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# Correspondences between English Romantic and Persian Sufi Poets: An Essay in Anagogic Criticism\*

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## I. PLATONISM IN ROMANTIC AND SUFI POETRY

Cross-cultural studies in comparative mysticism involving Muslim Sufi and Western poets have been seldom made; when made, have seldom been successful.<sup>1</sup> Despite this, homologies both of content and intent in the verse of the classical Persian Sufi poets and the English Metaphysical and later Romantic poets are clearly present insofar as a huge intellectual common ground between both poetic traditions exists. The closest corresponding school of English poetry to Persian Sufi poetic imagery, aside from the Romantics, is that of the Metaphysical—Neoplatonic and Meditative—poets of the seventeenth century such as Donne, Marvell, Herbert, Crashaw, Traherne and Vaughan.<sup>2</sup> The fraternity of Poetic Genius between the Sufis and Romantics is not only animated by the metaphysics of the Imagination, as

\* This essay originated as a lecture presented to the Temenos Academy, 15 July 2008.

1. The reason for this is primarily scholars' poor grasp of the nuances of Sufi mysticism and doctrine. For instance, the Syrian-Lebanese poet Adonis attempted to read Rimbaud as 'an oriental-Sufi poet' in his *Sufism and Surrealism* (London: Saqi, 2005), p. 194; but because of his unwillingness to seriously engage with the mystical doctrines which the French *voyant* shared with the Sufi visionaries, his comparisons remain provocative at best and unconvincing at worst. His work stands in contrast to Azize Özgüven's 'Two Mystic Poets: Yunus Emre and William Blake', in A. Turgut Kut and Günay Kut, ed., *In Memoriam Abdülbakı Gölpinarlı, Journal of Turkish Studies* 20 (1996) 234–47, who provides not only some interesting parallels in their thought, but several deep insights.

2. Cf. Eric Schroeder's remarks in his 'Verse Translation and Hafiz', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 7:4 (1948) 209–22 (p. 216) on the similarity of Hāfiz and Donne, and the interesting observations on correspondences between European and Persian poets made by Robert Rehder, 'Persian Poets and Modern Critics', *Edebiyat* 2:1 (1977) 91–117 (pp. 98–9). However, I do not wish to exaggerate these similarities, but merely to observe that there is more room for making comparisons—in respect to rhetorical and poetic devices, poetic forms (e.g. between sonnet and ghazal), symbolism, metaphysical and cosmological theory, erotic theology, etc.—between these schools of poetry than there is reason to accentuate their differences.

Henry Corbin's researches have shown,<sup>3</sup> but grounded in the mutually shared Platonism and Neoplatonism nurturing both poetic traditions, not to mention many similar metaphysical world-views, cosmogonies, theerotic and ethical doctrines which Christianity and Islam hold in common and which transcend their exoteric theological divergences (such as Islam's rejection of the Christian dogmas of the Incarnation, Trinity and Crucifixion).

Regarding Platonism and Neoplatonism in particular, before attempting any comparison it should be underlined that there is far less known about the literary history of the Platonic tradition in medieval Islam than there is about it in Christianity. For instance, not one single Persian Sufi poet has ever directly quoted a Platonic dialogue to my knowledge.<sup>4</sup> 'It remains difficult to say just how much of Plato, whether in integral translation or in epitomes,' F. E. Peters underlines, 'the medieval Muslim actually possessed. No Arabic version of a Platonic dialogue has been preserved.'<sup>5</sup> This stands in direct contrast to the situation found among the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English Romantics, nearly all of whom were immersed in the

3. Cf. *Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabī* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 179ff., and parts II–III below.

4. While it is true that 'the Arabs observed the passage of philosophy from Hellas to Islam', as F. E. Peters tells us ('The Origins of Islamic Platonism: The School Tradition', in Parviz Morewedge, ed., *Islamic Philosophical Theology* [Albany: SUNY Press, 1979], pp. 14–45 [p. 14]), 'and carefully recorded its progress', the transmission of the thought of Aristotle in the Islamic world is far more easy to trace than that of Plato. As a consequence, we do not know as much about the transmission of Platonism in Islam as we do about Platonism's transmission in Christianity. There were also many varieties of Platonism and Neoplatonism in Islam—from that of the free-thinker Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī (d. 925), to the intellectual mysticism of the Ismā'īlīs, to the ecstatic meditations of the Sufis, to the Pythagoreanizing Neoplatonism of the Ishrāqī thinkers—all of whom, in diverse manners, drew on Plato's thought for inspiration, as Peters (*ibid.*) observes. The contributions to Parviz Morewedge, ed., *Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992) illustrate this diversity of the heritage of Plato in Islam. As Richard Walzer points out, Platonism was nearly always conflated with Neoplatonism in Islam, for 'the Plato to whom al-Fārābī (with the exception of his theory of the ideal state), Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Bājdja and Ibn Rushd refer is, whether explicitly or implicitly, always the Plato of Plotinus and his followers' ('Aflāṭūn', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, 1.234). Having said this, after nearly 200 years of scholarship on Islamic mysticism, there is not even one good study—nay, hardly even one mediocre essay—comparing Sufi theosophy to Platonic/Neoplatonic thought. A good place to begin reading, however, is John Walbridge's *The Wisdom of the Mystic East: Suhrawardī and Platonic Orientalism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001).

5. Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

actual study of Plato's dialogues, which they read in Greek, and Neoplatonic commentaries on Plato written in Latin.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), for instance, whose rendition of Plato's *Symposium* from Greek to English is a superb work of prose translation,<sup>6</sup> was one of the most erudite scholars of Greek history, literature and poetry of his day. When translating the *Symposium*, Shelley kept Marsilio Ficino's commentary on it—probably the most influential work of the Renaissance on romantic and divine love—constantly at his side.<sup>7</sup> For years, Shelley had immersed himself in the translations of Plato by Thomas Taylor the Platonist, the first translator of Plato into the English language during the last two decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> As James Notopoulos has exhaustively demonstrated in his monumental work on *The Platonism of Shelley*,<sup>9</sup> Shelley was a *poeta doctus* who knew in depth and detail the precise metaphysical references of his romantic imagery. In addition to his Platonic studies, Shelley was also well versed in Indian, Kabbalistic and Hermetic works of metaphysical gnosis. More importantly for this essay, he was also influenced by Persian Sufi poetry, having composed imitations of some of the ghazals of Ḥāfiz.<sup>10</sup> It is thus entirely in order to compare his type of Platonic Hermeticism with traditions of Islamic gnosis found in poets of the Persian Sufi tradition.

The same pattern emerges with all the other English Romantic poets. As a schoolboy, Coleridge had read the Neoplatonists in the writings of Thomas Taylor. In his own writings he frequently cites

6. In Richard Holmes, ed., *Shelley on Love: Selected Writings* (London: Flamingo, 1996), pp. 97–156.

7. As Richard Holmes in his biographical study *Shelley: The Pursuit* (London: Flamingo, 1995), p. 431, observes. Shelley also translated Plato's *Phaedo*, *Ion* and several other dialogues.

8. See J. A. Notopoulos, 'Shelley and Thomas Taylor', *Proceedings of the Modern Languages Association* 51 (1936) 502–17.

9. *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1949). While it is surprising to find that Shelley's spiritual teachings, based on Plato's writings, are still misunderstood by scholars, it is utterly astounding that a learned poet and critic such as T. S. Eliot could accuse him of not having any 'metaphysical or philosophical mind', and imagine that his verse was the effusions of a 'confused . . . [and] a cloudy Platonist' (*The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933; rpt. 1996, 6th printing], p. 81).

10. See F. Jahanpour, 'Western Encounters with Persian Sufi Literature', in L. Lewisohn and D. Morgan, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. 3: *Late Classical Persianate Sufism—The Safavid and Mughal Period* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), pp. 28–62 (pp. 50–51).

Plato and Neoplatonic texts in the original Greek.<sup>11</sup> Keats likewise was steeped in Taylor's translations. William Blake was a personal friend of Taylor; in fact, he was so intimate with Taylor's translations of Plato that some of the speeches made by the gods in his Prophetic Books paraphrase Taylor's commentary on Plato's dialogues, myths, and symbols exactly.<sup>12</sup> Blake was especially attentive to Taylor's translations of Plotinus' tractates, which he illustrated in his paintings and verse. The American Transcendentalists, who were largely inspired by Romantic philosophy,<sup>13</sup> were all well versed in Plato's writings: Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman knew their *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic* and *Symposium*, not to mention Pythagoras, Iamblichus and Plotinus, quite well.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, it would be a gross simplification of the cultural complexity of the Romantic sensibility to say that the religious and philosophical influences on the Romantics were limited to, or even largely defined by, Platonism or Neoplatonism, since the terrain for Romantic poetics was based on a number of other pietistic and theological undercurrents of the Enlightenment.<sup>15</sup> Yet the fact remains that, despite the difference in the reception history of Plato in the Christian West and Muslim Persia (which no one should overlook

11. Kathleen Raine, 'Traditional Symbolism in "Kubla Khan"', in *Defending Ancient Springs* (Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1985), pp. 88–104.

12. Kathleen Raine has shown this in so many of her erudite studies. In particular see her monumental two-volume study of the Platonic sources of Blake's symbolism and terminology: *Blake and Tradition*, Bollingen Series XXXV/11 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

13. American Transcendentalism has been described as an offshoot of Romanticism's basic ideas, comprising 'an agreeable summary of the less difficult phases of romantic thought—contempt for the rationalist side of the eighteenth century . . . exaltation of intuition, spirit, sensibility, imagination, faith, the unmeasurable, the wordless' (Crane Brinton, 'Romanticism', in Donald Borchert, ed., *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd edition [Farmington MI: Thomson/Gale, 2006], VIII.488). Martin Halliwell likewise describes Transcendentalism as 'closely associated with the flowering of American Romanticism in New England in the 1830s and 1840s' ('Transcendentalism', in Christopher Murray, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era, 1760-1850* [New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2004], II.1149); and Ian D. Copestake ('Emerson, Ralph Waldo', *ibid.*, 1.318) describes Emerson as 'the embodiment of American Romanticism'.

14. See Jay Bergman, 'Neoplatonism and American Aesthetics', in Aphrodite Alexandrakis and Nicholas Moutakfakis, ed., *Neoplatonism and Western Aesthetics* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), pp. 177–92, who details the influences of, for example, Pythagoras on Thoreau (p. 186) and Thomas Taylor on Emerson (p. 178).

15. Kurt Weinberg, 'Romanticism', in Alex Preminger, ed., *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 720.

when attempting a comparative understanding of these civilizations), Plato's thought and Neoplatonism are the most important part of the mutual philosophical heritage shared by these Christian Romantic and Muslim Persian Sufi poets and mystics.

Given the temporal span of five centuries separating the classical Persian Sufi poets from the Romantics, the geographical distance that separates Persia from Europe and North America, the varieties and differences in the reception history of Platonism in Islam and Christianity, not to mention theological divergences between the eminent *poetae theologi* in both traditions, it might appear that the pursuit of parallels and convergences between Sufis and Romantics is a kind of quest for the horn of a unicorn. However, this is not the case and there exists today a small but important coterie of authors, such as Luce Lopez-Baralt, Maria Rosa Menocal, Parvin Loloï and Massud Farzan,<sup>16</sup> who have already charted some of the correspondences that do exist with much success. In their writings the presence of such correspondences, heretofore largely intuitively appreciated, has received solid scholarly substantiation.

