# REFLECTIONS ON RUMI'S RECEPTION IN AMERICA

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## Abstract

*The paper attempts at seeing the recent reception of Rumi in America in relation to the contemporary critical reformulations of the Emersonian aesthetic ideal through postmodern critique of deconstruction. The paper suggests that despite the transformations of romanticism in the Emersonian and the deconstructive thought that open considerable critical grounds for the reception of a figure like Rumi, both the discourses still submit to a certain "epistemic tyranny" that may allow the criticism industry today to cash in upon Rumi in ways that may turn "the sacral into the banal".*

*... [W]hen the sun is hid, and the stars withdraw their shining, --- we repair to the lamps which were kindled by their ray, to guide our steps to the East again, where the dawn is.*

*The American Scholar*

*Beware, do not make (too much) haste: first become naught, and when you sink (into non-existence) rise from the radiant East!*

*Rumi*
*The Mathnawi*

Dubbed as "Rumi-mania" by Franklin D. Lewis, the American author of arguably one of the most comprehensive biographies of Rumi in English, the American reception of Rumi over the past couple of decades has been phenomenal. The way Mawlana Jalauddin Rumi has captured the American cultural imagination in the recent years is indeed an event that invites critical attention. Among the more visible factors influencing this surging interest in Rumi one must mention Coleman Barks, whom Lewis considers as chiefly responsible, more than any other single individual, for Rumi's current fame, who "uncaged" the scholarly translations of Rumi by Nicholson by translating them further into the contemporary American idiom. Along with Barks' somewhat "inaccurate" translations, another contributing influence to this euphoric response is what Lewis calls "the unchurched Westerner's (hunger) for some form of non-institutional religion or non-traditional spirituality". In addition to these, the spectacular performances of the so-called "whirling dervishes" have also contributed towards attracting the media attention making Rumi available to even the pop-culture, with celebrities like Madonna and Demi Moore featuring in Deepak Chopra's musical versions of the poet. Although Lewis watches with concern the way the American pop culture "dilutes and distorts (Rumi's) message", and with "a foreboding sense that modern secular culture will inevitably

reduce the sacral into the banal through its relentless commercialism and consumerism",[1] the present scenario nevertheless brings one point home: that Rumi appeals simultaneously both to the sublime (by drawing considerable scholarly attention) and to the mundane (the pop) sensibilities of the American culture. Such a reception is anticipated by Rumi himself. Rumi's reed tells us: "Every one became my friend from his own opinion; none sought my secrets from within me".[2] In the American reception of Rumi what we are witnessing is a coming together of one of the most unique poetic phenomena in the history of world literature with one of the most complex cultural scenarios in the world today.

No matter how much I would personally feel inclined towards leaving the uniqueness of Rumi and the complex diversity of the American culture as self-evident claims, still critical deliberation would demand a few supporting words here. By way of addressing the complexity of the American culture, for my immediate purpose, I would like to focus more upon the aesthetic and intellectual aspects of this cultural identity, leaving out cultural indicators that Homi Bhabha would call "the scraps, patches, and rags of daily life". For this purpose I would like to bring in here Ralph Waldo Emerson, thought by many as the father of American thought, and undoubtedly one of the seminal figures in the American cultural history. Tracing through Emerson an aesthetic ideal, I would attempt at arguing that one way of seeing Rumi's reception in America may be as a sort of a response, perhaps an unconscious one, to this Emersonian aesthetic ideal itself, especially in its radical reformulation in the postmodern critical trends.

In the introduction to his first translation of Rumi, Coleman Barks characterizes Rumi's creativity as a "continuous fountaining from beyond forms and the mind, from a mind within mind, the *qalb*", which defies any comprehension through the accepted categories of mind.[3] Here lies a point of affinity between Rumi's poetic phenomenon and the Emersonian project of resisting the accepted categories of the western mind through which aesthetic and cultural ideals have historically been measured. Emerson himself as a writer resists convenient categorization into the roles of a poet, a critic, a philosopher or as a preacher. I see Emerson's critical project as an attempt at formulating the basis of an aesthetic culture going well beyond the boundaries of Eurocentrism. That is why perhaps to critics like T. S. Eliot, who himself left America to settle in Britain, Emerson seemed "an encumbrance" and more of an orator than a critic. On the other hand, the strength of Emerson's thought has been appreciated by thinkers like Nietzsche, who called Emerson "a brother soul", where the sentiment to resist the western metaphysics was more pronounced than perhaps anywhere else in the nineteenth century. In more recent years, Emerson has been reevaluated as a "proto-deconstructionist", instead of being the "cheery sage of Concord", as a figure divided against himself, symptomizing what Joel

