humans, teaching dem tings….But now dey are gone so I tell you myself dis tings…"
"Okay Baba," I call up the tree trunk, only able to see his feet dangling in little leather slippers.
"De universe, out there," and he waves his arm out, “is quiet and peaceful place with lots of spirits. There is no direction out there. No East. No West. No qibla. All is de qibla.”\(^8^8\)

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87 A. M. Ülgezer, Allah on the Soles of His Feet, p. 225
88 A. M. Ülgezer, Allah on the Soles of His Feet, p. 205. Qibla refers to the direction of the Kaa'ba, the direction in which Muslims pray.
The motif of the Cypress tree in Sufi poetry is associated with the “perfect human being” as it surrenders to the wind yet doesn’t snap or break. Thus the father character climbing it and surrendering to his visionary musings is a play on surrender to just the sort of poetic creation Rumi experienced or Socrates refers to in *Ion* or *Meno*. The weave of my novel is threaded through with such stories of my father. It resonates with a poetic atavistic memory of my cultural past and alludes to the stories of Rumi both read and heard throughout my life. It is the result of the internalisation of all these disparate narrative threads and voices and their flowering into creative inspired states. In my novel, the narrator, after being instructed by her aunt to call out to Rumi, has the following experience:

And behind my eyes I see a white figure spinning in front of the *Kaa’ba*. Just one figure in a billowing white skirt, spinning around and around and around.\(^{89}\)

Through the faculty of the intuitive imagination the narrator was able to glimpse such visions of the intermediary realm. Further in creating my novel, I also was able to catch sight of similar visions as I inhabited a creative space, somewhere between the corporeal and incorporeal world where the tropes of the Sufi poetic became manifest. This allowed me to experience for myself, however fleetingly a taste of the sugar referred to by Rumi and shaped the research and creative work that follow.

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\(^{89}\) A. M. Ülgezer, *Allah on the Soles of His Feet*, p. 220
CHAPTER THREE

*Kashf: Unveiling a Transformative Sufi Poetic*

To open the exploration of a transformative Sufi poetic I will briefly examine some key features of Aristotle’s seminal work *Poetics*, written around 330 BC. Rather than banishing them from *The Republic*, as his teacher Plato did he systematically examined the production of poetry and outlined what he believed constituted good poetry, its ethical and social role. His work, although pithy, has continued to be influential for both philosophers and creative practitioners today. I will examine the notion of *poeisis*, the making or construction of something by means of poetics involving imitation or representation, also called *mimēsis*,90 *tekhne* and plot. I will explore the relevance and applicability of Aristotle's ideas to *The Mathnawi*. To supplement the discussion of *Poetics* I will also turn to Plato and the distinction he drew between imitators and inspired poets. I will suggest that the work of Rumi, beyond being a highly constructed piece of epic poetry, is in fact a testament to and a representation of his metaphysical knowledge rather than an imitation or *mimēsis* of it. As such this links Rumi to Plato’s visionary epistemology and grounds his work in a wider relationship with *poeisis* as a form of representation. But rather than Rumi’s work being a copy of a copy it is a true re-presentation of his experience. My own creative practice and novel will be considered in light of this discussion about presentation and representation of my own experiences.

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This examination of poetics will be conceptually supplemented with the scholarship of al-Hujwiri and will draw from his work, *Kashf al-Mahjub*. *Kashf* is a term employed by al-Hujwiri in his discussion of Sufism and forms the thematic spine of the book. He describes his book as an 'elucidation of the Way of Truth' and 'an uplifting of the veil of mortality.' In it, unveiling is discussed throughout and the last eleven chapters are named after the uncovering of certain veils such as gnosis of God and *samā'* etc., resulting finally in a total ecstatic annihilating vision of God. In the context of this exegesis *kashf* pertains to the metamorphic process of the writer/poet and reader as they attempt to unveil the voice of the text and the text in turn unveils them. In order to illuminate the vision of God that is the ultimate result of *kashf* and destination of the Sufi I will reference Plato and his allegory of the cave, in Book VI of the *Republic*, to briefly examine his notion of imitation and poetry.

Rather than being a guide book for aspiring poets, Aristotle's *Poetics* is philosophical in its concern. Its interest lies in what constitutes a good poem, its aesthetic, construction and its ability to give pleasure to the reader/listener, due in part to the likeness to that which it depicts. Aristotle posits poetry as 'a species of imitation' characterized by the employment of rhythm, language and melody. He asserts that the poetic product is distinguished by its media, object and mode.

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92 Aristotle, *Poetics*, (trans.) M. Heath, as above, p. xi
93 Aristotle, *Poetics*, (trans.) M. Heath, as above, p. xi
Key to Aristotle's philosophy of poetry is the notion of *mimesis*, which he asserts stems from the pleasure human beings glean from mimicry.\(^{94}\) Where Plato wrote of *mimēsis* as a means of both image-making and philosophizing, as in Book VI of the *Republic*, Aristotle forged a new approach focused on artistic concerns.\(^{95}\) Heath translated *mimēsis* in his introduction to *Poetics* as imitation, as opposed to representation. The two can be differentiated for example by the dramatic voice of an actor as imitative *mimēsis* opposed to a narrator representing or telling a poem or story. The distinction, Heath argues in exploring Aristotle’s ideas, lies in the fact that imitation is more real to life. He gives the example of a symbol on a map 'representing' an airport. He says that a symbol is not *mimēsis* but that a scaled outline of its runways would be.\(^{96}\) In this way Rumi’s *Mathnawi* can be understood as a representation rather than an imitation of his experiences as unlike an airport, the topography of his esoteric tableau is infinite and can never be definitively contained.

This representation presents challenges for a creative writer and is something I grappled with. In my novel, *Allah on the Soles of his Feet*, I have presented a compelling father character. The first time he appears with the narrator in the novel he tells her his florid version of the world’s genesis.

My father, Captain Schizophrenia, as he once penned himself on a wall, leans forward a little in his armchair. "Alis" he says, "in de Beginning when Allah made eweryting, der were fruit trees ewerywhere. You can’t imagine what it was like."\(^{97}\)

\(^{94}\) Aristotle, *Poetics*, (trans.) M. Heath, as above, p. xii
\(^{96}\) Aristotle, *Poetics*, (trans.) M. Heath, as above, p. xiii
\(^{97}\) A. M. Ülgezer, *Allah on the Soles of His Feet*, p. 41
The transporting imagery of his story is a stark contrast to the run down room above the Brunswick shop where he tells it. In presenting his character I attempted to capture his voice and particular idiom and their collision with the voice of others. I employed directly accented speech to imitate his voice patterns and to come as close as I could to the experience of hearing it. His voice varies in volume and texture depending on the story he tells. His accent, though not thick is still discernible. V’s become w’s, a’s become the ‘u’ in under and i’s become snipped, short and distinct. It is an accent formed by thirty years of living away from his native country, Turkey.