## II. COMPARATIVE PERSIAN-ENGLISH POETICS: ARCHETYPAL AND ANAGOGIC CRITICISM

Northrop Frye provides us with two important theoretical approaches to comparative literature that offer useful tools to explore and expose the common ground between the two schools of poets separated by so much time and space. He delineates these approaches as comprising respectively 'archetypal' and 'anagogic' criticism. 'Archetypal criticism' is described as tracing the associative clusters of symbols within a

16. Luce Lopez-Baralt has mainly concentrated on the influence of Sufism on medieval Spanish Catholic poets such as San Juan de la Cruz, as in her remarkable *San Juan de la Cruz y el Islam* (Mexico City/San Juan: Colegio de México/University of Puerto Rico Press, 1985), but has also touched on the influence of Sufism on contemporary Spanish prose literature in her *Islam in Spanish Literature: from the Middle Ages to the Present*, tr. Andrew Hurley (Leiden: Brill, 1992). Menocal's *Shards of Love: Exile and the Origins of the Lyric* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1994) explores (among other things) the influence of medieval Islamic literature on modern poets such as Ezra Pound and rock musicians such as Eric Clapton. Part 1 of Parvin Loloï's *Hafiz, Master of Persian Poetry: A Critical Bibliography, English Translations Since the Eighteenth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004) provides a good account of the influence of Ḥāfiz on the English Romantics. M. Farzan's many studies of this subject include his 'Whitman and Sufism: Towards "A Persian Lesson"', *American Literature* 41:1 (1976) 572-82.

body of literature, in which the critic is essentially concerned with a poem's 'relationship to the rest of literature'.<sup>17</sup> This type of criticism explores poetry's communicable symbols and conventions in order 'to fit poems into the body of poetry as a whole'.<sup>18</sup> Archetypal criticism, which involves the 'study of literary symbols as parts of a whole',<sup>19</sup> applied to the study of Persian Sufi poetry is concerned with, for instance, the elaboration and expression of the technical terms (*iṣtilāḥāt*) of Sufi symbolism in poetry.<sup>20</sup> The Sufi symbolic lexicon was publicly hermetic, so that all writers and readers of Sufi poetry quickly understood its celebrated set of 'esoteric signs'—images, metaphors—used by poets, spelled out in detail, for example, in the classical commentaries on Shabistari's *Garden of Mystery (Gulshan-i rāz)*<sup>21</sup> or in traditional mystical exegeses on the *Divān* of Ḥāfiz.<sup>22</sup> From the standpoint of comparative literature, at this level of criticism it is difficult to make any valid comparisons between Western Romantics and the Sufis since often their respective uses of poetic symbols and signs are quite different. The *topoi* of the cypress and the narcissus, for instance, have entirely opposite symbolic meanings in Persian Sufi and in English classical and romantic poetry. However, even on this level one can still find certain archetypal themes that pervade both traditions.

One of the most obvious of these is *Carpe diem*. From the perspective of archetypal criticism, *Carpe diem* is a common, universal, grand theme that pervades classical English literature as well as ancient Egyptian, Greek (e.g. Aeschylus), Latin (e.g. Horace, Catullus), Renaissance Italian (e.g. Lorenzo de' Medici), Sanskrit, and Persian poetry.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, virtually all the world's literatures contain similar expressions of this timeless idea. Consider, for instance, the sentiment expressed by this quatrain by ʿUmar Khayyām (d. c. 526/1132), quoted here from

17. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 100.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 99. 19. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

20. The ground-breaking work in this field is Javad Nurbakhsh, *Sufi Symbolism: The Nurbakhsh Encyclopedia of Sufi Terminology*, translated by various authors (London and New York: KNP, 1984–2004), 15 vols.

21. See my *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Mahmud Shabistari* (London: Curzon Press, 1995), chap. 6.

22. The vast literature on this in Persian is covered in Leonard Lewisohn, ed., *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry* (forthcoming London: I. B. Tauris, 2010).

23. Roger Hornsby, 'Carpe Diem', in Alex Preminger, ed., *The Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 28.

Fitzgerald's translation—which for once follows the Persian original<sup>24</sup> closely enough to make the comparison valid:

Ah! Fill the cup: what boots it to repeat  
 How time is slipping underneath our feet:  
 Unborn Tomorrow, and dead yesterday,  
 Why fret about them if today be sweet!<sup>25</sup>

Between this quatrain and the following poem attributed to Henry David Thoreau, itself entitled *Carpe Diem*, an exact homology exists:

Build not on tomorrow  
 But seize on today  
 From no future borrow  
 The present to pay  
 The task of the present  
 Be sure to fulfil  
 If sad or if pleasant  
 Be true to it still  
 God sendeth us sorrow  
 And cloudeth our day  
 His sun on the morrow  
 Shines bright on our way.<sup>26</sup>

Both poets encourage their readers not to cloud their delight in the present moment with melancholic reveries about the brevity of life. At the same time, they express in nearly identical terms the same archetypal theme of the perception of the eternal within the transitory.

24. *Az day kay gudhasht hīch az ū yād makun. Fardā kay nayāmada-ast, faryād makun. Bar nāmada u gudhashta bunyād makun: ḥālī khwush bāsh u 'umr bar bād makun.*

25. In Edward Fitzgerald (trans.), *Rubāiyāt of Omar Khayyām*, edited with an introduction and notes by R. A. Nicholson (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1909; reprinted Tehran: British Council, 2003, with facing Persian text; introduction in Persian by Ḥusayn Ilahī-Qumshā'ī), Quatrain xxxvii.

26. Cited in Ḥusayn Ilahī-Qumshā'ī, *Dar qalamrū-yi zarrīn: 365 rūz bā adabiyāt-i Inḡlīsī* (Tehran: Sukhan, 1386/2007), pp. 163–4.

Another common archetypal theme that the Sufi poets shared with Romantic poets is the ethical teaching that salvation lies in overlooking the faults in one's neighbours and in 'seeing no evil', which appears to be held in common both as a tenet of moral philosophy and an insight based on poetic intuition. Blake's view that abstaining from censure of one's neighbours leads to salvation in the verse 'Mutual forgiveness of each vice/Such are the Gates of Paradise'<sup>27</sup> is identical in spirit and substance to Ḥāfiz's doctrine that salvation lies in finding no fault and seeing no evil expressed in his famous verse:

I said to the master of the tavern: 'Which road is  
The road of salvation?' He called for wine and said,  
'Not revealing the faults of other people'.<sup>28</sup>

27. *Blake: Complete Writings*, ed. G. Keynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 761 ('For the Sexes: the Gates of Paradise').

28. *Divān*, ed. Khānlari, ghazal 385: 4; in Robert Bly and Leonard Lewisohn, trans., *The Angels Knocking on the Tavern Door (Thirty Poems of Hafez)* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2008). Although Khānlari's *lectio* is *rāz* (secret), three of his MSS. read <sup>ʿ</sup>*ayb* (fault), which is the reading we follow here (this is also Qazwini and Ghani's *lectio*). As will be seen from the following story, a homily on the evils of fault-finding is the most likely soteriological message the poet meant to convey here. Commenting on this verse, a seventeenth-century commentator on Ḥāfiz relates an interesting tale from a certain 'Treatise on the Benefits of Belief' (*Risāla-yi Fawā'id al-ʿaqā'id*) about the ascension of the Prophet: 'Having returned from the divine Presence, the Prophet found himself standing in the midst of Paradise. He was given a robe of honour to put on. He thought to himself "How nice it would be if the members of my community might also receive some benefit from this robe as well". Gabriel at that moment appeared and said, "Indeed, the members of your community will benefit from this robe of honour but on one condition". Upon returning to his terrestrial abode, the Prophet summoned his elect Companions and related other particulars of his spiritual journey, before concluding with the above account. He commented, "Now, I wonder if there is any among you who can fulfil that condition so I may give him this robe?" Umar, Uthmān and Abū Bakr each rose and offered their own views about the meaning of Gabriel's binding condition, yet one by one the Prophet bade them be seated. Finally when it came the turn of ʿAlī, the Prophet asked, "So ʿAlī, to fulfill this condition, what would you do?" ʿAlī replied, "I would reveal the upright virtues (*rāst*) of God's devotees and conceal their faults." "That, indeed, is the condition!" the Prophet said, bestowing upon ʿAlī that robe of honour (*khirqā*), which has been passed ever since down to the Sufi masters of the present day. Indeed, being a dervish totally consists in concealing the faults of people' (Abū'l-Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Khatmī Lāhūrī, *Sharḥ-i ʿirfānī-yi ghazalḥā-yi-i Ḥāfiz*, ed. Bahā' al-Dīn Khurramshāhī, Kūrush Mansūri, and Ḥusayn Muṭī'i-Amīn [Tehran: Nashr-i Qaṭra, 1374 A.Hsh./1995], iv.2563).

Above and beyond the comparison of such grand archetypal themes, there is another literary approach that Frye calls 'anagogic criticism'. Viewed from the anagogic perspective, almost all such comparisons now make much better sense because this approach allows us to transcend all civilization-specific and ethnocentric interpretations of literature and discern the 'universal symbols' underlying the exoteric literary archetypes. Frye thus explains that 'in the anagogic phase, literature imitates the total dream of man, and so imitates the thought of a human mind which is at the circumference and not at the center of its reality . . . . When we pass into anagogy, nature becomes, not the container, but the thing contained, and the archetypal universal symbols, the city, the garden, the quest, the marriage, are no longer the desirable forms that man constructs inside nature, but are themselves the forms of nature'.<sup>29</sup> 'Aṭṭār understood this well when he sang:

Both earth and heaven must fit within your own soul  
 If on love's path you'd be distinguished and unique.  
 'Attar, could you but free yourself in toto from your 'self',  
 All ninefold cobalt vaults of heaven will find place within your soul!<sup>30</sup>

Andrew Marvell referred to the same phenomenon when he spoke of

. . . The mind, that Ocean where each kind  
 Does straight its own resemblance find;  
 Yet it creates, transcending these,  
 Far other worlds, and other seas . . .

At the anagogic level, the writer becomes a seer who is 'caught up into the life of the Universe', as Emerson well understood in his essay on 'The Poet'—'his speech is thunder, his thought is law, and his words are universally intelligible as the plants and animals'. Such a poet 'has yielded us a new thought . . . unlocks our chains, and admits

29. *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 119.