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[1] Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi, Past and Present, East and West, The Life, Teachings and Poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi*, (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 4. (Henceforth referred to as *Rumi*)

[2] Jalaluddin Rumi, *The Mathnawi of Jalaluddin Rumi*, trans. R. A. Nicholson, (Karachi: Darul-Ishaat, 2003), I/ 6, 5.

[3] Coleman Barks with John Moyne, *The Essential Rumi*, (NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995).

Porte called "the American psychomachia", a fundamental split in the American character.[4]

This split could well be taken as an attempt at renewing the identity of a new culture, at writing a new history of a new nation. This new history, at least as Emerson envisioned it, would be more about the present and future of America than its past, not simply a legacy of Europe. As Emerson wrote in one of his journal entries, along with Aristophanes and Rabelais, a good scholar will even find Hafiz, the Persian poet, "full of American history".[5]

It is keeping in mind this non-Eurocentric cultural outlook that we should look at the ideal of a poet that Emerson presents. "When the intervals of darkness come", writes Emerson in *The American Scholar*, "... when the sun is hid, and the stars withdraw their shining, --- we repair to the lamps which were kindled by their ray, to guide our steps to the East again, where the dawn is".[6] It is a significant historical event that the inauguration of the American thought in this manner coincides with the European movement of Romanticism, that short lived period in the European history in which the age old quarrel between poetry and philosophy was sought to be resolved in favour of the former. But European Romanticism, at least in its nineteenth century idealist form, could not last for long. It could not probably sustain itself amidst the growing criticism of its idealism, as an approach cut off from the practical affairs of life. In transferring European Romanticism to America, one big contribution that Emerson made was to challenge this arbitrary distinction between the ideal and the practical affairs. "To a sound judgment", Emerson pronounced in *Nature*, "the most abstract truth is the most practical".[7] On the other side of the Atlantic, in Emerson's own life time, Mathew Arnold was advising the literary critic to remain as aloof as possible from the practical affairs. Through Arnold Europe was witnessing the decay and failure of Romantic idealism. But Arnold was also a great advocate of considering Europe as a great confederation, writing its own self-enclosed history within itself. Arnold at the same time was attempting to liberalize and secularize literature by having religion replaced by poetry. At such a moment, given the religious temperament of the East, the colonized *other* had to be perpetually kept at bay from ever participating in the aesthetic ideals of the western world. In contrast, Emerson in giving his ideal of the poet is ever anticipating the collapse of the boundaries between the self and the other, the East and the West, and the necessary part religion must play in the actualization of the aesthetic ideal. In his 1876 dissertation on Poetry and Imagination he writes:

> Of course, when we describe man as poet, and credit him with the triumphs of the art, we speak of the potential or ideal man --- not found now in any one person. You must go through a city or a nation, and find one faculty here, one

[4] Joel Porte, *Representative Man: Ralph Waldo Emerson in His Time*, (London and NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), 140.
[5] Emerson, *The Journal and Miscellaneous Notebooks*, 10: 35. Quoted here from Lewis, *Rumi*, 570.
[6] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Selected Prose and Poetry*, ed. Reginald L. Cook, (NY: Rinehart, 1960), 53. (Henceforth referred to as *SPP*)
[7] Ibid., 4.