I was inspired to render this in my novel by the Melbourne poet Pi O who offers insights into poetics and voice. In his books, *24 Hours: The day the language stood still* (Collective Effort Press, 1996) and *Big Numbers: New and Selected Poems* (Collective Effort Press, 2008) he wrote accents phonetically. Pi O argues compellingly through his poetry to present voices in this way, though showing the reader the identity of the character by letting them speak for themselves. I chose to present the father’s voice in this *mimétic* way also, to place the reader as close to the position of the narrator in the text as possible. My intention was for the reader to hear the unmediated rhythm, idiom and melody of the father’s voice, thus coming closer to the narrator’s direct experience of him. The following extract from my novel illustrates misunderstandings that can arise with hearing passed an accent.

"Naqshibendi pipol is from Mohamed…Mohammed's arms and 'Baar Bekir."
"Baar Bekir?"
"Ebaaa."
"Ebaaa," I repeat wondering who he is talking about.
"Eba Bekir. Dats right, dat’s his name."
"Who's that?"
"He's is de right hand of de Mohamed."
And just before I think to ask who is his left hand - "Oh!" I finally hear past his accent. "Abu Bakr!" 98
In this extract the daughter struggles to understand her father’s accented speech.

Speech thus becomes one of the foibles and fallibilities of the characters and adds its own perplexing poetic. The text becomes hermeneutic, as the character and the reader search for meaning. The imitation of the character’s voices allows them to resonate just below the surface of the text. Hearing the character’s voices allows the reader to push, nudge, and flirt against the flatness of the page from beneath which the speech rises. In his book *Narrative*, Cobley argues that "mimēsis seems to be the imitation of the exact words a fictional character speaks, which is precisely the mode of drama, the mimetic art *par excellence*." 99

In an attempt to present an accurate vision of a cigarette box covered in scribbled prayers, rather than telling through summary, I wrote into the text that that which was written on the box, followed by an English translation so as not to isolate the reader.

The cigarette box on the table between us reads

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
*In the name of God*
*The Most Merciful*
*The Most Compassionate*
Winfield Red. 100

Directly after this mode of textual image-making and *mimēsis* the narrator goes on to describe other examples of similar graffi and her exploration becomes a form of

98 A. M. Ülgezer, *Allah in the Soles of his Feet*, p. 56
99 P. Cobley, *Narrative*, as above, p. 59
100 A. M. Ülgezer, *Allah in the Soles of his Feet*, p. 46
mimēsis and diegesis. Cobley argues that this mix of imitation and the poet’s voice constitutes a powerful means of representing the world leading to its foremost manifestation, narrative. In a similar fashion Rumi shows the characters of his tales engaging with and speaking to one another. He narrates his tales, addressing the reader directly (something which I do not do in my novel) and poses rhetorical or didactic questions or ethical commentary. In his Mathnawi he opens mimētic tale about Majnoung petting Layla’s dog. In it the direct speech of the characters is employed alongside Rumi’s poetic narrator’s voice allowing him to address the reader directly:

If I acquaint thee (fully) with the joy of Khwaja, I fear, O wayfarer, lest I make thee late. I will abridge.

Second-guessing the listener/reader’s attention span and/or time constraints, Rumi interrupts his narrative in order to abridge it and does so countless times throughout the six books. Cobley argues that this mixed mode, these interventions “allow for a kind of ‘poetic truth’ which is different from the truth of abstract scientific categories.” Rumi is a character as well as a creator of characters. He directs the story, observes it and intervenes, implicitly asking the reader to intervene with him. Rumi’s parable continues

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101 It is beyond the scope of this research to discuss the dynamic interplay and relationship between mimesis and diegesis. For further reading please refer to: P. Cobley, Narrative, as above and J. Wood, How Fiction Works, Vintage, London, 2009, p. 5 - 31
102 P. Cobley, Narrative, as above, p. 62
104 “For the Mathnawi to be transformative, it is necessary to know how to read it…Rumi…addresses the reader directly as a prospective spiritual traveller: sometimes he thunders, sometimes harangues, sometimes beguiles, sometimes entertains, sometimes inspires with flights of soaring mystical vision, and sometimes he is deliberately insulting, even vulgar.” S. G. Safavi, S. Weightman, Rumi’s Mystical Design: Reading The Mathnawi Book I, as above, p.1. For examples see: Rumi, ed. & trans. Nicholson, R.A., The Mathnawi of Jalalu’ddin Rumi, Translation of Books V and VI, as above, p. 369, l. 1992, l. 2002, p. 405, l. 2665, p. 437, l. 3247, p. 193, l. 3211
105 P. Cobley, Narrative, as above, p. 62
with a discursive commentary on the tale he has just related wherein he questions the reader and speaks didactically about the moral import of his tale. Cobley suggests this approach “is necessary to render a multi-faceted world in more than just one voice.”

Certainly throughout his *Mathnawi* Rumi moves seamlessly between the two narrative modes of *mimêsis* and *diegesis*. In one Rumi himself is the speaker and does not attempt to suggest that anyone else is speaking. This is what Plato calls *pure narrative*. In the second he delivers speech as if he were someone else, rendering himself an 'absent' narrator.

Another key term in Aristotle's *Poetics* is *tekhnê*. “Conventionally translated as ‘craft’, ‘skill’ or ‘art’, Aristotle defines it as 'a productive capacity informed by an understanding of its intrinsic rationale.’” Much as Rumi wrote with the highly polished skill of a poetic technician in the *mathnawi* form of rhyming couplets replete with internal rhymes, his creative processes were not only informed by this awareness of form. Rumi’s creative practice rather was one that married the skills of a poetic technician with those of an inspired mystic beset with a visionary overflow. Rumi states in a story about stones raining down upon the enemies of Lot in Book IV:

> If I relate the help given rationally to the prophets by the inanimate things of the world, The *Mathnawi* will become of such extent that, if forty Camels carry it, they will be unable to bear the full load.