30. *Dīvān-i 'Aṭṭār*, ed. T. Tafaḏḏulī, 3rd ed. (Tehran: Markaz-i Intishārāt-i 'ilmī va farhangī, 1362 A.Hsh./1983), ghazal 776, vv. 8, 10. All translations from the Persian below are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

us to a new scene. This emancipation is dear to all men, and the power to impart it, as it must come from greater depth and scope of thought, is a measure of intellect. Therefore all books of imagination endure, all which ascend to that truth, that the writer sees nature beneath him, and uses it as his exponent . . . All the religions of the world are the ejaculations of a few imaginative men.'<sup>31</sup> The universe of the *anagoge*, Frye continues, is not to be 'contained within any actual civilization or set of moral values, for the same reason that no structure of imagery can be restricted to one allegorical interpretation. . . . The *ethos* of art is no longer a group of characters within a natural setting, but a universal man who is also a divine being, or a divine being conceived in anthropomorphic terms. The form of literature most deeply influenced by the anagogic phase is the scripture or apocalyptic revelation.'<sup>32</sup> A good example of the unity of the microcosm and macrocosm within that 'universal man', as Frye calls it here, appears in Blake's *The Four Zoas*:

. . . Man looks out in tree & herb & fish & bird & beast  
 Collecting up the scatter'd portions of his immortal body  
 Into the Elemental forms of everything that grows.  
 . . . In pain he sighs, in pain he labours in his universe  
 Screaming in birds over the deep, & howling in the wolf  
 Over the slain, & moaning in the cattle & in the winds . . .  
 And in the cries of birth & in the groans of death his voice  
 Is heard throughout the Universe: wherever a grass grows  
 Or a leaf buds, The Eternal Man is seen, is heard, is felt  
 And all his sorrows, till he resumes his ancient bliss.<sup>33</sup>

Frye's use of the word *anagoge* here was derived from medieval Biblical Christian hermeneutics, according to which there existed a four-fold meaning to Scripture: literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical.<sup>34</sup>

31. *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), p. 463.

32. *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 120.

33. *Blake: Complete Writings*, pp. 355–6. Cited by Kathleen Raine, 'The Human Face of God', in James Lawrence, ed., *Testimony to the Invisible: Essays on Swedenborg* (West Chester PA: Chrysalis Books, 1995), pp. 68–86 (p. 72).

34. 'The medieval world of allegory was confined to the affairs of the Hebrews. The events recounted in the Bible were ordered as a vast message, expressed through its literal sense but pointing towards a spiritual meaning. The spiritual had various aspects. It was *allegorical* whenever the persons and events of the Old Law prefigured

In Islam, a very similar theory, propounding that four levels of meaning existed within the Qurʿān,<sup>35</sup> was advanced; thus the Prophet said that ‘The Koran has an outer sense (*zahrī*), an inner sense (*batnī*), a tropological sense (*ḥaddī*), and an anagogic sense (*maṭlaʿī*), which itself further extends unto seven, nine and seventy inner senses’.<sup>36</sup> Both in medieval Christian poetics,<sup>37</sup> and in classical Sufi poetics, therefore, not only God’s word in the revelation of divine scripture, but inspired poetry could be thus read as polysemous works hiding higher parabolic senses.<sup>38</sup> M.-D. Chenu, describing the ‘symbolist mentality’ of Christian Neoplatonism, reveals that ‘this upwards reference of things—this *anagoge*—was constituted precisely by their natural dynamism as symbols. The image of the transcendent was not some pleasant addition to their natures; rather, rooted in the “dissimilar similitudes” of the hierarchical ladder, it was their very reality and reason for being’.<sup>39</sup> He notes that the anagogic approach to symbols was ‘essentially a method of approach to intelligible reality, not an explanation of the world of sense by means of that reality. [It was] an ascent that began from the lowest material level, on which the mind of man found its connatural objects—objects whose value for knowledge, for sacred knowledge, lay not in their coarse material natures but in their symbolic capacity, their “anagogy”’.<sup>40</sup> Thus Coleridge believed that without ‘symbolical’ perception, one merely lives a world of shadows:

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those of the New Law; it was *moral* whenever the actions of Christ indicated how we should live; and it was *anagogical* when it referred to the things of heaven’ (Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. H. Bredin [Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1988], p. 151). The classic treatment of the subject is that of Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. Mark Sebanc and E. M. Macierowski, 2 vols (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999–2000).

35. For an overview see Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics: The Qurʿān Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 69–73.

36. John Wansbrough, *Qoranic Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 242–3, compares these four hermeneutic degrees in Koran exegesis to the hermeneutics of the Biblical lexicon, drawing equivalences as follows: *zāhir* = *historia*; *bāṭin* = *allegoria*; *ḥadd* = *tropologia*; *maṭlaʿ* = *anagoge*.

37. Cf. Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 160ff.

38. Cf. J. C. Bürgel, *The Feather of Simurgh: The ‘Licit’ Magic of the Arts in Medieval Islam* (New York: NYU Press, 1988), pp. 59–60; Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity*, chap. 6.

39. *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*, trans. J. Taylor and L. K. Little (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 123.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 82. Similarly, Emerson states that the inspired poet who understands the ‘universality of the symbolic language’ becomes ‘apprised of the divineness of this superior use of things, whereby the world is a temple, whose walls are covered with

For all that meets the bodily sense I deem  
 Symbolical, one mighty alphabet  
 For infant minds; and we in this low world  
 Placed with our backs to bright Reality  
 That we may learn with young unwounded ken  
 The substance from the shadow.<sup>41</sup>

This is of course the same thing that Mircea Eliade meant when he noted that for *homo religiosus* all of nature is a cosmic hierophany.<sup>42</sup> Persian Sufi poetics understood the anagogic references of images and metaphors to be of quintessential importance. Interpreting 'The Philosophy of Persian Art', Ananda Coomaraswamy reveals how 'anagogic values can be read' in all Persian works of art, for 'the divine Artist is thought of now as an architect, now as a painter, or potter, or embroiderer; and just as none of His works is meaningless or useless, so no one makes pictures . . . without an intention'.<sup>43</sup> This is what Sa<sup>ʿ</sup>dī meant, for example, in the following verse from his *Būstān*:

That student of weaving spoke well as he wove  
 The shapes of the elephant, phoenix, giraffe . . .  
 'My own hand it's not that configures these forms,  
 Except if the Maker above for me weave them first'.<sup>44</sup>

Sa<sup>ʿ</sup>dī here versifies Plato's doctrine enunciated in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* that the arts are but phantom reflections and shadows of the

emblems, pictures and commandments of the Deity, in this, that there is no fact in nature which does not carry the whole sense of nature; and the distinctions we make in events, and in affairs, of high and low, honest and base, disappear when nature is used as a symbol' (*Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, p. 454).

41. From *The Destiny of Nations*, in Ted Hughes, ed., *A Choice of Coleridge's Verse* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), p. 217. For further discussion of this idea, see Elémire Zolla, 'The Uses of the Imagination and the Decline of the West', *Sophia Perennis* 1:1 (1975) 33–59.

42. M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1959), trans. W. R. Trask, p. 12.

43. 'Notes on the Philosophy of Persian Art', in Roger Lipsey, ed., *Coomaraswamy: Selected Papers, Traditional Art and Symbolism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 1.260–65 (pp. 261–2).

44. *Kulliyāt-i Sa<sup>ʿ</sup>dī*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAlī Furūghī (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1363 A.Hsh./1984), *Būstān*, ch. v: story 7, pp. 327–8. Cited by Coomaraswamy, *ibid.*, but my own translation.

Forms of Ideal Beauty and the progeny of Heavenly Love.<sup>45</sup> In his essay, 'The Poet', Emerson in the same spirit quotes Spenser's famous stanza in *The Faerie Queene* which teaches that the soul makes the body:

So every spirit, as it is most pure,  
And hath in it the more of heavenly light,  
So it the fairer body doth procure  
To habit in, and it more fairly dight,  
With cheerful grace and amiable sight.  
For, of the soul, and body form doth take,  
For soul is form, and doth the body make.<sup>46</sup>

In *Prometheus Unbound* Shelley too had set this same doctrine to verse:

And lovely apparitions,—dim at first,  
Then radiant, as the mind arising bright  
From the embrace of beauty (whence the forms  
Of which these are the phantoms) casts on them  
The gathered rays which are reality—  
Shall visit us, the progeny immortal  
Of Painting, Sculpture, and rapt Poesy,  
And arts, though unimagined, yet to be . . .<sup>47</sup>

Therefore, on the anagogic level the theological, religious and cultural distinctions that otherwise separate the Persian Sufi from the English Romantic poets evaporate and leave not a rack behind, insofar as literature at this level, to quote Frye again, is viewed as 'existing in its own universe, no longer a commentary on life or reality, but containing life and reality in a system of verbal relationships'.<sup>48</sup> That is

45. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, ed., *Plato: The Collected Dialogues* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), *Symposium* 209–212 and *Phaedrus* 250c (pp. 497, 560–63).

46. *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, pp. 482–3.

47. *Prometheus Unbound*, III.iii, 49–56, in Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Complete Poems* (London, Softback Preview, 1993), p. 192. For an analysis of Neoplatonic philosophy in these verses, see Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley's Poetry*, pp. 254–5.

48. *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 122.

because at this phase, as Frye says, for the poet, 'only religion, or something as infinite in its range as religion, can possibly form an external goal'.<sup>49</sup>

### III. ANAGOGIC CORRESPONDENCES BETWEEN SUFI AND ROMANTIC POETRY

At this juncture it will be asked how exactly 'anagogic criticism' may enable us to better grasp the correspondences between Sufi and Romantic poetry. Below, six anagogic themes found in both Sufi and Romantic poetry will be examined—*Carpe diem*, *Nunc aeternum*, *Mundus imaginalis*, Annihilation and Mystical Death (*fanā'*), the Earthly Mirror of Divine Beauty in the Eternal Feminine, and the Unity of Religions—and an attempt will be made to disclose some of the allusive anagogic correspondences between the two poetic traditions.

#### 1. *Carpe diem*

If from the anagogic perspective we approach now the same theme of *carpe diem* discussed above, we find correspondences that are entirely different from what archetypal criticism had yielded us. Here, the theme of *carpe diem* becomes an expression of the poet's realization of the *nunc aeternum*, which in Sufism is termed 'metaphysical time' (*waqt*):<sup>50</sup> the Eternal Now transcending dull, horizontal, serial temporality, beyond our personal obsession with events future or past, living within the presence of 'Eternity's sunrise' which sustains 'the moment as it flies' as Blake understood. Instead of considering *carpe diem* merely as a universal literary theme, we now contemplate it as expressing an *anagogic truth* about the higher vertical *reality* of the interface of Time with Eternity. Remarkably, we also discover that the Persian Sufi poets' anagogic conception of *carpe diem* is expressed in almost precisely the same way as it is by the English Romantics Blake and Shelley, or for that matter, in exactly the same way that Ralph Waldo Emerson approached the songs of Ḥāfīz which he translated (albeit from the German) in a manner that has been accurately des-

49. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

50. On the meaning of this technical term in Sufism see Javad Nurbakhsh, *Spiritual Poverty in Sufism*, trans. Leonard Lewisohn (London: KNP, 1984), chap. 6: 'Metaphysical Time', pp. 134–9.

cribed by one commentator as a 'spiritual *carpe diem*'.<sup>51</sup> However, it will be impossible to clarify the anagogic sense of *carpe diem* without examining the anagogic reality of the concept itself and entering into the realm of the Eternal Now.

## 2. *Nunc aeternum*

Several quite clear expressions of the transcendence of serial time in the eternal moment in Persian Sufi poetry can be found in the poetry of Shabistārī (d. after 741/1340) and in the *Dīwān* of Ḥāfiẓ (d. 791/1389). In the introduction to his *Garden of Mystery*, Shabistārī describes his experience of *waqt* as being transported outside of serial time, enabling him to compose his whole poem in an hour or so:

So after all their earnest pleas  
that I compose a reply in verse  
I started out with this response.  
With words exact I knit quite terse,  
concise a text. I wrote  
these words in just a moment's space  
among a throng of men all free of ties,  
—I took no pause to think, without  
reflection or any repetition, it all flowed out . . .<sup>52</sup>

In another of his poems, he clarified the mystical doctrine underlying the moment of poetic inspirations as follows:

What spiritual vision (*nazar*) senses  
in a breath of mystic consciousness  
no pen can write in the space of fifty years.  
Nor in a moment's span can anyone write  
What treading the way takes years to teach.<sup>53</sup>

51. George Williamson, 'Emerson the Oriental', *University of California Chronicle* 30 (1928), p. 281; cited by John Yohannan, *The Persian Poet Hafiz in England and America*, MA Thesis, Columbia University (1939), p. 139.