> there, to build the true poet withal. Yet all men know the portrait when it is drawn and it is a part of religion to believe its possible incarnation.[8]

In identifying the poetic and the religious, Emerson sets tough standards for any one to come up to the ideal of his poet. "The religions of the world", he says in *The Poet*, "are the ejaculations of a few imaginative men".[9] In the same essay, after describing the ideal poet, Emerson frankly admits his inability to find any such figure in the western history: "I look in vain for the poet whom I describe ... I have not found that excellent combination of gifts in my countrymen which I seek, neither could I aid myself to fix the idea of the poet by reading now and then in ... five centuries of English poets ... When we adhere to the ideal of the poet, we have our difficulties even with Milton and Homer".[10]

True poetry for Emerson is "God's wine". The "sublime vision" that Emerson associates with the poetic imagination "comes to the pure and simple soul in a clean and chaste body". In a reciprocating gesture to Plato's mistrust of inspiration, Emerson qualifies his idea of poetic inspiration in divine terms. This inspiration does not come from the conscious self of the poet, as happened with many romantic poets, but rather comes as a result of "unlocking his human doors, (to suffer) the ethereal tides to roll and circulate through him ... beyond the energy of his possessed and conscious intellect ...". To the true poet, the one "who received the true nectar, Emerson prescribed austere ascetic practices. All such qualifications occur in Emerson's essay *The Poet*, during his discussion of the distinction between a lyric and an epic poet, the two extrapolated aesthetic characters, who have been struggling to come together in the history of western literature, the lyric, the personal, conventionally associated with the romantic, and the epic, the impersonal, with the classic. Paradoxically, in Emerson the ideal seems to be writing personal poetry that is impersonal at the same time.

A few words now on the uniqueness of Rumi's poetic phenomenon. Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi was certainly a poet who wrote lyrics of epic proportions. In a productive career of some thirty odd years, even shorter than the whole span of English Romanticism, having already passed the normal *romantic* age (T. S. Eliot often associated Romanticism with adolescence. Rumi seems to have started writing poetry when he was about forty, at the time of his first separation from Shams Tabriz), Rumi composed some 3,229 ghazals and qasidas, coming to a total of approximately 35000 lines of poetry. 25,6888 lines of the *Mathnawi* would make his poetic output more than 60,000 lines of verse, more than what Homer, Dante, Milton or Shakespeare produced. As F. D. Lewis points out, 60,000 lines of Rumi's Persian would actually equal about 120,000 lines of verse in English. There are around 570, 000 syllables in the *Mathnawi*, coming equal to syllables found in approximately 4000 sonnets.[11]

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[8] Emerson, "Poetry and Imagination", in *The American Transcendentalists*, ed. Perry Miller, (NY: Doubleday, 1957), 210.
[9] Emerson, "The Poet", in *SPP*, 335.
[10] Ibid., 336.
[11] Lewis, *Rumi*, 314.

But quantity alone does not measure the quality of verse. Some critics have suggested that Rumi may have been subject to automatic writing. Rumi , apparently at least like the romantics, sought inspiration from within the self: *az darūn-e-khīshten jū chashmeh râ* (Seek the fountain from within your self).[12] But was the nature of this self identical with idea of the *Cogito* inheriting which Romanticism opened its eyes? One could recall here Emerson's words in *Self-Reliance* where he calls the self as a "science baffling star, without parallax … the fountain of action and thought". In this self for Emerson "are the lungs of inspiration which giveth man wisdom, and which cannot be denied without impiety and atheism. It is that source which we call Spontaneity".

If one were to look for an ideal of spontaneous poetry, Rumi could serve as an example *par excellence*. Describing his own poetic process Rumi writes:

> I am thinking of rhymes, and my sweetheart says to me,
> "Do not think of ought except my vision
> Sit at your ease. My rhyme meditating friend:
> In my presence you are rhymed with felicity.
> What are words that you should think of them?
> What are words? Thorns in the hedge of the vineyard.
> I will throw words and sounds and speech into confusion, that
> Without these three I may converse with You.[13]

The source of such an inspiration is a self that is annihilated in the vision of the most Beautiful, in Emerson's words, "beyond the energy of the conscious intellect". This "I-hood" is not the Cartesian self-consciousness, something that Rumi would dismiss as *hushyari* and call it a sin: "The way of him who has passed away is another way/ Because sobriety/ self-consciousness (*hushyari*) is another sin".[14] The "I-hood" Rumi talks about that rises from "the radiant East" and is revealed only after "passing away from self" (*fana*):