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106 P. Cobley, *Narrative*, as above, p. 66
108 Aristotle, *Poetics*, (trans.) M. Heath, as above, p. ix
109 For further reading on the mystic design and composition of Rumi’s *Mathnawi* please refer to: S. G. Safavi, S. Weightman, *Rumi’s Mystical Design: Reading The Mathnawi Book One*, as above, Chapter Two; ‘The Question of Structure’ and ‘Synoptic Reading and the Principles of Parallelism and Chiasmus.’
Just as tekhnê is vital to Aristotle’s ideas on poetic production the practices, both exoteric and esoteric, of the tariqa are vital to the Sufi as they move towards the divine. In the above example Rumi refers to the discovery along the tariqa that hidden within all things is an esoteric aspect. The unseen which he refers to is limitless and thus unable to be comprehended through corporeal analogies. Further, as Rumi is not imitating but representing or pointing to a vast metaphysical tableau it is reasonable to argue that he does not fall into the same category in which Plato unceremoniously places Homer in Book X the Republic. Plato deems Homer an imitator of appearances who never reaches the truth. He goes on to align painters with poets saying a painter will make a likeness of a cobbler, though he understands nothing of cobbling and his picture is good enough for those who know no more than he does and judge only by colours and figures.111 As a writer I like to imagine that if we had the luxury of listening to Socrates discuss the poetry of Rumi perhaps he would not have dismissed him in the same way he did Homer.

Some of Plato's notions of poets and image-making, found in his early writings such as Ion and Meno and Aristotle's notions of mimēsis, diegesis tekhnê are found in the Rumi’s work. However for the most part, Aristotle is too utilitarian and rationalistic in his approach to apply to the work of Rumi in entirety. Aristotle does not address poets inspired by revelatory, visionary states of the intermediary realm or their mesmeric and incantationary writings. Further, Rumi distinguishes between taqlīd, where what one has learnt is imitated and borrowed, (which can be understood as mimesis) and tahqīq where

111 Plato, The Essential Plato, (trans.) B. Jowett, with an introduction by A. de Botton, as above, p.386
everything is encountered and met in its reality (which can be understood as direct divine
apprehension). Accordingly the spiritual seekers and readers of The Mathnawi should
read and reread the text and verify it through their own experiences.112 And Plato, having
banished the poets from the Republic, deeming their creations to be mere copies of
copies, or mimêtic in the second degree,113 fails to recognise that poets, as well as
philosophers, are capable of apprehending the 'truth' as they leave behind the shadowy
images on the cave wall. The imitation of shadow play on the cave walls is something left
to image makers who work purely by intellectual effort and rational construction. A
category that is too limited in its approach to apply to Rumi or a Sufi poetic.

Another key point of Aristotle’s thesis on poetics is plot. Plot for Aristotle was to
be outlined in detail before the rest of the creative execution of the literary work took
place. A good plot for him was one that was ‘concerned with a unified action, whole and
complete, possessing a beginning, middle parts and an end, so that (like a living
organism) the unified whole could effect its characteristic pleasure.’114 A structured plot
that is not headless or footless, so to speak, that is not discursive and one that is
constructed in a conscious manner is the business of the poet who writes for the
entertainment of his audience or the intellectual gratification of aesthetic architecture.

While writing of this kind may give pleasure or intellectual satisfaction it lacks any

http://www.jsri.ro/new/?download=20_corin_braga.pdf, p. 60
114 Aristotle, *Poetics*, (trans.) M. Heath, as above, p. 38
“claim on mystery”. In the Platonic Dialogue *Ion*, a clear distinction is drawn between imitators of appearances, as paraphrased above and inspired poets.

God takes away the minds of the poets, and uses them as his ministers, as he also uses diviners and holy prophets, in order that we…may know that they speak not of themselves who utter these priceless words in a state of unconsciousness, but that God is the speaker, and that through them he is conversing with us.¹¹⁶

Employing Plato’s allegory of the cave, the poets described above, including Rumi, can be understood as those who have left the cave’s shadowy confines of image-making, where ‘the truth [is] literally nothing but the shadows of the images.’ They have walked out into the sun-light to the direct apprehension of the truth. For these poets and writers plot is a component of this direct apprehension rather than something achieved through intellectual effort. In relation to the Sufi poetic Aristotle’s notion of plot is prescriptive and perhaps lends itself better to drama than to Sufi poetry. Plot, for the mystic poet is not a studied contrivance of the intellect but rather a feature of the poetry that is revealed to the poet along with other poetic and mystical tropes. In any one of the six books of *The Mathnawi* scores of separate narratives are offered, each with their own separate discrete plot. Schimmel, writing of *The Mathnawi* notes:

The book is not built according to a system; it lacks architectural structure; the verses lead one into another, and the most heterogeneous thoughts are woven together by word associations and loose threads of stories.¹¹⁷

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¹¹⁷ S. G. Safavi, S. Weightman, *Rumi’s Mystical Design: Reading The Mathnawi Book 1*, as above, p. 41
No one meta-plot is discernible however overarchin
g the six books certain themes related to the
travails of the Sufi path may be distinguished. Themes such as the struggle
with one’s lower self or nafs, faqr or spiritual poverty, tawhīd or Unity of God, ‘aql or
intellect, ‘ilm or knowledge and the importance of moral principles like honesty and
fairness and the love of God.

In relation to plot Aristotle spoke of the importance for the poet of gesture and of
visualizing the action in his Poetics. Rumi embodied this importance as he whirled
eccstatically reciting verses. Just as Socrates may have approved of Rumi’s inspired states,
so too might Aristotle have embraced Rumi’s intimate embodiment of his text. Aristotle
wrote that:

one should…work out plots using gestures…those who are
actually experiencing the emotions are the most
convincing…(this is why the art of poetry belongs to people who
are naturally gifted or mad; of these the former are adaptable, and
the latter are not in their right mind.)\textsuperscript{118}

He does not explicate any further on the creation of poetry by those who are ‘mad’ or
explain just what he means by this word. However it is reasonable to assume that he is
referring to one possessed or overwhelmed by some sort of divine inspiration such a one
as Socrates speaks of in Ion, Phaedra or Meno. It is precisely this sort of madness that for
the Sufis is an elect spiritual knowledge, one invested with the authority and empiricism
of experience. As Aristotle himself said in the opening of his Metaphysics, ’[a]ll human
beings by nature desire knowledge’.\textsuperscript{119} Just how this knowledge is gained and defined is

\textsuperscript{118} Aristotle, Poetics, (trans.) M. Heath, as above, p.28
\textsuperscript{119} Aristotle, Poetics, (trans.) M. Heath, as above, p. xi
where the tension lies (for an outside observer) in a Sufi poetic. So while parts of Aristotle's thesis are applicable when examining a Sufi poetic and indeed that of Rumi, this integral component of divine inspiration, etc., which characterises The Mathnawi, is not examined. Aristotle’s Poetics is worth examination yet it is only able to take us part of the way in to a text like The Mathnawi. This nexus of experience, embodiment, 'madness' and poetry brings us closer to a Sufi poetic and closer to the work of Rumi.