52. *Gulshan-i rāz*, in *Majmū'a-i āthār-i Shaykh Maḥmūd Shabistārī*, edited by Ṣamad Muwaḥḥid (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-i Ṭahūrī, 1986), p. 69, vv. 45–7.

53. *Ibid.*, *Sa'adat-nāma*, p. 169: vv. 352–53.

In his poem *Milton*, Blake describes in similar terms exactly the same phenomenon of transtemporal poetic inspiration, where the poet realizes the 'eternal now' of 'metaphysical time' –

Every Time less than a pulsation of the artery  
Is equal in its period & value to Six Thousand Years  
For in this Period the Poet's Work is done, and all the Great  
Events of Time start forth & are conceiv'd in such a Period,  
Within a Moment, a Pulsation of the Artery.<sup>54</sup>

Blake penned numerous descriptions of metaphysical time, which he called the moment of inspiration, asserting, for instance, later on in the same poem that:

There is a Moment in each Day that Satan cannot find,  
Nor can his Watch Fiends find it; but the Industrious find  
This Moment & it multiply, & when it once is found,  
It renovates every Moment of the Day if rightly placed.<sup>55</sup>

In his poem on erotic mystical love, *Epipsychidion*, which, as Notopoulos states, best manifests 'the complex nature of Shelley's Platonism',<sup>56</sup> the poet recounts how the metaphysical moment, rightly opened and amplified, can fill each day with fresh inspiration:

Mind from its object differs most in this:  
Evil from good, misery from happiness;  
The baser from the nobler; the impure  
And frail, from what is clear and must endure.  
If you divide suffering and dross, you may  
Diminish till it is consumed away;  
If you divide pleasure and love and thought,  
Each part exceeds the whole; and we know not  
How much, while any yet remains unshared,  
Of pleasure may be gained, of sorrow spared.  
This truth is that deep well, whence sages draw

54. Blake: *Complete Writings*, p. 516. I have already compared these two passages in my *Beyond Faith and Infidelity*, pp. 22–3.

55. Blake: *Complete Writings*, p. 526.

56. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 275.

The unenvied light of hope; the eternal law  
 By which those live, to whom this world of life  
 Is as a garden ravaged, and whose strife  
 Tills for the promise of a later birth  
 The wilderness of this Elysian earth.<sup>57</sup>

In these verses the poet had based himself on Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, Propositions 26–27, which taught that 'in giving rise to the effect the cause remains undiminished and unaltered';<sup>58</sup> and on Diotima's doctrine of love, according to which, as Socrates in the *Symposium* narrates, the vision of supreme intellectual beauty is 'eternal, unproduced and indestructible; neither subject to increase nor decay . . . All other things are beautiful through participation of it, with this condition, that although they are subject to production and decay, it never becomes more or less, or endures any change'.<sup>59</sup>

But Shelley's verses also speak of the spiritual elongation of moments of 'pleasure and love and thought' by which the quality of the transient and temporal is itself deepened by the 'light of hope'. Similarly, the Sufis celebrate that spiritual *carpe diem*, which is the knowledge or gnosis of time, called *waqt-shināsī*, as Ḥāfiẓ expounds in the verse 'Rise and come! Those cognizant of time, earth and heaven sell freely/For an idol's company and a cup of drossless wine'.<sup>60</sup> Elsewhere, in his dramatic poem *Hellas*, Shelley gives the following description of the *nunc aeternum*, the Eternal Now which encompasses the past, present and future, as narrated by Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew (who corresponds to Khidr in the Sufi tradition<sup>61</sup>):

All is contained in each.  
 Dodona's forest to an acorn's cup  
 Is that which has been or will be, to that

57. Shelley, *Complete Poems*, p. 301.

58. See E. R. Dodds, ed., *Proclus: The Elements of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000, rprt.), p. 214. Cited by Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 285.

59. From Shelley's translation of the *Symposium* (211B); see Holmes, *Shelley on Love*, p. 142; Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 285.

60. *Divān*, ed. Khānlārī, no. 465: 6.

61. For a deeper comparison between Shelley's Ahasuerus and the Muslim Khidr, see my 'From the "Moses of Reason" to the "Khidr of the Resurrection": The Oxymoronic Transcendent in Shahrastānī's *Majlis-i Maktūb* . . . *dar Khwārazm*', in *Shī'i Studies: Essays in Honour of Farhād Daftary*, ed. Omar Ali-de-Unzaga (London: I. B. Tauris and the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2010 [forthcoming]).

Which is—the absent to the present, Thought  
 Alone, and its quick elements, Will, Passion,  
 Reason, Imagination, cannot die;  
 They are what that which they regard appears,  
 The sturden whence mutability can weave  
 All that it has dominion o'er—worlds, worms,  
 Empires, and superstitions. What has thought  
 To do with time, or place or circumstance?  
 Wouldst thou behold the future?—ask and have!  
 Knock and it shall be opened—look and lo!  
 The coming age is shadowed on the past  
 As on a glass.<sup>62</sup>

Shelley's mention of the immortal powers of Imagination leads us directly into the third anagogic theme that the Romantics share alike with the Sufi poets.

### 3. *Mundus imaginalis*

When Shelley states that 'Will, Passion, Reason, Imagination, cannot die', he refers to the latent power of these internal faculties and senses to open up, in Blake's words, 'the immortal Eyes of Man into the Worlds of Thought, into Eternity Ever Expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination'.<sup>63</sup> This expansion of consciousness occurs because, as Coleridge later explained, Imagination is, in its primary power, 'the reflection in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation of the infinite I AM'.<sup>64</sup> Sufis refer to this phenomenon of 'reflection' of 'the finite mind . . . in the infinite' as *tafakkur*: contemplative medita-

62. Shelley, *Complete Poems*, p. 334 (*Hellas* 11.792–806).

63. These are the opening lines of his poem *Jerusalem*, in *Blake: Complete Writings*, p. 623.

64. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria: or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. George Watson (London: Everyman, 1975), chap. 13, p. 167. On this oft-quoted passage, see Anca Vlasopolos, *The Symbolic Method of Coleridge, Baudelaire and Yeats* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), pp. 37–40. J. Robert Barth in his 'Theological Implications of Coleridge's Theory of Imagination', in Christine Gallant, ed., *Coleridge's Theory of Imagination Today* (New York: AMS Press, 1989), pp. 3–13 (p. 5), comments—I believe correctly—that the passage implies that 'the imagination is in fact a faculty of the transcendent, capable of perceiving and in some degree articulating transcendent reality—the reality of higher realms of being, including the divine'.

tion or visionary reflection.<sup>65</sup> In a verse which sums up Coleridge's sentence in a single epigram, Shabistarī thus says: 'Reflection is passing from the false to the Truth/To behold the Infinite Whole within the finite part'.<sup>66</sup>

Imagination is the key word here. 'The notion of imagination, magical intermediary between thought and being, incarnation of thought in image and presence of the image in being, is a conception of the utmost importance, which plays a leading role in the philosophy of the Renaissance and which we meet again in the philosophy of Romanticism'.<sup>67</sup> As Henry Corbin points out, both in Sufism and in Christian esoteric thought of the Renaissance and the later Romantic period,

We encounter the idea that the Godhead possesses the power of Imagination, and that by imagining the universe God created it; that he drew the universe from within Himself, from the eternal virtualities and potencies of His own being; that there exists between the world of pure spirit and the sensible world an intermediate world which is the idea of 'Idea Images', as the Ṣūfis put it, the world of 'supersensory sensibility', of the subtle magical body, 'the world in which spirits are materialized and bodies spiritualized'; that this is the world over which Imagination holds sway; that in it the Imagination produces effects so real that they can 'mold' the imagining subject, and that the Imagination 'casts' man in the form (the mental body) that he imagined.<sup>68</sup>

For the Sufis<sup>69</sup> as for the Romantics, as René Wellek pointed out, Imagination was 'not merely the power of visualization, somewhere in

65. For a long treatment of *tafakkur* in the Sufi tradition, see my *Beyond Faith*, chap. 7: 'The Thought of the Heart'.

66. *Beyond Faith*, p. 217.

67. Alexandre Koyré, *Mystiques, spirituels, alchimistes du XVIème siècle allemand* (Paris: A. Colin, 1955), p. 60, n. 2; cited by Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī*, p. 179.

68. Corbin, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

69. See W. C. Chittick, 'The World of Imagination and Poetic Imagery according to Ibn 'Arabī', *Temenos* 10 (1989) 98–119. For a survey of how Corbin's concept of *mundus imaginalis* has been related to Renaissance Romantic poetics, see Marieke J. E. Van den Doel and Wouter J. Hanegraff, 'Imagination', in W. J. Hanegraff, gen. ed., *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 11.606–17; and also Tom Cheetham, *The World Turned Inside Out: Henry Corbin and Islamic Mysticism* (Woodstock CT: Spring Journal Books, 2003), chap. 4.

between sense and reason, as it had been for Aristotle . . . but a creative power by which the mind “gains insight into reality”, reads nature as a symbol of something behind or within nature’.<sup>70</sup> More than this, though, ‘Imagination was the fundamental ground of human knowledge’<sup>71</sup> for all the Romantic poets. For Coleridge and for Shelley in the above-cited verses, as well as for Blake<sup>72</sup>—who spoke of God as being the Poetic Genius,<sup>73</sup> and the ‘Imagination or the Divine Body in Every Man’<sup>74</sup>—Imagination is fundamentally identical with the Platonic *nous*<sup>75</sup> and is, as Emerson put it, the ‘cardinal human power’.<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, according to Blake, Shelley, Coleridge . . . *and* the Sufis, the powers of passion, feeling, reason and imagination themselves *comprise the quintessence of Being itself*, because *existence itself is thought*. Blake thus proclaimed that ‘Mental Things are alone Real; what is called Corporeal, Nobody knows of its Dwelling Place, it is a Fallacy, and its Existence an Imposture . . . Vision or Imagination is a representation of what Eternally exists’. In other words, everything non-mental is immaterial, a truth which Shelley later has Ahasuerus proclaim in *Hellas*:

The future and the past are idle shadows  
Of thought’s eternal flight—they have no being;  
Nought is but that which feels itself to be.<sup>77</sup>

Blake was a Berkeleyan immaterialist who shared with Shelley and Coleridge the Platonic notion that thought alone has created—and

70. René Wellek, ‘The Concept of “Romanticism” in Literary History’, *Comparative Literature* 1:1 (1949) 1–23, 147–72. Cited by Wouter J. Hanegraaf, ‘Romanticism and the Esoteric Connection’, in Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaf, ed., *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), pp. 237–68 (p. 243).

71. Kathleen Raine, *W. B. Yeats and the Learning of the Imagination* (Ipswich: Golgoonooza Press, 1999), p. 23.

72. See Kathleen Raine, *The Human Face of God: William Blake and the Book of Job* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), p. 14.