> Beware, do not make (too much) haste: first become naught, and when you sink (into non-existence) rise from the radiant East!
> The heart was dumbfounded by the eternal "I"-hood: this (unreal) "I"-hood became insipid and opprobrious (in its sight).
> The spirit was made glad by that "I"-hood without "I" and sprang away from the "I"-hood of the world.
> Since it has been delivered from "I", it has now become "I": blessings on the "I" that is without affliction;
> For it is fleeing (from its unreal "I"-hood) and the (real) "I"-hood is running after it, since it saw it (the spirit) to be selfless.
> (If) you seek it (the real "I"-hood, it will not become a seeker of you: only when you have died (to self) will that which you seek become your seeker.

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[12] Rumi, *The Mathnawi*, IV / 1968. (English translation mine).
[13] Ibid. , I / 1727-30.
[14] Rumi, *The Mathnawi*, I/ 2200.

> If the intellect could discern the (true) way in this question, Fakhr-i Razi would be an adept in religious mysteries;
> But since he was (an example of the saying that) whoso has not tasted does not know, his intelligence and imaginations (only) increased his perplexity.
> How should this "I" be revealed by thinking? That "I" is revealed (only) after passing away from self (*fana*).[15]

It is through reconceptualizing the self in such categories that seem to break away from the Cartesian determination of self-hood that the Emersonian critical categories draw some affinity with Rumi's Sufi discourse, and also with the so-called deconstructive strategies in the later half of the twentieth century. It may not be merely a chance phenomenon that a revitalized American interest in the past few decades in Sufism in general and Rumi in particular coincides with critical reestimation of the Emersonian romanticism. In the earlier half of the century, the American critical tendencies governed powerfully by the likes of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot had almost interdicted Emerson and Romanticism together. But such an interdiction can possibly be understood as kind of a Freudian repression always destined to return. Later critical works on Eliot, for example, reveal an unacknowledged Emersonian and romantic heredity which a possible anxiety of influence might not have allowed the likes of Eliot to own.[16] A symptom that may point towards the idea that such repressive tendencies were not so much in line with the course the American intellectual culture was to take is Eliot's settling himself in England, as though leaving behind both his protestant and romantic legacies.

Emersonian romanticism had to make a more powerful return in the postmodern period through post-structuralism, especially through deconstruction. The American critical culture, in the last few decades of the twentieth century, that received both Rumi and Emerson with open hands, was hugely under the influence of deconstruction. Although deconstruction as an approach originated in the continent rather than in America, American culture was, to use an expression of the editors of *Deconstruction in America*, "over-receptive": "... there has long seemed something puzzling, even disturbing, in the relation of American culture to European culture. When not closed into willful provincial isolation, the United States has appeared over-receptive ... the "greatest" and most "difficult" European writers have often had, even before in their homelands, their "first vogue" in America ..."[17] While not completely disagreeing with Van Wyck Brooks that such over-reception might be caused by the "culture of industrialism" that could find "nothing real to us", I would like to add a different dimension as to its explanation, namely, the presence of critical tendencies in the roots of American thought, *à la* Emerson, which are akin to what deconstruction had to offer.

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[15] Ibid. , V/ 4124-4146

[16] See for instance Edward Lobb, *T. S. Eliot and the Romantic Critical Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1981), George Bornstein, *Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot and Stevens* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), Eugenia M. Gunner, *T. S. Eliot's Romantic Dilemma* (NY: Garland, 1985), Steven Helmling, "Emersonian Eliot" in *The Sewanee Review*, Winter 1994.

[17] Jonathan Arac, Wlad Godzich, Wallace Martin (eds.), *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), X.