Dance, when you're broken open.
Dance, if you've torn the bandages off.
Dance in the middle of the fighting
Dance in your blood
Dance, when you're perfectly free.  

Rumi's gesture could be approached from an Aristotelian sense as the conscious and creative employment of rhythm, language and melody in the sense of mimêsis or representation. Or these gestures of spinning and turning could be seen as the embodiment of the mystic visions encountered by Rumi. Further much like a subjective, idiosyncratic prayer, they could be understood as representing a point at which faith and text have fled the confines of ink, paper and intellect and saturated the poet.

Schimmel observes that the 'rhythms [of The Mathnawi] often suggest the turning and whirling movement out of which they came' and goes on further to state, in regards to the meters Rumi employed, that the result is 'something very similar to Turkish folksongs.' Rumi was also known to fall into inspired trances wherein he recited verses to the sound of the goldsmith's hammers in the bazaar at Konya. One of his favoured

120 Rumi, The Essential Rumi, (trans.) C. Barks, J. Moyne, as above, p. 281
followers was Zarkub the goldsmith.\textsuperscript{121} This phonetic and sonic embodiment of poetics is reflective of the narrative mode which Rumi dexterously employed, juggling a multitude of digressional stories and themes to a specific rhythmic pattern.

As the words of \textit{The Mathnawi} fell from the tongue of Rumi he spun around in endless circles in a state of rapture or even trance,\textsuperscript{122} composing and singing verses to his scribe Chelebi. He spun in grief and longing for his departed beloved, Shams. He also spun in ecstasy as this departure became the true arrival of the divine beloved internalised and living in his heart. Rumi's gestures can be understood as representing and embodying the text and the endless, cyclical revolutions of death and birth, of immanence and transcendence as his feet kept the revolutions of his body steady, further steadying the internal rhythms of the couplets, in the melodic Persian language.

\begin{quote}
A secret turning in us
makes the universe turn.
Head unaware of feet,
and feet head. Neither cares.
They keep turning.\textsuperscript{123}
\end{quote}

This semiotic synergy of utterance, gesture and text have fused together in the composition of \textit{The Mathnawi} and combined to shape the particular subjectivity of Rumi. Further, what is described in \textit{The Mathnawi} can "suggest to us the topography of these interworlds, as they have been seen by those who have \textit{actually} been there."\textsuperscript{124} In my
novel I explore this synergy through spinning. The father describes this embodiment of divine intoxication to his daughter:

"And then Alis I was dancing like this!" and he gets up and spins around and around on the spot. He had a shop front at that time. I walked passed once as a child and there he was. "In front of the window and people would look because I didn’t stop! Just all day I dance like this saying Allah Allah Allah…" Round and round and round. The palm of his left hand facing down and the palm of the right hand open to receive the cosmos. "HA!"

He falters halts and looks at me clapping out one face of a laugh.125

After his demonstration the father offers no further explanation. His teaching is the action itself and points to the experience of ‘being there.’ This ‘being there’ can be understood as the different states a Sufi experiences and indeed fanā.126 Rumi’s poetic expression of the mystical quest was deeply concerned with the transformative experience of the intimate re-union of ‘being there’. He allegorizes this in a story of Majnoun when he becomes sick with longing for Layla. Majnou exclaims to the doctor:

I am afraid…lest if you let my blood you suddenly inflict a wound with your lancet upon Layla. The man of reason whose heart is enlightened knows that between Layla and me there is no difference.127

125 A. M. Ülgezer, Allah on the Soles of his Feet, p.79
126 Some mystics, religious theologians and scholars rejected this notion of fanā as not only impossible but blasphemous, Rumi and the so-called intoxicated Sufis certainly didn’t. The most famous being Mansur Hallaj (d.922) who was martyred for his declaration; “I am the Truth!” Beyazid Bistami (d.874) was another intoxicated Sufi, known for his proclamation, “How great is my glory?! Glory to me!” These exclamations are understood by some to be evidence of fanā, while others would argue that these exclamations are merely the intoxication of a passing visionary state for as al-Hujwiri states an ‘awareness of unawareness is yet an awareness of self,’ al-Hujwiri, Kashf al-Mahjub, ed. &trans. Nicholson, R. A., as above, p. 243
Further for these individuals, the Sufi poets and saints, (lit. Arabic awliyā) to reach the level of fanā they are ‘aware neither of [themselves] …nor of any absence of awareness of [themselves]…at that level of “withness”, spatiotemporal proximity and distance have no meaning.’\textsuperscript{128} As Rumi wrote:

\begin{quote}
I am filled with you.
Skin, blood, bone, brain, and soul.
There’s no room for lack of trust, or trust.
Nothing in this existence but that existence.\textsuperscript{129}
\end{quote}

\textit{The Mathnawi} originated from a place of such spiritual re-union and thus is read by Sufis as the result of a visionary and unitary experience of the Divine. For without the communication, the \textit{baqā} of his experience of fanā, the encounter would remain a tightly bound knuckle of secrets with no broader spiritual or ethical import.

In order to complement the preceding discussion of \textit{Poetics} the work of al-Hujwiri, due to his cultural, spiritual and temporal proximity to Rumi will be examined. al-Hujwiri in his \textit{Kashf al-Mahjub} describes the Sufi path as being characterized by the transformative process of unveiling or kashf. In a practical sense this notion of unveiling can be applied to the progression along the spiritual path marked by the spiritual wayfaring stations or \textit{maqamāt}. The seeker progresses along the path, unveiling the aspects of her or himself that are not conducive to spiritual growth, in turn unveiling the reality of the divine beloved.