73. See Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in *Blake: Complete Writings*, p. 153.

74. From Blake’s Annotations to Berkeley’s *Siris*, *ibid.*, p. 773.

75. Raine, *The Human Face of God*, p. 14.

76. *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. E. W. Emerson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1903–1912), x.243; cited by Thomas McFarland, ‘Imagination and Its Cognates: Supplementary Considerations’, in Gallant, ed., *Coleridge’s Theory of Imagination Today*, pp. 15–30 (p. 23).

77. Shelley, *Complete Poems*, p. 334 (*Hellas* II.782–4).

continues to create—the world. ‘The Universe is the externalisation of the soul,’ said Emerson. ‘The earth, and the heavenly bodies, physics, and chemistry, we sensually treat, as if they were self-existent; but these are the retinue of that Being we have.’<sup>78</sup> We encounter the same idea in the Persian Sufi tradition. The world is but a single thought generated by the Universal Mind,<sup>79</sup> as Rūmī affirms. It is utter ignorance to consider the world to be ‘real’ and our thoughts ‘unreal’, since any grandeur the former may possess ultimately derives from the wonder of the latter.

If just a single thought comes in your consciousness  
 A thousand different worlds fall head over heels.  
 The Sultan’s bodily form is one in its outer show,  
 And yet behind it squadrons and battalions go.  
 Yet still that good king’s form is but a silhouette  
 Which follows the decree of thought unmanifest.  
 From just one single thought, a crowd has filled the plain  
 Like sluices opened when the floodgates are let drain.  
 That thought, the mass of men thinks insignificant,  
 But puny thought gushed through the world and ate it.  
 And so you see from just one thought, all trades and crafts  
 Throughout the world subsist: all residences  
 And villages, all manor houses and palaces,  
 All hills and peaks and parks and fields, brooks and streams,  
 The sun above, this firmament and earth and sea  
 Like fish within the sea, by thought all live and breathe.<sup>80</sup>

To sum up, both the Sufi and Romantic poets apprehend and affirm the creative power of Imagination to animate, and Thought to generate, the cosmos. Both have similar anagogic approaches to the meta-physical moment of poetic inspiration. Such ideas are not merely topoi and literary themes according to Sufi and Romantic belief but rather a shared symbolic discourse based on an anagogic perspective of the role of the Imagination in human creativity and consciousness that

78. ‘The Poet’, in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, p. 453.

79. *The Mathnawī of Jalālūddīn Rūmī*, ed. R. A. Nicholson, 8 vols (London: Trustees of the E. J. W. Gibb Memorial, 1926–1937), II, v. 978.

80. *Mathnawī*, II, vv. 1029–35.

sets into vibration planes of reality and awareness other than that of the sensible world.

#### 4. Annihilation, Mystical Death, *Fanā'*

Mystical death and dissolution of the self is another theme that English Metaphysical and Romantic, and Persian Sufi poets share in common. Since this theme is so profoundly native to classical Christian mysticism,<sup>81</sup> it will be helpful to see how it was expressed by more explicitly pietistic poets of the seventeenth century before exploring its appearance among the Romantics in the nineteenth century.

The sentiments of the English Metaphysical poets are, more often than not, completely Sufiesque in their metaphors and imagery. Consider Richard Crashaw's stanza in his poem 'The Flaming Heart upon the Book and Picture of the Seraphical Saint Teresa':

By all of Him we have in Thee  
Leave nothing of my SELF in me.  
Let me so read thy life, that I  
Unto all life of mine may dy.

Likewise, the tone of John Donne's address to God in his Holy Sonnet XIV can be seen as identical to the spiritualized eroticism of the Persian Sufi poets:

Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I  
Except you'enthrall mee, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee.

Both verses elaborate the idea of self-annihilation in God couched in an erotic imagery wherein God figures as the lover and man the ravished beloved. Both the doctrine and imagery of such verses are startlingly close to the classical Sufi concept of *fanā'* as the 'annihilation of particular, self consciousness in the divine, universal conscious-

81. Evelyn Underhill's classic study *Mysticism* (first published in 1911) analysed this notion in much detail. The Sufi notion of *fanā'* seems present in San Juan de la Cruz's exposition of mystical death: see George Tavad, *Poetry and Contemplation in St John of the Cross* (Ohio University Press, 1988), pp. 203–7.

ness', a doctrine which was elaborated in Islamic lands as an essential element of the mystic experience from the early ninth century onward.<sup>82</sup> Some three hundred years after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, a Persian Sufi by the name of Abū'l-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. c.295/908), known by the epithet the 'Leader of the Sufis' for his sober intellectual expression of the most subtle of the Sufis' ecstatic experiences, elaborated the various stages of *fanā'*, the last of which he described as being 'that you cease to be conscious of your ecstatic experience [of God], as a result of an overwhelming vision of God's witness (*shāhid*) to you. At this stage you die as well as live, and you live in reality, for you die to yourself and live by God. Your personal characteristics (*rasm*) survive, but your independent identity (*ism*) vanishes.'<sup>83</sup>

While in their specifically Christian context Donne's verses function as a kind of poetic commentary on the famous words of the Gospel ('Anyone who wants to be a follower of mine must renounce self; day after day he must take up his cross, and follow me. Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it': Luke 9:23-4; Matthew 16: 24-6), their resonances in Sufi doctrine and poetry are so obvious as to be virtually identical. Consider the parallels in theme and imagery to the verses from Donne's Sonnet XIV, cited above, in the following two verses from a Sufi poem by Muḥammad Shīrīn Maghribī (d. 808/1410):

Enravisn me, usurp me from me, oh beloved  
 in your rapture  
 Seize me, seize me, in spirit-filled attraction  
 But me, me! there is no other veil like me  
 Before me—!

How, how, tell me how  
 I can get just one step outside my self  
 and go beyond everything that is 'me' and 'I'

82. Cf. Qamar-ul Huda, 'Reflections on Muslim Ascetics and Mystics: Sufi Theories of Annihilation and Subsistence', in *JUSUR: The UCLA Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 12 (1996) 17-35.

83. A. H. Abdel-Kader, *The Life, Personality and Writings of al-Junayd* (London: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1962), p. 55. Cited by M. A. H. Ansari, 'The Doctrine of One Actor: Junayd's View of *Tawḥīd*', in *The Muslim World* 73:1 (1983) 33-56 (p. 45).

If and since my very *being* stands in the way  
roadblocking me.<sup>84</sup>

A similar idea of annihilation and dissolution of the Selfhood appears in all the Romantics. It is probably most clearly expressed in Blake's poem *Milton*, which inculcates the teaching that ego-centrism is itself Death. Annihilation, or as the Sufis call it, *fanā'*, on the other hand, is in fact not annihilation at all, but a liberation from the constrictions of the selfhood, expressed as follows in Shabistari's *Garden of Mystery*:

Go! Take this 'self' which bars the path;  
Each moment engage yourself in Faith anew.  
Inside us all the lower soul's an infidel:  
Rest not content with this Islam of outer form.<sup>85</sup>

And that is also why Blake's *Milton*, a symbol for the inspired man of Poetic Genius, clearly announces his pursuit of annihilation:

I will go down to self annihilation and eternal death,  
Lest the Last Judgment come & find me unannihilate  
And I be seiz'd & giv'n into the hands of my own Selfhood.<sup>86</sup>

Through annihilation of self one attains to what is known as 'subsistence-in-God' (*baqā'*) in the lexicon of Persian Sufism,<sup>87</sup> an idea that

84. *A Critical Edition of the Divan of Muhammad Shīrīn Maghribī*, edited in the original Persian by Leonard Lewisohn with notes and an introduction by Annemarie Schimmel (Tehran: Tehran University Press/London: SOAS Publications, 1993), Ghazal CXV. Translation mine.

85. *Gulshan-i rāz*; for an analysis of these verses and the doctrine of the infidel selfhood in Sufism, see my *Beyond Faith*, pp. 295–8.

86. *Blake: Complete Writings*, p. 495. Citing these same verses by Blake in his article on 'Intellectual Fraternity', which compared Shakespeare with Indian philosophies, Ananda Coomaraswamy comments that 'it is . . . significant that one could not find in Asiatic scripture a more typically Asiatic purpose than is revealed in his [Blake's] passionate will to be delivered from the bondage of division' (*The Dance of Shiva* [New York: Sunwise Turn, 1924], p. 113).

87. For an overview of the concept of *fanā'* in Sufism, see Leonard Lewisohn, 'In Quest of Annihilation: Imaginalization and Mystical Death in the *Tamhīdāt* of 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadhānī,' in L. Lewisohn, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. 1: *Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rumi (700–1300)* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), pp. 284–336. See also G. Böwering, '*Baqā' wa Fanā'*, in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, III.722–4.

Blake also enunciates perfectly later on in his poem where he attacks Satan, his symbol for the Infidel Selfhood (in the Sufi lexicon termed *nafs-i kāfar*), and has Milton exclaim:

I come to Self Annihilation.  
Such are the Laws of Eternity, that each shall mutually  
Annihilate himself for others' good, as I for thee.  
Thy purpose & the purpose of thy Priests & of thy Churches  
Is to impress on men the fear of death, to teach  
Trembling & fear, terror, constriction, abject selfishness.  
Mine is to teach Men to despise death & to go on  
In fearless majesty annihilating Self, laughing to scorn  
Thy Laws & terrors, shaking down thy Synagogues as webs.  
I come to discover before Heav'n & Hell the Self righteousness  
In all its hypocritic turpitude . . . to put off  
In Self annihilation all that is not of God alone,  
To put off Self & all I have, ever & ever. Amen.<sup>88</sup>

Similarly, Rūmī maintains that the best sort of existence is found only when a man annihilates his 'self'. Although vis-à-vis the divine Attributes, he writes in the *Mathnawī*, the mystic may seem to be 'annihilated', his 'annihilation' (*fanā'*) is in fact a higher form of 'being-in-God' (*baqā'*).<sup>89</sup> 'Since by way of Annihilation you have discovered how to survive in life (*in baqāhā az fanāhā yāfti*),' Rūmī reproaches the reader, 'how is it you turn your back on Annihilation? . . . Since the latter is superior to the former—pursue Annihilation, and adore the One-who-changes.'<sup>90</sup> Elsewhere, he counsels: 'Die, if you would see Him who brings forth Eternal Life bring forth a living person from this mortified person. Become Winter if you would see how Spring is manifest. Be Night if you would behold the advent of Day.'<sup>91</sup>

We may compare this advice with the counsel given by Shelley in his ode to his friend Keats, *Adonais*:

Die!  
If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!  
Follow where all is fled!—Rome's azure sky,

88. Blake: *Complete Writings*, p. 530. 89. *Mathnawī*, IV.398-9.  
90. *Mathnawī*, v.796, 798. 91. *Mathnawī*, v.551-52.

Flowers, ruins, statues, music, words, are weak  
 The glory they transfuse with fitting truth to speak.

... 'Tis Adonais calls! Oh, hasten thither,  
 No more let Life divide what Death can join together.<sup>92</sup>

##### 5. Eternal Feminine: Earthly Mirror of Divine Beauty

O wrangling schooles, that search what fire  
 Shall burn this world, had none the wit  
 Unto this knowledge to aspire  
 That this her feaver might be it?