I must clarify here that seeking any affinity between some of the seminal deconstructive premises and Rumi via Emerson is not to suggest an identicality or any unconditional compatibility between Sufi thought and deconstruction, a tendency that has marked the critical efforts of some critics in recent times. Even a comparative study of Rumi with the figures like Emerson, who unlike the postmodern "Godless" philosophies display a more religious outlook, has to be carried out with due consideration to the cultural, ideological and theological contexts that qualify their work. Rather the point in talking about Rumi, Emerson and deconstruction in a single breath is to evoke a certain drift away from a philosophical reason that had dominated the European thought since its inception. If the project of deconstruction, in the words of Herman Rapaport, is to produce a debunking critique of the "Western reason" that "has become a deity in its own right",[18] then this critique can surely trace its roots to Emerson's finding all philosophy "at fault" in the determination of the self.[19] Such an Emersonian gesture of distrusting any claim of philosophical reason to self-knowledge resonates in Derrida's deconstructive take on the fundamental Cartesian premise of *cogito*. For Derrida, the Cartesian claim to self-knowledge paradoxically necessitates the disappearance of the self itself:

> If the possibility of my disappearance in general must somehow be experienced in order for a relationship wit presence in general to be instituted, we can no longer say that the experience of the possibility of my absolute disappearance (my death) affects me, occurs to an I am, and modifies a subject, The I am, being experienced only as an I am present, itself supposes a relationship with presence in general, with being as presence. The appearing of the Ito itself in the *I am* is thus originally a relation with its own possible disappearance. Therefore, *I am* originally means *I am mortal*.[20]

This deconstructive mocking of the philosophical surety of knowledge is a hallmark of the later twentieth century criticism in America, and it also measures to some extent the implications of Emerson's stress upon intuition, spontaneity and imagination in the matters of perception. It may be true, as Roger Lundin argues, that for the twentieth century thinkers (Lundin quotes Martin Heidegger, whom Derrida acknowledges as one of the precursors of deconstruction) intuition itself is not a category that transcends language and history, and hence the romantic "dream of tearing the veil to gain an unobstructed view of truth is a delusion",[21] but the deconstructive thrust is not so much towards the rejection of such delusive idealism as towards an extension of such a delusion to all modes of scientific and philosophical knowledge, towards the *epistemé* itself.

That is why in the American critical culture of the last few decades of the twentieth century, along with the revival of interest in Emerson, there also has been a drastic

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[18] Herman Rapaport, *Heidegger and Derrida. Reflections on Time and Language* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 49.
[19] Emerson, "Self-Reliance", in *SPP*, 177.
[20] Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David B. Allison, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973) 54.
[21] Roger Lundin, "Emerson and the Spirit of Theory" in *Religion and Literature*, 21.3, Autumn, 1989.

revision in the way romantic idealism in general has been historically viewed. Paul de Man, a major American deconstructionist, traces these "considerable and revealing fluctuations" in the reputation of the main English romantic poets and considers the more recent critical trends, even if they be self-pronouncedly anti-romantic, as an "expansion of our understanding of the (romantic) movement":

> These fluctuations reflect changes in critical temper that are themselves the result of a continued reinterpretation of romanticism. Time and again, literary and critical movements set out with the avowed aim of moving beyond romantic attitudes and ideas; in America alone, Pound's imagism, Irving Babbitt's neo-humanism and New Criticism of T. S. Eliot are relatively recent instances of such a trend; the same anti-romantic (or anti-idealist) bias underlies neo-realist and neo-Marxist tendencies here and abroad. But time and again, it turns out that the new conceptions that thus assert themselves were in fact already present in the full context of European romanticism; instead of moving beyond these problems, we are merely becoming aware of certain aspects of romanticism that had remained hidden from our perception ... What sets out as a claim to overcome romanticism often turns out to be merely an expansion of our understanding of the movement, leading inevitably to changes in our images of individual poets.[22]

So what is this "expanded" understanding of romantic idealism that has suffered a "gradual demystification" at the hands of the nineteenth century realism, and then subsequently has been reappropriated by the postmodern critiques of structuralism, a reappropriation that has rendered the so-called romantic "delusion" increasingly relevant within a contemporary context? In one of his later works de Man first elaborates the structuralist understanding of the romantic delusion as a belief that "in the language of poetry, sign and meaning can coincide, or at least be related to each other in the free and harmonious balance that we call beauty", that is, the idea of the presence of something, some *meaning* beyond language that is sought to be captured and expressed through language. The post romantic literature realizes the self-referential function of language and becomes "authentic, when it discovers that the exalted status it claimed for its own language was a myth". Similarly the post-structuralist criticism seeks to extend this acknowledgement to language as such, even beyond the boundaries of literature: "[W]hen modern critics think they are demystifying literature, they are in fact being demystified by it ... at the moment that they claim to do away with literature, literature is everywhere; ..." But de Man elaborates his own view of romanticism through the following quotation from Rousseau which, for de Man is not nostalgic in the sense that nostalgia is "a desire of something or for someone". The romantic consciousness depicted here by Rousseau actually becomes a vantage point for de Man to arrest the self-delusion of self-proclaimed "non-literary" discourses like anthropology, linguistics, psychoanalysis, etc. that "go through amazing feats of distortion to avoid facing 'the nothingness of human matters'":