\textsuperscript{129} Rumi, \textit{Unseen Rain Quatrains of Rumi}, (trans.) C. Barks, J. Moyne, Shambala, Massachusetts, 1986, p.19
In a poetic sense *kashf* can be understood as the process of removing the veils that obscure direct apprehension of the divine beloved, the unveiling of the hidden inner meanings of a text as one penetrates deeper into it beyond the symbolism of the words and letters. For, ‘as long as [the mystic] remains bound to the letters…[s]he is in some sense fettered by idols…instead of reaching the place in which there are no more letters or forms’.\(^{130}\) In a Platonic sense this being fettered to symbols is akin to the need to move beyond the *mimēsis* of the shadowy images flickering on the cave wall. Similarly in a Sufi sense, reaching paradoxically through and ultimately beyond poetic experience, the hidden inner meanings of a text are internalized as the cave of the corporeal world is left behind and one experiences a direct apprehension of the divine source humming beneath the surface of language.

A Sufi poetic then is not about craft and skill alone. Nor is it one concerned with mimicry or trying to create a perfect likeness of the object/subject represented. Whilst it does include various creative forms both poetic and musical its primary concern is not to entertain an audience or fashionable ornamentations. Rather, a Sufi poetics is one based on the authority of experience rather than intellect. It is one concerned with the vagaries of spiritual wayfaring, nostalgia and longing. Particular and subjective, it is at the same time a universal calling out, a poetics of return to source at any cost. Through the unveiling of form it attempts to reach the formless and through the unveiling of the effable it reaches for the ineffable.

\(^{130}\) A. M. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, as above, p.411
This reaching however is not a one way conversation. The process of unveiling or kashf in a poetic sense is a dialogue. Just as the writer invites the reader into the text, so too does water seek the thirsty or as Rumi states:

Not a single lover would seek union
If the beloved were not seeking it

In my novel this reciprocity and kashf is expressed by the father when he describes the journeys of his absent Sheikh:

"He travelled de universe. Den he travelled 500 year distance of one screen. He has to pass 5 screen like dat to go to heaven."
“What’s a screen?”
But the light moves across his eyes and he doesn’t hear me.
“What do you mean by screen?” I ask again.
“Ah… sort of a curtain but you can’t...”
“Ah curtain, ok...”
“But you can’t see it. You can’t pass, you hev to hev speshal allowance to pass from Allah, otherwise no one can pass."

What the father describes here as curtains and screens is what al-Hujwiri details as the different stages of 'unveiling' on the Sufi path to God. The travelling of described above is clearly not physical travelling in a corporeal landscape. Rather it is travelling that happens through the faculty of the intuitive imagination in the intermediary realm; the threshold space between the seen and unseen. The reciprocity described above of the allowance from Allah is akin to Rumi’s beloved seeking re-union. The landscape of the

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131 “Just as they that are thirsty seek water from the world ... (water) too seeks in the world the[y] that are thirsty,” Rumi, The Mathnawi of Jalālū’ddin Rūmī, (trans. & ed.) R.A.Nicholson, as above, Book I, p. 95, l.1741
132 A. M. Ülgezer, Allah on the Soles of his Feet, p. 49
intermediary realm and the journeying therein will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter.

By utilising *kashf* as a template, a Sufi poetic can be understood textually as a reciprocal experience in which as one writes/reads, yielding one’s self up and opening to a text, the text in turn enters the internal life of the writer/reader and writes them. In other words, much like the beloved seeks the lover, the Sufi poetic is characterized by the text claiming the writer/reader as much as the writer/reader claims the text. It is this claiming that renders the poetic transformative. The text itself has a certain agency as the internal life of the writer/reader becomes a 'workshop' space or hothouse for its transformative power. In this way a certain reciprocity exists, a certain suppleness and relaxing of the boundaries of self and other, form and formlessness. Text then becomes a living voice and poetics the listening to and unveiling of that voice. A Sufi reading of a text therefore can be understood as a dynamic exchange wherein occurs an unveiling of the text and an unveiling of the writer/reader. Just how this Sufi poetic manifests creatively in my work and is fed by the ‘elsewhere’ journeys made in the intermediary realm will be the focus of the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR

Re-Imagining Beyond the Frontier

As I have discussed in the previous chapters there are a number of key features of the Sufi poetic which relate to my creative practice and novel. As Sufism is the mystic ‘seed’ of Islam it is inherently influenced by the latter’s discursive traditions of orality and aurality. My own cultural experiences as a Turkish Australian female writer have very much drawn on this tradition. The Sufi’s transmission of esoteric knowledge also manifests itself through dreams and visions, as in the case of the absent Sheikh mentioned in Chapter 1. The Sufi poetic further reflects the Sufi path or tarīq towards reunion with God and is inherently transformative through the process of kashf. This unveiling pertains to visionary encounters perceived by the faculty of the imagination in the intermediary realm. Thus, the Sufi poetic is the direct result of travelling to the intermediary realm. What is experienced there is not the stuff of mere fantasy but rather ontologically real and transformative encounters. These experiences are internalized,
lived and sometimes, though not always, incorporated through embodied gesture before being re-presented through poetic text. It is this intermediary realm which interests me in this chapter and just how the writer and reader gain access to it through their connections with text.

In order to unlock the intermediary realm one needs a key and the key for both the writer and the reader, is the faculty of the intuitive imagination. This intuition is not unique to 13th century Persian texts nor to the Platonic or Aristotelian ideas which preceded them. In more recent eras the 20th century philosopher Henri Bergson speaks of intuition in relation to the ways in which it offers the reader a way into texts. In the opening lines of his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Bergson asserts that philosophers distinguish between two different types of knowledge; relative and absolute. The first implies ‘moving around’ an object and depends on the point of view of the subject and the use of symbols to express the experience. This may be likened to Rumi’s *taqlīd* mentioned earlier. The second type of knowledge requires the subject to enter into the object or experience and is resonant with Rumi’s *tahqīq* where everything is encountered and met in its reality (which can be understood as direct divine apprehension) It depends neither on point of view nor on symbols.133 Bergson also argued that there are:

[t]wo ways of knowing anything. The first is characteristic of the intellect which approaches the thing externally…the second is the process of intuition, whereby we “enter into” the thing and identify ourselves with it by a kind of “intellectual sympathy”….Here no symbols are involved, yet the knowledge attained is absolute and perfect.134

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134 H. Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, (trans.) T. E. Hulme, as above, 1976, p.11
This immediate, intimate and direct experience of a thing, the proximity of subject and object to the point that the two merge, and the empiricism of that experience, can be likened to the Sufi’s experience of fanā. In Sufi idiom the state of ‘being in’ is akin to fanā. Just as Bergson articulated this experience, centuries after him, Rumi describes this knowledge from such a fusion:

If you know the true nature
Of existence and absence both
Then neither can be a problem for you
Leaving the world of appearances behind
You become the truth
Distinctions of any kind no longer matter.\textsuperscript{135}