John Donne (1572–1631)

As Jill Line has demonstrated in her insightful book on Shakespeare, the philosophical doctrine sustaining these verses by John Donne can be traced back to the Neoplatonic erotic theory in Marsilio Ficino's commentary on the *Symposium* of Plato,<sup>93</sup> and in particular to the idea that by the medium of earthly forms and terrestrial beauty the soul engages in loving contemplation of the divine beauty of God.<sup>94</sup> This fundamental mystical idea appears in Petrarch's sonnets celebrating Laura, in Dante's *La vita nuova* honouring his love of Beatrice, and again in all the great artists and poets of the Renaissance. Donne's contemporary Spenser, in *The Faerie Queene* (1596), paraphrased this

92. *Adonais*, LII–LIII, in Shelley, *Complete Poems*, p. 316. Tracing the doctrine of this poem back to Plato, Notopoulos paraphrases these lines as follows: 'Mortality is simply an illusion like all the phenomena of nature; it is only in death that we really live and the soul finds its true home in the Platonic reality above and beyond the physical world' (*The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 291). He also points out (*ibid.*, p. 301) that these verses are modeled on a passage (68B) in Plato's *Phaedo*: 'Surely, there are many who have chosen of their own free will to follow dead lovers and wives and sons to the next world, in the hope of seeing them and meeting there the persons whom they loved. If this is so, will a true lover of wisdom who has firmly grasped this same conviction—that he will never attain to wisdom worthy of the name elsewhere than in the next world—will he be grieved at dying? Will he not be glad to make that journey? We must suppose so, dear boy, that is, if he is a real philosopher, because he will be of firm belief that he will never find wisdom in all its purity in any other place' (trans. from Plato: *The Collected Dialogues*, p. 50).

93. Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, trans. Sears Jayne (Woodstock CT: Spring Publications, 1985), pp. 125ff. (VI.10).

94. Jill Line, *Shakespeare and the Fire of Love* (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 2004), pp. 70–71.

Platonic doctrine of the Beautiful reflected in the fair things of the earth as follows:

That wondrous pattern, whose'er it be  
 Whether in earth laid up in secret store,  
 Or else in heaven, that no man may it see  
 With sinful eyes, for fear it to deflower,  
 Is perfect Beauty, which all men adore.  
 Whose face and feature doth so much excel  
 All mortal sense, that none the same may tell.

Thereof as every earthly thing partakes,  
 Or more or less by influence divine  
 So it more fair accordingly it makes,  
 And the gross matter of this earthly mine  
 Which encloseth it, thereafter doth refine,  
 Doing away the dross which dims the light  
 Of that fair beam, which therein is empight.<sup>95</sup>

Several decades later, Shakespeare likewise referred to that same divine Beauty, the heavenly prototype of all earthly beauty,<sup>96</sup> as being an unmoving, unchanging, immutable 'substance', expressing exactly the same Platonic doctrine in his Sonnet 53:

What is the substance, whereof are you made  
 That millions of strange shadows on you tend?  
 Since everyone hath, every one, one shade,  
 And you, but one, can every shadow lend.  
 Describe Adonis and the counterfeit  
 Is poorly imitated after you;  
 On Helen's cheek all art of beauty set,  
 And you in Grecian tires are painted new.

95. Cited by Kathleen Raine, *Defending Ancient Springs* (Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1985), p. 173.

96. The Platonic doctrine in this sonnet is commented on by both Raine and Line (cited in the previous two notes), and also underlined by most scholars of the sonnets: see e.g. Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 258, and Stephen Booth, *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Edited with an Analytic Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 224.

Speak of the spring and foison of the year,  
 The one does shadow of your beauty show,  
 The other as your bounty doth appear;  
 And you in every blessed shape we know.  
     In all external grace you have some part,  
     But you like none, none you, for constant heart.

The same Platonic teaching concerning the reflection of divine beauty in the mirror of the Eternal Feminine found in Donne, Spenser and Shakespeare also reappears in the nineteenth-century English Romantics and the American Transcendentalists. One of the most beautiful poems ever composed in any language on the manifestation of divine Beauty in earthly forms—and in this case, the Eternal Feminine—is Shelley's *Epipsychidion*,<sup>97</sup> where the supreme expression of this Platonic doctrine among the English Romantics appears. In the following verses the poet celebrates his ethereal beloved and praises the deathless reflection in her of the perfect forms of heavenly beauty upon earth:

See where she stands! a mortal shape indued  
 With love and life and light and deity,  
 And motion that may change but cannot die;  
 An image of some bright Eternity;  
 A shadow of some golden dream; a Splendour  
 Leaving the third sphere pilotless; a tender  
 Reflection of the eternal Moon of Love  
 Under whose motions life's dull billows move.<sup>98</sup>

Later on in the same poem, delighting in the poetic hyperbole which insists on beholding the divine original perpetually reviving the mortal exemplar, penetrating 'into the height of Love's rare universe', he actually refers to the same heavenly 'substance', which was the divine source of his longing:

97. In a letter to a friend, Shelley explained the mystical nature of the poem's inspiration as follows: 'The *Epipsychidion* is a mystery; as to real flesh and blood, you might as well go to a gin-shop for a leg of mutton, as to expect anything human or earthly from me' (*Complete Poems*, p. 298).

98. *Epipsychidion*, vv. 112–19.

Our breath shall intermix, our bosoms bound,  
 And our veins beat together; and our lips  
 With other eloquence than words, eclipse  
 The soul that burns between them, and the wells  
 Which boil under our being's inmost cells,  
 The fountains of our deepest life, shall be  
 Confused in Passion's golden purity . . .  
 In one another's substance finding food,  
 Like flames too pure and light and unimbued  
 To nourish their bright lives with baser prey,  
 Which point to Heaven and cannot pass away . . .<sup>99</sup>

Shelley's doctrine here, as Richard White pointed out, is a poetic paraphrase of the speech on love made by the comic poet Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*, in which he speculated to the gathering that the lover might regain his lost original wholeness through merging into the beloved.<sup>100</sup>

The Neoplatonic doctrine that the soul is an emanation of the One<sup>101</sup> expressed in these verses was also enunciated in similar terms in Rūmī's *Mathnawī*,<sup>102</sup> in the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* by Ibn 'Arabī,<sup>103</sup> and in other works on romantic and divine love by Ibn 'Arabī's later poet-disciples in the Persian Sufi tradition—specifically the *Divine Flashes (Lama'āt)* of Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī and the *Lawā'ih* of Jāmī. Although it is not possible to elaborate here in any detail on the intricacies of the Sufi metaphysics of love<sup>104</sup> or the Akbarian doctrines of theophany (*tajallī*) and theomonism (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) which animate the Sufi poetry of these two great poets, suffice it to say that the Platonic theory underlying Shelley's verses quoted above is quite close to the doctrine

99. *Ibid.*, vv.565–83.

100. Richard White, *Love's Philosophy* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), p. 56. See also Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 288 on these lines.

101. See *ibid.*

102. *Mathnawī-yi ma'nawī*, ed. R.A. Nicholson (Tehran, 1984), v. 372–4.

103. See R. J. W. Austin, 'The Sophianic Feminine in the Work of Ibn 'Arabī and Rūmī', in L. Lewisohn, ed. *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. 2: *The Legacy of Mediæval Persian Sufism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), pp. 233–45.

104. For an overview of such doctrines of love, see my 'Romantic Love in Islam', in *Encyclopædia of Love in World Religions*, ed. Yudit Greenberg (New York: Macmillan Reference & Thomson Gale, 2007), 11.513–15.

in chapter xxiv of the *Divine Flashes* of ʿIrāqī. All the lover's attributes in truth belong to the Beloved, ʿIrāqī asserts, for the lover

cannot be called a partner, for partnership in attributes would demand two separate essences. But in the lover's contemplative eye there exists in all reality but one single existent Essence.

A hundred things  
a million or more  
if you look to their reality  
are one.

Thus all attributes pertain to the Beloved alone, leaving no ontological attribute to the lover.<sup>105</sup>

This is exactly Shelley's doctrine of love as well, where he says in *Epipsychidion*:

We shall become the same, we shall be one  
Spirit within two frames, oh wherefore two?<sup>106</sup>

After the fashion of some classical Persian Sufi poet, Shelley describes in his poem *Adonais* his vision of the One beyond the temporal realm of generation and decay, seeming to inculcate a kind of Platonic Sufi *tawhīd* (the notion of divine unity which is the basis of Islamic faith) in verses which approach the Sufi vision of Unity within multiplicity:

The One remains, the many change and pass;  
Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;  
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,  
Stains the white radiance of Eternity  
Till Death tramples it to fragments. —<sup>107</sup>

Exactly the same metaphor of the shadow of earthly beauties acting as prisms mirroring and relaying the reflection of the One's heavenly radiance to the soul appears in Rūmī's *Mathnawī*. 'That which made

105. Fakhruddin ʿIraqi, *Divine Flashes*, trans. William Chittick and Peter Wilson (London: SPCK, 1982), pp. 118–19.

106. *Epipsychidion*, vv. 573–4.

107. Shelley, *Complete Poems*, p. 316 (*Adonais* LI1); see Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, pp. 297–301 for a good study of the Platonic doctrines in these famous lines.

you wonder and marvel at the faces of the Fair is the light of the Sun reflected through a glass prism. It is that many-coloured glass which makes that one Light appear as so many hues like this to you. So make yourself fit to gaze on that Light without a glass, lest when the glass is broken, you be left blind.<sup>108</sup> Here, we see the same archetypal poetic topos and anagogic insight shared by the Romantic and Sufi poet alike. Shelley's metaphor of the dome of many-coloured light refracting the Light of Eternity had first been coined in these verses by the Sage of Konya, it appears. Had Byron perhaps on their sailing trips recited these verses from Rūmī's *Mathnawī* to Shelley? This same kind of anagogic mirror metaphor was utilized by a number of other Persian Sufi poets,<sup>109</sup> and was mentioned repeatedly by ʿIrāqī in his *Divine Flashes (Lamaʿāt)*. The following passage is typical:

In each mirror, each moment the Beloved shows a different face, a different shape. Each instant reflections change to suit the mirror, image follows image in harmony with the situation.

In each mirror, each moment  
a new face reveals His beauty  
Now he is Adam, and now  
He appears in the robes of Eve.

Thus, He never twice shows the same face; never in two mirrors does one form appear. Abu Talib al-Makki says, 'He never shines through one shape twice nor manifests as one form in two places.'

His loveliness owns  
a hundred thousand faces;  
gaze upon a different fair one  
in every atom;  
for He needs must show  
to every separate mote  
a different aspect  
of His Beauty.  
'One' is the fountainhead  
of all numbers:

108. *Mathnawī-yi ma'nawī*, v.988-91. In his commentary on these verses, Nicholson to his credit quotes Shelley's verses cited above. See his edition, VIII.245, v. 988.

109. See Akhtar Qamber, 'The Mirror Symbol in the Teachings and Writings of Some Sufi Masters', *Temenos* 11 (1990) 163-79; Jacquelyn Bralove, 'The Mirror in Sufi Poetry', *Sufi* 20 (1993) 29-32.

each split second wells up  
a new perplexity.