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[22] Paul de Man, "The Negative Road", in *Selected Poetry of John Keats*, (NY: New American Library, 1966), 29-30.

> If all my dreams had turned into reality, I would still remain unsatisfied: I would have kept on dreaming, imagining, desiring. In myself, I found an unexplainable void that nothing could have fulfilled; a longing of the heart towards another kind of fulfillment of which I could not conceive but of which I nevertheless felt the attraction.[23]

For de Man the consciousness here "does not result from the absence of something, but consists of the presence of a nothingness", and hence can not be unhesitatingly designated as desire. Such a view of romantic consciousness and desire, and a resulting understanding of literature as "persistent naming" of this void can offer an interesting comparison with Rumi's often cited line from the ghazal that takes the presence of a desire (*arzust*) as its refrain: "*... ankeh yafi mi neshaved anum arzust*" (I have a desire for the one who is not to be found). This desire takes Rumi "beyond all desire" (*khud kar-e-man guzasht ze har arzoo wa az*), and hence one might in de Man's words "hesitate to use terms such as nostalgia or desire to designate this kind of consciousness". The idea of literature as a "persistent naming" of a desire that is paradoxically not a desire seems to be attested by Rumi's asking the "ingenious singer" at the end of the ghazal to take the remaining ghazal also in the same vein as the preceding for "this is how is my desire": "*baqi-ye in ghazal ra ay matrab-e-zarif/ zin san hami shumar keh zinsanam arzust*".[24]

Despite these similarities of articulation, Rumi's desire remains paradigmatically different from the Rousseauistic consciousness in its being a desire qualified by faith: "*gusham shunid qissaye iman o mast shud/ ku qism-e-chashm-e-surat-e-imanam arzust*" (My ear heard the story of faith and got intoxicated / That kind of eye like the form of faith is my desire). Unlike the deconstructive and the romantic dispersion of the rational, a dispersion that itself is regulated by reason (consider the oxymoronic "consciousness of nothingness", and also de Man's notion of authentic criticism as the one that has "turned back upon itself"), Rumi's desire for "the subtleties of dispersion" is directed towards love: "*ay ishq aql ra tu paragandeh guye kun / ay ishq nuktahaye parishanam arzust*" (O love! Disperse the speech of reason / O love! The subtleties of dispersion is my desire).[25]

Some major critical topoi of the western treatment of love and faith may identify one problematic premise of the American reception of Rumi, what I would like to call a certain epistemic tyrrany that delimits paradoxically even the most radical critiques of this epistemic history itself. One might begin, for both chronological and genealogical reasons, with Plato's "discourse" on love and madness in the *Phaedrus* and in *Symposium*. In the *Phaedrus* love appears only as a thematic ruse to discuss the difference between good and bad discourses. Much similar to the way love comes out as an arbitrarily chosen topic in *Symposium*, a topic suitable enough, as Eryximachus proposes, for "our entertainment to-day in conversation" and to "pass the time well

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[23] Jean Jacque Rousseau, Letter to Malesherbes, Pléiade ed. I, 1140. Quotation and its discussion taken here from Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1983), 18.

[24] Rumi, *Kulliyat Divan-e-Shams Tabrizi*, (Tehran: Intisharat Nashr-e-Tulu, n. d.), 441, 166. (English translations from the *Divan* are my own).