In an ecstatic visionary state the Sufi enters into this \textit{absolute} knowledge. Bergson maintained that this entering into a thing is superior to any other way of knowing something, stating further the state becomes possible through “an effort of the imagination.” In this way the reader employs a new hermeneutics which “involve a sympathetic participation in distant experiences and events.”\textsuperscript{136} In her article ‘Cultural Hermeneutics: The Concept of Imagination in the Phenomenological Approaches of Henry Corbin and Mircea Eliade’ Adriana Berger describes this hermeneutics as: “[a]n intuitive vision, which requires a special method characterised by openness, reception, re-experience, suspension of judgement…and sympathetic participation as a mode of feeling.”\textsuperscript{137} Berger like Bergson saw the need for the reader to participate actively in the

\textsuperscript{137} A. Berger, ‘Cultural Hermeneutics: ‘The Concept of Imagination in the Phenomenological Approaches of Henry Corbin and Mircea Eliade’, as above, p.143
hermeneutic process by opening up to a text and allowing it to enter them as they in turn enter it. Thus the reading of a Sufi text is reflective of the creative process of the writer. The two processes (writing/reading) act as mirrors of each other. For the reader to move through the mirror of the text and enter into it, Berger argues that the reader is required to give themselves over to its uniquely unifying engagement, a partnership which is “[a] method close to poetic experience, arising from…the perception of an overall unity that cannot be captured by either dogma or positive investigation.” The sympathetic participation, receptivity and intuitive participation of the reader takes them into the text, allowing them to come closer to the possibility of experiencing what it is to be overwhelmed by its esoteric aspects, thus closely approximating what the writer felt when they wrote it. The intuitive key, coupled with the faculty of the imagination, allows both the reader and writer to enter into the intermediary realm where the self is lost to the work. The Sufis also employ this intuitive process to engage with the intermediary realm.

Corin Braga, in his article, ‘Three Concepts for Defining Creative Fantasy,’ attempts to delineate between imagination, imaginaire and imaginal. Noting as he does that: “imagination [traditionally understood] is a term that designates the function of the spirit the Greeks called phantasmata …to produce mental images [however] they are not the real thing itself, they are only a copy of it.” This recalls the copying of shadows on the cave wall of Plato and the relative knowledge of Bergson. As the imagination is associated with fantasy, Braga describes the second term, imaginaire as an attempt begun by Kant to resuscitate the reputation of the former term which had become too closely

138 A. Berger, ‘Cultural Hermeneutics: ‘The Concept of Imagination in the Phenomenological Approaches of Henry Corbin and Mircea Eliade’, as above, p,141
associated with fantasy. The marriage between sense and reason for Kant was represented as the “transcendental imagination, a psychic function ... the precondition ... for all knowledge.”

The third and final term Braga analyses in his article is l’imaginal. He asserts that far from the phantasmata of the Greeks the experience of l’imaginal (a French adaptation of the Latin mundus imaginalis) is ontologically real as opposed to fictitious. Braga concludes that the distinctions may offer a better understanding of creative practice and further, religious experience.

The term mundus imaginalis was coined by the French scholar Henry Corbin, who was the first to translate Heidegger into French and the first to introduce Iranian Islamic philosophy in France. Corbin has noted the interconnections between the ancient Greek philosophers, the Iranian mystic tradition and contemporary philosophers such as Heidegger and came to Islamic mysticism through his contact with Louis Massignon at the Sorbonne and the writings of Suhrwardi, 12th century Persian mystic. He claimed that had he not been exposed to Heidegger it would have been more difficult to translate the metaphysics of figures like Suhrwardi. Corbin’s mundus imaginalis possesses a kind of existential autonomy and can be aligned with the intermediary realm of the Sufis. This threshold space is flanked by two realities; that of the ‘intelligible One’ and the

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140 C. Braga, ‘Three Concepts for Defining Creative Fantasy’, *JSRI*, as above, p.63
141 Suhrwardi believed that: discursive philosophy, which originated in the Aristotelian school [was] not suitable to apprehend reality. [Rather] intuitive philosophy coming down from Hermes to Plato...[was] the only adequate way to apprehend reality...[and]... the only adequate source of truth.” M. Kamal, *From Essence to Being: The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra and Heidegger*, as above, 2010, p. 57
142 A. Berger, ‘Cultural Hermeneutics, The Concept of Imagination in the Phenomenological Approaches of Henry Corbin and Mircea Eliade’, *JSRI*, as above, p.144
‘sensible world of body and matter’. In Corbin’s extensive studies on Islam's esoteric aspects, particularly esoteric Shi‘ism, he presented the experiences of mystics and attempted to describe in detail, to a Western secular audience, the topography of the realms they traversed. In doing so he became an expounder of the integrity and validity of these experiences. Not being satisfied for them to be perceived as the mere fantasies of a heady Oriental imagination or philosophy, he described the “initiation to vision”\textsuperscript{144} and the \textit{mundus imaginalis} as:

\begin{quote}
(A) world as ontologically real as the worlds of the senses and the world of the intellect, a world that requires a faculty or perception belonging to it, a faculty that is a cognitive function, a noetic value, as fully real as the faculties of sensory perception or intellectual intuition. This faculty is the imaginative power, the one we must avoid confusing with the imagination that modern man identifies with “fantasy” and that, according to him, produces only the “imaginary”.\textsuperscript{145}
\end{quote}

This \textit{mundus imaginalis} or the intermediary realm has been described extensively in the poetic idiom of the Islamic tradition from Muhammad and his night journey to Rumi and his \textit{Mathnawi}. The Andalusian Sufi ‘Ibn Arabī described it as the third world between the witnessed and the unseen worlds, referring to it as the \textit{barzakh} or isthmus and the faculty of the imagination as a ‘prophetic mode of perception,’ employed to traverse this realm. Within this space “things that are normally inaccessible to sense perception or to reason are given form by God and then perceived within the imagination

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\textsuperscript{143} C. Braga, ‘Imagination, Imaginaire, Imaginal: Three concepts for Defining Creative Fantasy,’ \textit{JSRI}, as above, p. 65
\end{flushright}
by those to whom the door to unseen things has been opened.”146 In responding to these esoteric aspects of Islam, Corbin applied ‘Ibn Arabi’ s mystical theosophy wherein visible states are not the cause of phenomena rather the cause is invisible and hidden,147 allowing him to engage more directly and experientially with mystic texts.