Thus it is that every lover gives a different sign of the Beloved and every gnostic a different explanation; every realized one seems to point to something different, yet each of them declares:

'Expressions are many  
but Thy loveliness is one  
Each of us refers  
To that single Beauty' (al-Nuri).<sup>110</sup>

And in Jāmī's mystical epic *Yusūf va Zulaykhā* ('Joseph and Zulayka'), this doctrine is carefully enunciated as well.<sup>111</sup>

A few stanzas later on in *Adonais*, Shelley celebrates the divine light and love that fill the universe and are woven through the woof of life, diffusing a fiery glow that illuminates each person according to his or her capacity to receive its light:

. . . That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,  
That Beauty in which all things work and move,  
That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse  
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love  
Which through the web of being blindly wove  
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,  
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of  
The fire for which all thirst.<sup>112</sup>

Shelley's verses here (penned to celebrate his beloved 'Emilia as a Platonic theophany on earth . . . the earthly vision of Platonic Beauty, Love, and Immortality'<sup>113</sup>) have many close correspondences in the Persian Sufi poets' erotic theology, where we are told that the divine Beloved created the world like a mirror wherein God's Beauty and

110. 'Iraqī, *Divine Flashes*, trans. Chittick/Wilson, Flash v, pp. 81–2.

111. *Yusūf va Zulaykhā*, in Jāmī, *Mathnawī-yi Haft Awrang*, ed. A'lākhān Afḍāhrād and Ḥusayn Aḥmad Tarbiyat (Tehran: Nashr-i Mirāth-i Maktūb, 1378 A.Hsh./1999), II.34–6, particularly vv. 324–37, where he speaks of the pre-Eternal Beauty's reflection in the mirrors of created beings, 'for it is Her Beauty that everywhere appears/She's the One behind the veil of everyone beloved' (v. 334).

112. *Adonais* LI, LIV, in Shelley, *Complete Poems*, p. 316.

113. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 281.

Grandeur are reflected and adored.<sup>114</sup> This Sufi view of the cosmic hierophany is based on the common metaphysical symbolism shared by medieval Islamic and Christian thinkers alike, according to which 'all things are like so many mirrors', as the late Roman author Macrobius said, 'which reflect in their beauty the unique visage of God'.<sup>115</sup> In the Persian Sufi tradition, one of the most famous verses describing the reflection of divine beauty in Eternity *a parte ante* (*azal*), which causes 'love' (*ishq*) to appear and 'set ablaze' the entire world, was composed by Ḥāfiz:

One day in pre-Eternity a ray of your beauty  
Flashed forth in a blaze of theophany.  
Then Love revealed itself and cast down  
Its fire that razed the earth from toe to crown.<sup>116</sup>

Ḥāfiz speaks here of the 'Pre-eternal' role of Beauty which permeates and infiltrates the creation and Love which ultimately consumes it. Inspired by Ibn 'Arabī's theory of divine self-manifestation or theophany (*tajallī*: the same Arabic term used by the poet here), Ḥāfiz describes how God's beauty 'showed itself forth' (that is: theophany = *tajallī*) in two distinct manners. Firstly, His Beauty appeared through a 'theophany of the divine Essence' (*tajallī-yi dhātī*) which corresponds to the level of 'the most holy emanation' (*al-fayḍ al-aqdas*). Secondly, His Love appeared through the 'theophany of the divine Attributes' (*tajallī-yi šifātī*), which is the level of 'the holy emanation' (*al-fayḍ al-muqaddas*).

All creation thus serves as a mirror reflecting God's Beauty and Love according to Ḥāfiz's metaphysic, appearing through two basic types of 'self-manifestation' or theophany (*tajallī*) of the Absolute. During the second theophany, Love emerges from its invisible, purely intelligible condition, appearing in external phenomena, permeating every aspect of existence. Both through the love of human beings for one another

114. See A. Schimmel, *A Two-Coloured Brocade: the Imagery of Persian Poetry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 102.

115. In *somnium Scipionis*, 1.14; cited by Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 139. On various aspects of the mirror motif in Islamic thought, see Bürgel, *Feather of Simurgh*, pp. 138–58.

116. *Dīvān-i Khwāja Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāfiz*, ed. Parvīz Nātil Khānlari (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Khawārazmī, 1359 A.Hsh./1980), ghazal 148:1.

(which the Sufis call figurative love: *‘ishq-i majāzī*), and through that love which human beings have for God (which Sufis call divine love: *‘ishq-i Ḥaqīqī*), the fire of Love sets everything in the world ablaze.<sup>117</sup> Shakespeare, referring to the ‘right Promethean fire’ of the Eternal Feminine’s apparition, espouses this same ‘doctrine’ as follows:

From women’s eyes this doctrine I derive:  
They sparkle still the right Promethean fire;  
They are the books, the arts, the academes,  
That show, contain, and nourish all the world.<sup>118</sup>

Now, the metaphysical topos of Love’s fiery apparition through Beauty in the mirror of the world has a completely Christian (and Islamic) Platonic pedigree. It is clearly enunciated in *The Divine Names* of Pseudo-Dionysius,<sup>119</sup> a work which describes the universe as ‘an inexhaustible irradiation of beauty, a grandiose expression of the ubiquity of the First Beauty, a dazzling cascade of splendours’.<sup>120</sup> Centuries later it appears in Ficino’s commentary on Plato’s *Symposium* (which inspired Shakespeare’s verse cited above),<sup>121</sup> where we read how ‘the single face of God shines successively in three mirrors’. These ‘mirrors’ are the Angel, the Soul, and the Body of the World. The Angel here corresponds to what Muslim philosophers and Sufis call the First Intellect; the Soul corresponds exactly to the *Anima Mundi* or Universal Soul (*nafs-i kullī*) of Peripatetic thinkers such as Avicenna, a doctrine endorsed by all Sufis and the Illuminationist philosophers (*Ishrāqī*) of Islam. The Body of the World is of course the *materia* of the world. ‘The Angelic Mind,’ Ficino continues, ‘sees that face of God imprinted in its own breast. It immediately admires what it has seen. It cleaves passionately to it forever. The grace of that divine face we call beauty. The Angel’s passion, clinging inwardly to the face of God, we call Love.’

117. My interpretation of Ḥāfiz’s verse is based on Bahā’ī al-Dīn Khurramshāhī’s commentary on this poem. See his *Ḥāfiz-nāma: sharḥ-i alḥāz, i’lām, mafāhīm-i kilīdī va abyāt-i dushvār-i Ḥāfiz* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Surūsh, 1372 A.Hsh./1993), 1.600.

118. *Love’s Labours Lost*, IV.3,346–9.

119. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), pp. 76–7 (701D–704A).

120. Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. Hugh Bredin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 18.

121. On the Platonic doctrine derived from Ficino in these verses, see Line, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–12.

Precisely the same doctrine is also taught here by Ḥāfiz, who envisions in his verse the pre-Eternal ray of divine Beauty setting the world ablaze with love. So identical are the Neoplatonic theoerotic doctrines of the Sufis to Renaissance Christian-Platonism that glossing Ḥāfiz's verse with Ficino's exegesis of the *Symposium* works perfectly in this case. Ficino explains that 'beauty is a certain lively and spiritual grace infused by the shining ray of God, first in the Angel, and thence in the souls of men, the shapes of bodies, and sounds; a grace which through reason, sight, and hearing moves and delights our souls; in delighting, carries them away; and in carrying them away, inflames them with burning love'.<sup>122</sup> This apparition of beauty, first to the Angel and then to men, detailed in depth by Ficino here, is in fact precisely recorded by Ḥāfiz in the next verse of his poem:

Your Face revealed itself. It saw the Angels had  
No Love; so then it turned like fire consumed  
With jealous rage, and struck the soul of man.

If we now review Shelley's stanza cited above ('That Light . . .'), we see that the light imagery of Shelley and Ḥāfiz both anagogically describe the same reality. That 'Light whose smile kindles the Universe', which fills Shelley with such enthusiasm and that generates that 'sustaining Love' reflected in the mirrors of 'man and beast and earth and air and sea' throughout all levels of the Body of the World, is essentially identical to the pre-Eternal epiphany of beauty envisioned by the Persian Shirazi poet. Furthermore, this is exactly the same metaphysical doctrine that had been taught by Spenser who described how 'every earthly thing partakes' of the 'influence divine', and so refines the dross of that 'gross matter' which had dimmed 'the light of that fair beam'.

To conclude this study of the anagogic correspondences between Persian Sufi and English Romantic poetry it is fitting that we consider how both Platonic traditions are united by their shared ecumenical approach to religious diversity. Their intellectual fraternity is best reflected in the similarity of their understanding of the topos of

122. Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, p. 95 (v. 6).

## 6. The Unity of Religions

Arthur McCalla informs us that ‘Romanticism holds that the essential content of myths and religions is the same everywhere and at all times (that is, the unfolding of Spirit), [so] it follows that differences among them are only superficial and that there is no absolute distinction between Christianity and other religions . . . Romanticism practices an analogical hermeneutics of myth and religion that discovers an inner unity beneath the surface differences that seem so striking.’<sup>123</sup> This ecumenical outlook on the higher unity of religious diversity on the part of Romanticism bears comparison with the traditional Sufi standpoint of the transcendental Unity of Religions (*wahdat al-madhāhib*).<sup>124</sup> Consider, for instance, these verses by Shaykh Bahā’ī (d. 1030/1631), the leading Persian Sufi poet of seventeenth-century Persia and one of the greatest Shī’ite divines and scientists of the entire Safavid epoch:

I visited the hermitage of pietists and priests;  
 I witnessed they all knelt in awe and reverence  
 Before her visage there. Since in the wine cell of the monk  
 And in the chapel of the pietist I was  
 At home, it’s there I dwell. At times I make my residence  
 The mosque, at times the cell: which is to say, it’s you  
 I seek in every place, both in the tavern and the church.

Whatever door I knock upon, the Lord within  
 The house is always you, and every place I go  
 The light that shines therein is always you.  
 The One beloved in bodega and convent you:  
 From Ka’ba or pagoda all my quest and aim

123. ‘Romanticism’, in Hanegraaff, ed., *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* II.1003–04.

124. Traditionalist approaches to this concept appear in the classic work by F. Schuon, *The Transcendental Unity of Religions* (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1984) and S. H. Nasr, ‘Principal Knowledge and the Multiplicity of Sacred Forms’, in his *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), pp. 280–308. On the theory of the transcendental unity of religions in Sufism, see my ‘The Transcendental Unity of Polytheism and Monotheism in the Sufism of Shabistarī’, in L. Lewisohn, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism*, II.379–406.

Again, is you. You, *you*, are what I seek therein:  
The rest—pagoda or the Ka‘ba—all is but a ruse.<sup>125</sup>

In these verses Shaykh Bahā‘ī follows a Sufi tradition that can be traced back at least to the thirteenth century, if not earlier, in Persian poetry, which espoused the ecumenical idea that, as one modern commentator on Ḥāfiz’s verse has put it, ‘the relish for the spiritual quest exists in everyone, and all the various religions have the same basic spiritual aim. Moreover, divine Love is not restricted to Sufi mystics alone, for both the mosque and the temple are places of love’.<sup>126</sup> The commentator on Ḥāfiz was referring to two different verses where the poet tells us that all the various faiths and sects of mankind comprise multiple expressions of a single Truth:

Let’s forgive the seventy-two sects for their ridiculous  
Wars and misbehaviors.<sup>127</sup> Because they couldn’t take in  
The path of truth, they took the road of moonshine.<sup>128</sup>

\* \* \*

Whether we are drunk or sober, each of us is making  
For the street of the Friend. The temple, the synagogue,  
The church and the mosque are all houses of love.<sup>129</sup>

Many of the Romantic poets held similar if not nearly identical views to those of Ḥāfiz. Tennyson, for instance, writing in his poem ‘Akbar’s Dream’ (composed not incidentally after reading and translating Ḥāfiz from the original Persian—a passion that he shared with his friend Edward Fitzgerald), espoused exactly the same open-minded pluralistic attitude towards religious diversity:

125. From Bahā‘ al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Āmilī, *Kulliyāt-i ash‘ār va āthār-i fārsī Shaykh Bahā‘ī*, ed. ‘Alī Kātibī (Tehran: Nashr-i Chakāma, n.d.), p. 348. Translation mine.