[25] Ibid. , 457, 173.

enough in discourses" in a drunken gathering,[26] the *Phaedrus* also "dare(s) to speak the truth" through reason about "that region beyond (which) no one of our earthly poets has ever sung, nor will any ever sing worthily" and closes with Socrates' satisfaction of having given love "its due", having "enough of this amusement of ours with speeches", and also apologizing to love for having being forced to use poetic figures.[27] The attitude both the dialogues dealing with the theme of love seem to betray is that of treating love in a self-satisfied, comprehensive way through reason. The dialogues can more be taken as love of words (as Socrates' own admission of being a "lover of words" and his appreciation for Phaedrus' attitude of readiness towards discourse suggests) rather than words of love, a condition Rumi would make necessary for any discourse on love to take place : "*Sharh-e-ishq-o-ashiqi ham ishq guft*" (The interpretation of love, love itself speaks). Unlike Plato, Rumi doesn't "dare" to go into a rational explanation of love, doesn't claim any comprehensive treatment of love even in the most poetic of figures. In expounding love, Rumi tells us, reason lies down "like an ass in the mire".[28]

A faith in the omnipotence of reason comes down, perhaps unwittingly on their part, to the romantics. Romanticism may have been considered, as by Voloshinov, as a "reaction against the last resurgences of the cultural power of ... the epochs of Renaissance and neo-classicism", a cultural power that owes to a great extent to the rational thought systems of the seventeenth century philosophy, [29] it can still be argued that the romantic reaction against the dominance of reason is complicit with what it seeks to do away with. As Geoffrey Hartman argues, the romantic "journey beyond self-consciousness is shadowed by cyclicity, by paralysis before the endlessness of introspection, and by the lure of the false ultimates". Hartman points out that the romantics were aware that "every increase in consciousness is accompanied by an increase in self-consciousness, and that analysis can easily become a passion that 'murders to dissect'". Romanticism "seeks to draw the antidote to self-consciousness from consciousness itself", a "return, via knowledge", as Hartman puts it, "to naiveté—to a second naiveté". For Hartman such a solution complicit with the problem owes itself to replacement of religious faith with a faith in art, but "as soon as poetry is separated from imposed religious or communal ends it becomes as problematic as the individual himself", for art in this case "is linked to the autonomous and individual".[30]

The so called postmodern period, in this case via Derrida, can at least be accredited with the acknowledgement that "[T]he step 'outside philosophy' is much more difficult to conceive than is generally imagined by those who think they made it long ago by cavalier ease, and who in general are swallowed up in metaphysics in the entire body of discourse which they claim to have disengaged from it".[31] The complicity to be revealed in this case is between Heidegger's *desire* for a pure faith with no rational or philosophical

[26] Plato, *Symposium*, trans. W. R.M. Lamb, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), 97-99.
[27] Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. W. C. Helmbold & W. G. Rabinowitz, (NY: Macmillan, 1956), 30.
[28] Rumi, *The Mathnawi*, I / 115.
[29] Nikolaevic Valentine Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 83.
[30] Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Romanticism and Anti-Self-Consciousness", in *Romanticism and Consciousness*, ed. Harold Bloom, (NY: Norton, 1970), 47-54.
[31] Jacque Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, (NY: Routledge, Third Indian reprint, 2007), 359.

supplementarity. To emphasize here on Heidegger's desire is by way of relating it to the Rousseauistic desire earlier mentioned, a desire that contradictorily seeks to fulfill and to suppress the impulse, a classical neurotic symptom in Freudian theory. Derrida quotes Heidegger: "At the interior of thought, nothing could be accomplished that would prepare for or contribute to determining what happens in faith and in grace. If faith summoned me in this manner, I would close down shop. ---Of course, interior to the dimension of faith, one yet continues to think; but thinking as such has no longer a task".[32] Derrida feels that 'in effect that theology (in the sense in which Heidegger links it to faith and distinguishes it from theiology and from metaphysical onto-theology) is rigorously excluded from his texts. It is well defined there but excluded, at least in what ought to *direct* it, namely the movement of faith'.[33] In other words, Derrida is suggesting that if Heidegger prioritizes faith over philosophy, this prioritizing itself is philosophical and intellectual. No matter how much Heidegger considers 'Christian philosophy' as an oxymoron, he inevitably succumbs to writing himself a 'Christian philosophy', can not ultimately 'close down shop'. One could notice that the summoning of faith and hence closing the shop (of philosophy) comes to Heidegger only as an imaginary condition, the second case of the conditional used: 'If faith summoned me in this manner (it hasn't really), I would close down shop (it is actually still open)' (parenthetical insertions mine). Thus for Derrida Heidegger remains 'in and beyond a platonic or Neoplatonic tradition. But also in and beyond a Christian tradition of which Heidegger—while submerged in it, as in the Greek tradition—never ceased claiming ... that it could in no case entertain a philosophy'.[34] For Derrida the shop would always remain open. The *failure* for Derrida would not lie in the inability to 'close down shop', but in the misrecognition of its possibility of closure, in not acknowledging that it can only always remain open, at least in the topoi we have selected here for a discussion of the western treatment of love and faith. The classical, the romantic and the Heideggarian tradition, of which Derrida considers himself a descendent, are all intellectual, philosophical discourses themselves for Derrida