Another perspective on the barzakh is provided by the Persian architectural term dihliz, which denotes the space in a traditionally built Arabic house between the front door and the courtyard where the inhabitants receive guests.148 The scholar Ebrahim Moosa employs this term metaphorically when he locates the creative and spiritual praxis of the Persian Sufi philosopher al-Ghazālī.149 He states that al-Ghazālī’s writings originate from this liminal threshold space- this dihliz of entry into the text and another existential realm. In this realm which links the corporeal street to the incorporeal home, the writer and the reader move back and forth informed by the experience of both realities. The poet and reader move between the corporeal world of the text and the incorporeal world beyond and their poetic fruit.

In order for a reader to approach a Sufi text and experience all that it has to offer, the urge to withdraw the writers, their spiritual and creative processes, from their own perspectives, must be resisted. It is vital instead to approach a Sufi text and writer from within their own traditions. In the case of the Sufi poetic then the term imagination is

147 A. Berger, ‘Cultural Hermeneutics: The Concept of Imagination in the Phenomenological Approaches of Henry Corbin and Mircea Eliade’, as above, p.146
149 There has been new scholarship which suggests Rumi read al- Ghazālī’s Ihyā‘ Ulūm al-dīn, “The Vivification of the Religious Sciences” (c. 1106) in order to help him organise sections of Book I. Please refer to: S. G. Safavi, S. Weightman, Rumi’s mystical Design: Reading The Mathnawi, Book I, as above.
clearly not the *phantasmata* of the Greeks, nor the Kantian *imaginäre*. Rather it is a penetrative and subtle faculty of cognition beyond the rational intellect and coupled with Bergson’s intuitive key one may experience this intermediary realm. In Sufi practice this imaginative faculty is nourished initially by the exoteric manifestation of Islam or the *shari’a* and then by the sustenance of hidden, inner knowledge. Berger states that this intuitive imaginative key:

…far from being the mere fantasy we usually take it to be, [allows] the active and creative scene of encounters with other worlds through which understanding is achieved….Imagination thus appears as both a means of knowledge and a modality of being, and in that sense it bears a philosophical (existential) dimension.\(^{150}\)

Such encounters in the intermediary realm were the poetic sustenance of Rumi. Without them we would not know him today. As he relates: “[a] poem is better than a hundred bales of silk robes, especially (when it is composed by) a poet who fetches pearls from the depths.”\(^{151}\) Corbin describes the fetching of these pearls as the: “[t]ransmutation of internal spiritual states into external states, [and accordingly] into vision events symbolizing those internal states.”\(^{152}\) And in this sense *The Mathnawi* is the harvest of Rumi’s mystical migration to the intermediary reality, the *mundus imaginalis*. His experience of *fanā* is also communicated as he moved beyond the textual experience of spiritual and *relative* knowledge to a direct and *absolute* knowledge wherein he embodied

\(^{152}\) H. Corbin, *Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam*, (trans.) L. Fox, Swedenborg Monograph Series, West Chester Pennsylvania, p. 10
the experiences of his text. *The Mathnawi* then represents Rumi’s ontologically real encounter with the divine beloved. Just as Rumi utilized the power of his visionary imagination to experience the intermediary reality, so too can we as readers, harness our visionary imagination in an attempt to enter the heart of the text and glimpse the hidden inner meaning of its allegory and allusion. This imagining into the text results in a textual immersion wherein the act of reading imitates in its unveiling, the act of writing and hence the act of revealing.

Corbin further refers to these encounters in the intermediary realm as *imaginales* “ontological[ly] [real] manifestations of the One” that are encountered, witnessed and experienced as opposed to *imaginaires*, or fictions.\(^\text{153}\) The Sufi poetic then is one that represents the experiences of the intermediary realm. It is in this realm that *kashf* takes place, mirroring the task of the hermeneut. According to Corbin this interpretation “consists of letting the object show itself.”\(^\text{154}\) This receptivity to being interrogated by a text points to inner shifts that occur within the reader. The abrasions of the text on the internal life of the reader are the result of its transformative potential. In this process the reciprocity, much like that of the lover seeking the divine beloved, is inverted as the reader becomes subject to the text. In surrendering one’s self to the text, in ‘the going under,’ so to speak, the text acts upon the reader as they open to its suggestion. No longer is the text the subject of the reader’s scrutiny and examination but the reader of the text’s, as they reveal themselves to the text allowing it to unveil them.

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\(^{153}\) Braga, C., *Three Concepts for Defining Creative Fantasy*, as above, p.65

CONCLUSION

Blood Language

How then have I as a writer of a novel which draws on my personal experiences of Sufism and the intermediary realm addressed the ideas of immersion both in a literal and figurative way? In the novel’s final scene the narrator takes a boat trip down the Bosphorus with her father and grandfather. As they sail between the continents of Europe and Asia she leans on the ferry railing to write in her notebook. In a momentary lack of concentration the notebook slips and falls into the water. Not content to simply watch it sink into the water she dives in after it. Shortly afterwards her father dives in after her. What follows is an underwater scene of transcendence. The letters of the notebook bleed off the page saturating the narrator. It is not a death scene but rather a metamorphosis where the text claims the narrator immersing her with it. The narrator is transformed in the liminal, watery realm and begins her journey of ‘passing over.’ The scene alludes to the idiom of the Sufis who refer to death as a wedding with the Divine.
[f]inally the ecstasy of my lover the water rushing to meet me… as I plunge down in bloom through the chromatics of solitude and am submerged in the blossoming icy fever heat, the laced splash of a bridal trance….And then all at once a violent crash disturbs my watery reveries as Baba leaps in and…begins to dismantle like an alphabet or the pages of my book…the light comes flooding through…The letters fall about, the romance of their black ink is returning to the ocean, staining my lips and neck, my hands feet and tongue… he…dissolve like sugar into the watery light… the letters come drifting yet slowly through the deep blue light dark. A lemon quarter passes by me and a parsley sprig, the ferry’s hull…the disbanded letters of my notebook, the alphabet of my father's face, the alphabet of my heart.\textsuperscript{155}