126. Ḥusayn ‘Alī Haravī, *Sharḥ-i ghazalḥā-yi Ḥāfiz* (Tehran: Nashr-i Nū, 1367 A.Hsh./1988), I.365.

127. An allusion to a famous *ḥadīth* of the Prophet: ‘Verily, after me my community will be subdivided into seventy-three different sects, out of which one will be saved, and the seventy-two others will be in hell.’

128. *Dīwān-i . . . Ḥāfiz*, ed. Khānlārī, ghazal 179:4; trans. Robert Bly and Leonard Lewisohn.

129. *Ibid.*, ghazal 78: 3; trans. Robert Bly and Leonard Lewisohn.

the never-changing One  
 And ever-changing Many, in praise of whom  
 The Christian bell, the cry from off the mosque,  
 And vaguer voices of Polytheism  
 Make but one music, harmonising 'Pray'.<sup>130</sup>

Aside from being touched by the 'Tongue of the Invisible' (Ḥāfiẓ), Tennyson's views here had also been inspired by the Indian Sufi poets who wrote in Persian at the court of Akbar the Great (ruler of Mughal India, reigned 1542–1605) in praise of religious syncretism. Poets such as ʿUrfī, Fayḏī and Rahāʿī had all penned verse in praise of a transcendental religious unity, aiming to assimilate, accept and absorb the differing views of Hindus, Muslims, and Zoroastrians. ʿUrfī's famous verse sums up the spirit of their ecumenical endeavour:

The lover's drunk and senseless; he  
 Knows neither Islam or infidelity.  
 He's like a moth empassioned over fire  
 So one appears to him the burning pyre  
 Outside the Hindu's pagoda  
 Or candle burning in the Ka'ba.<sup>131</sup>

Tennyson's attitude towards religious diversity, obviously influenced by his reading of Persian and Mughal Sufi poetry, is echoed in Byron's comment (jotted down in a footnote to his poem *The Giaour* written in 1813) that 'On a still evening, when the Muezzin has a fine voice . . . the effect is solemn and beautiful beyond all the bells in Christendom'.<sup>132</sup> Byron, like Tennyson, knew Persian poetry quite well.<sup>133</sup> He

130. *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans, 1969), pp. 139–43; cited by Parvin Loloī, 'Tennyson, Fitzgerald, and Cowell: A Private Relationship with Public Consequences', in Sabine Coelsch-Foisner and Holger Klein, ed., *Private and Public Voices in Victorian Poetry* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 2000), pp. 5–17 (pp. 15–16).

131. Cited by Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Akbar and Religion* (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1989), p. 210. Translation mine.

132. *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie Marchand (London: John Murray, 1973–82), III.199 (note on line 734); cited by Mohammed Sharafuddin, *Islam and Romantic Orientalism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1994), p. 237.

133. See Bernard Blackstone, 'Byron and Islam: The Triple Eros', *Journal of European Studies* 4 (1970) 325–63.

had read Ḥāfiẓ and Saʿdī,<sup>134</sup> and was himself adept in the doctrines (and quite probably an initiate of) the Bektashi Order of Sufis in Ottoman Turkey.<sup>135</sup> Blake, it should also be recalled, in 1788, had etched a short tract entitled 'All Religions are One', where he preaches that 'The Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nation's reception of the Poetic Genius, which is every where call'd the Spirit of Prophecy'.<sup>136</sup> This ecumenical outlook on religious diversity amongst the Romantics is ultimately traceable back to the seventeenth-century Cambridge Platonists such as Henry More (1614–1680), whose doctrine on this matter was quite close to the contemporary Persian Platonists of the School of Iṣfahān,<sup>137</sup> as Marshall Hodgson and Corbin have pointed out.<sup>138</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSION: PLATONIC POETICS AND THE SCIENCE OF ANAGOGIC CRITICISM

From the foregoing, it can be seen that the epistemological key to understanding the Platonic poetics of both Persian Sufi and English Romantic poetry is to be found in the science of anagogic criticism. As demonstrated above, if we approach both the English Romantic and the Persian Sufi poetic traditions *anagogically*, contemplating their *topoi*, myths and symbols as fundamental *expressions of universal symbols*, there appear to be far more parallelisms than divergences of perspective between poets in both mystical traditions. This is particularly the case if we study the *spiritual* sentiments of Sufis and Romantics. Anagogically speaking, as shown above, they point to essentially the same metaphysical truth and reality, which are expressed poetically in a lexicon which is predominantly Platonic/

134. H. Javadi, 'Persian Literary Influence on English Literature', *Indo-Iranica* 26:1 (1973), p. 22.

135. Blackstone, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

136. Blake: *Complete Writings*, p. 98.

137. See L. Lewisohn, 'Sufism and the School of Iṣfahān: *Taṣawwuf* and 'Irfān in Late Safavid Iran (Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī and Fayḍ-i Kāshānī on the Relation of *Taṣawwuf*, *Ḥikmat* and 'Irfān)', in Lewisohn and Morgan, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism* III.63–134. Cf. More's defence of 'Liberty of Conscience', in David Mullan, ed., *Religious Pluralism in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 159–65. The doctrine of the Cambridge Platonists on the subject was latter versified by Alexander Pope (d. 1744) in his *Essay on Man* (IV, 307–9).

138. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1974), III.52.

Neoplatonic, whatever their exoteric religious persuasions—Christian (Romantic) or Muslim (Sufi)—may be.

To demonstrate this, it may be *helpful*, but not always *necessary*, to know how much Persian, for instance, Tennyson knew, or whether Byron and Shelley had actually read Sa'dī and Ḥāfīz. But even without knowing these helpful details, I think it may be demonstrated that *anagogically* they were expressing fundamentally similar spiritual visions. Geographically, of course, because 'the favourite location of English poetry' that was composed by Romantics such as Shelley, Byron and Robert Southey 'in the second decade of the nineteenth century becomes the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East',<sup>139</sup> there was a tendency on the part of almost all the Romantics to favour the Muslim Orient and sometimes even to celebrate Islam.<sup>140</sup> Likewise, in terms of literary influence, one also notices that at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries 'there came into existence a small but significant body of work translated from Persian',<sup>141</sup> works which clearly did have an effect on the English and American Romantic movements. Yet even without these literary influences and tendencies, which are significant, it should be reiterated that the anagogic perspective partook of the shared Islamic-Christian Platonic heritage that was quintessentially *both* Romantic *and* Sufi.

Apart from the Platonic and Neoplatonic heritage, M. H. Abrams has shown in *Natural Supernaturalism*, his monumental study of Romanticism, how deeply the Romantic poets were steeped in Hermetic and esoteric currents of thought.<sup>142</sup> Just as the Romantics shared a fascination with Platonic philosophy and Neoplatonic esoteric doctrines, so the Persian poets were steeped in Sufi mystical doctrine and symbolism; for this reason any comparative study of Romantic and Sufi poetry must take such forms of esoteric speculation seriously, not dismissing them to the realm of the fanciful and fantastic. Unfortunately, the common ground of the esoteric has been all but eradicated from the

139. Marilyn Butler, 'Romanticism in England', in Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, ed., *Romanticism in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 37–67 (p. 59).

140. See Sharafuddin, *Islam and Romantic Orientalism*, introduction.

141. M. J. Ahmad, *Persian Poetry and the English Reader from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century* (M.Litt. dissertation, University of Newcastle 1971), p. 41.

142. *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton & Co., 1971).

study of literature by what can only be described as the secular mind's inherent distaste for metaphysical speculation. This is the product of a 'subtle, unacknowledged form of agnosticism' that, as Henry Corbin puts it, 'consists in raising a frontier between what is commonly known as philosophy and what is known as theology'. Although the origins of this frontier are situated remote in time, 'it has particularly made itself felt in the countries of so-called Latin civilization . . . where philosophy as such has lost contact with "the phenomenon of the Holy Book" which, if it makes its presence known, there are philosophers to claim that it is no longer philosophy'. But it is only by grace of the *esoteric dimension* that philosophy and theology may operate as a unity. For this reason, as Corbin reminds us,

There is no such thing as Christian philosophy, or Judaic philosophy or Islamic philosophy. If we trace carefully the origins of this declaration, we collide with the frontier erected between philosophy and theology, and there it can be seen to be a consequence of the refusal of the esoteric, which is nevertheless common to the 'religions of the Book'. It is that esoteric which traditional philosophy and sciences postulate, and which has isolated them from official philosophy and theology to the extent which, in the West, these refuse what remains the axis of oriental thought.<sup>143</sup>

For the purposes of this essay, the most relevant aspect of this secular 'refusal of the esoteric' is our dismissal of the role that anagogic criticism must play in comparative literature. The Poetic Genius and Imagination, as understood by both the Romantics and Sufis, has access to an anagogic, parabolic Reality.<sup>144</sup> Once this is admitted, and once the esoteric symbolism and doctrines sustaining that Reality are appreciated and understood, then, whether the poetic expression of that vision be phrased in Latin or Greek, Turkish or Hindi, Arabic or English, Persian or Japanese, becomes almost a secondary consideration. As the Sufi poet Sanā'ī teaches us:

143. H. Corbin, 'Traditional Knowledge and Spiritual Renaissance', trans. Kathleen Raine, *Temenos Academy Review* 1 (1998) 29–45 (pp. 37–8).

144. An interesting essay which applies Corbin's notion of the Islamic *mundus imaginis* to English and American literature of the Romantic period is David Mitchell, 'Nature as Theophany', *Temenos* 7 (1986) 95–114.

When the song you sing is for the sake of Faith,  
 Who cares if it is in Syriac or in Hebrew sung?  
 When the place you seek is for the sake of Truth,  
 What matter if your abode is Jābalqā or Jābarsā?<sup>145</sup>

145. *Dīvān-i Ḥakīm Abū'l-Majdūd ibn Ādam Sanā'ī Ghaznavī*, ed. Mudarris Raḡavī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Kitābkhāna-i Sanā'ī, 1362 A.Hsh./1983), p. 52. Jābalqā and Jābarsā are cities of the subtle world of the Imagination. Jābalqā is the *mundus archetypus* located to the East, an interworld between the visible and supersensory worlds, containing all the archetypes of the universe. Jābarsā is located in the West, and is the world of Image-exemplars: the interworld in which Spirits dwell after they have left the terrestrial realm: Jābalqā corresponds roughly to Blake's Beulah, and Jābarsā to his Golgonooza. See Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: from Mazdean Iran to Shī'ite Iran*, trans. N. Pearson (London: I. B. Tauris 1990; reprint of the Princeton University 1976 ed.), pp. 160–61.