In this extract not only do I as a writer play with a corporeal threshold, that of Europe and Asia, and the threshold space between them, the Bosphorus (a strait of water which links the Sea of Marmara and The Black Sea), but also the incorporeal threshold. The intermediary realm for the narrator is under the strait of water, the throat of Istanbul, as she encounters characters she met in her pre-birth state. I refer to a popular allegory of annihilation in the Sufi poetic, that of the rain drop returning to the ocean, individual yet indistinguishable. In the case of my novel this allegory becomes that of the ink returning to the ocean. As the text dissolves and saturates the narrator it also claims and transforms her, leading to the ultimate transformation, her life/death/re-birth. Further, when her father appears he throws her the dot below the ba - ޝ، referred to in my novel both as the dot and as the fire. This is the second letter of the Arabic alphabet. The dot or the diacritical mark beneath it is significant for Sufis. There is a Sufi saying that the esoteric meanings of all the revealed texts can be found in al-Qur’an and all of al-Qur’an can be found in the first chapter and all of the first chapter can be found in the first line and all of

\textsuperscript{155} A. M. Ülgezer, \textit{Allah on the Soles of his Feet}, p.241
the first line can be found in the first letter of the opening invocation and all of this can be
found in the dot below the ٦

And all at once as the dot reaches the bone white of my hands I
begin to dissolve with it. All is rhythm and light… I am born with
the ink and fire of my notebook… A canto of silver gulls scud
about on spirit wings and I begin to laugh because out here where
there is no direction, no east and no west, from somewhere I hear
a voice, Selam Alaykum Alis! I’ll see you der den! 156
This final section of the novel, its transformative space, moves beyond the disbanded
letters of the notebook where language has dissolved. It was intended to be reminiscent of
the oddly abrupt way Rumi’s Mathnawi ends but as well as intent the work took on its
own dreamlike transformative shape. 157 The process of writing the final scene led to a
flood of visions that pervaded my waking and sleeping states so that my days and nights
were infused with the water, the ink and the transformation of the characters. The whole
novel was pollinated by the multitude of stories and visions imparted to me by my father
and aunt and my own vision states culminating in the dramatic final scene. Mittermaier
has stated: “The Sufi author, far from being an individual creative author, is de-centered
by being embedded in a “network of spiritual-social relations.” 158 And it is this de-
centering of the Sufi author which points to the dissolution of identity of the self in the
other, be it in Shams or in the fanā of the divine beloved. The silence resulting from this

156 A. M. Ülgezer, Allah on the Soles of his Feet, p. 243
157 The last lines of Book VI are as follows: “Finally, the youngest brother, who was the weakest of all,
succeeded where his brothers had failed, and obtained his earthly mistress, the king's daughter, as his bride,
and the spiritual beloved as well.” Here the Mathnawi breaks off but according to the Bulaq edition, the
following conclusion was supplied by Jalalu-'d-Din's son, Bahau-'d-Din Sultan Valad: “Part of the story
remains untold. It was retained in his mind and was not disclosed. The story of the princes remains
unfinished. The pearl of the third brother remains unstrung. Here speech, like a camel, breaks down on its
road. I will say no more, but guard my tongue from speech. The rest is told without aid of tongue to the
heart of him whose spirit is alive.” From Rumi, ed. & trans. Whinfield, E. H., Masnavi i ma'navi : The
Spiritual Couplets of Maulana Jalālu-'d-Dīn Muhammad i Rūmī, Octagon Press for the Sufi Trust,
London, 1979, Book VI
158 A. Mittermaier, ‘The Book of Visions: Dreams, Poetry and Prophecy in Contemporary Egypt’, as above,
p. 235
dissolution and with which Rumi finally ends his *Mathnawi* can be seen as an even deeper language, beyond the fetters of words.

At first, I sang and recited poems, 
keeping the neighbours awake. 
Now more intense, quieter. 
When the fire flames up, smoke vanishes.\(^{159}\)

It is in the silence beyond words and text that Rumi discovers the visions of the intermediary realm and the dissolution of the self in the divine beloved, where text has become internalised and can thus begin its metamorphic work so that he may subsist on a silent fire without the smoke of words.

Just as the transmission of Sufi knowledge is imparted orally/aurally, through demonstration and the experiences in the intermediary realm it was in a similar fashion that I came to be infused with the tropes of the Sufi poetic. Through the rhythms of languages I didn’t always understand I internalised the stories of my father and aunt. In surrendering to their pull I let them claim me as a writer, and using the faculty of my intuitive imagination allowed them to flower into my novel. Here it is pertinent to quote it at some length:

> Here in this city and within the walls of this flat, I re-discover language, the elemental sound meaning that bore my first thoughts. I float across syllables, rhythms, and metres of prayer in some primary conversation with myself. I learn to pray in Turkish, Arabic and German, in gesture and in thought. I learn the language and chronology of water, the repetition of devotion, and the pleasure of the chromatics of surrender in kissing the earth. I re-discover the language of the body: scrubbed, pumiced, starved, gorged, painted, pummelled, needed and denied, shamed and

\(^{159}\) Rumi, *Unseen Rain, Quatrains of Rumi*, (trans. & ed.) C. Barks, J. Moyne, as above, p.36
celebrated. The language of blood; that slow unsung poetry that moves through our veins, like our closest companion or the killer at our backs. Sound moves through blood and blood moves through language. Language moves through me and I move through this vast theatre of symbols chanting something my father once taught me; *jin jin dagada jin jin. jin jin dagada jin jin jin.* Still now I can almost hear the deep ringing song of solitude as I did when I waited impatiently once, such a long time ago, to reach this city. Here the letters and words of blood form the mantle of stories that my Nurdan Hala embroiders me with. Sometimes gently, sometimes brusquely, she knits me inextricably into the lore of her family until I have become blood language and the shapes of these sounds stir like cross-currents, surfacing in me from some great depth.\(^{160}\)

Through these explorations I have attempted to examine my own creative practice and the spiritual and cultural traditions which shaped it. As a Turkish Australian writer I have attempted through my novel and exegesis to present a compelling representation of the experience of inhabiting two worlds, Australia and Turkey, the corporeal and incorporeal and further attempted to present the experience of one who has become infused with such a poetic despite cultural, linguistic and familial dislocation. I have attempted to elucidate the power of the oral tradition of Sufism and show its early western philosophical influences and confluences with more contemporary western philosophers and scholars, thereby attesting to its validity and the experiences of the intermediary realm therein.

In the Sufi poetic, just as the process of writing is one of revealing and moving closer to the divine beloved, so too is the reading process one of participating in this experience as the reader enjoys the fruits of the text,

\[^{160}\text{A. M. Ülgezer, }\text{Allah on the Soles of his Feet, p. 175}\]
stripping it back to its essence and following its voice thereby beginning, 
existentially to move beyond the husk of the corporeal page to approach the 
kernel of the text. Just as poetic creation is understood through Sufism, Sufism 
too can be understood through poetic creation.