Such epistemic tyranny, if I may be allowed to call it, may characterize one facet of the contemporary reception of Rumi in America. I have earlier attempted to argue in this paper that Emerson's thought with its affinity with deconstruction, and a certain non-Eurocentric ecumenism in challenging the authority of philosophical reason may have been instrumental in paving the way for the reception of poet like Rumi. But Emerson himself, like others in the thought tradition he participates in, despite the presence of such "mystical" expressions as "I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all", has also been seen as emblematic figure of the Cartesian paradigm in American culture. Roger Lundin thinks that "[I]n cultivating an Emersonian obsession with the self, American culture has embraced, however unwittingly, the foundational premises of Cartesianism".[35] Lundin points out a similar complicity that Derrida might locate in

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[32] Derrida, 'How to Avoid Speaking: Denials', in *Language of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, (eds.) Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 62.
[33] Ibid. , 61.
[34] Ibid. , 54-55.
[35] Lundin, "Emerson and the Spirit of Theory", 18.

Heidegger, and which Hartman identifies in romanticism, between Emerson's emphasis upon intuition and the enlightenment conception of reason:

> Admittedly, there are distinct differences between an Enlightenment conception of reason and Emerson's stress upon intuition. The one emphasizes law and pattern, while the other stresses upon spontaneity and freedom; the one enshrines reason, while the other exalts the imagination. Yet in spite of their differences, Cartesian rationalism and Emersonian Romanticism share a deep trust in the power of the self to unveil the truth and a deep distrust of tradition. For Descartes, Emerson, and their theoretical descendants, tradition threatens knowledge.[36]

The reason for such complicity Lundin attributes to what has been earlier referred to in this paper, in the words of Joel Porte, as "the American psychomachia", a fundamental split in the American culture. The split can be seen as a theoretical distancing on the one hand, and a practical embracing of Cartesianism on the other. Lundin quotes Alexis de Tocqueville to support the view: "Of all the countries in the world, America is the one in which the precepts of Descartes are least studied and best followed".[37]

Lundin begins his essay by pointing out how back in 1988, Reebok international used the sentences of "Self-Reliance" to sell their product: "Insist on yourself. Never imitate ... Reeboks let U. B. U.". Unlike Lundin, who while acknowledging the Emersonian complicity with Cartesianism considers such marketing devices simply as "emblematic of the fate of what might be called the Cartesian paradigm in American culture",[38] F D. Lewis, in Rumi's case, looks with "a foreboding sense (at how) modern secular culture will inevitably reduce the sacral into the banal through its relentless commercialism and consumerism". This discomfort on Lewis' part may be mainly through his acknowledgement that Rumi is not simply "a prophet of the presumptions of an unchurched and syncretic spirituality" but a Muslim believer whose beliefs "derived from the Koran, the Hadith, Islamic theology and the works of Sunni mystics like Sanai, Attar and his own father, Baha al-Din Valad".[39] The commercial enterprise of turning the sacral into the banal may not only be restricted to the showbiz world, but criticism industry in America may not be far behind in submitting Rumi to any "hermeneutics of suspicion" (deconstruction, Lacanian psychoanalysis, gay criticism etc.) without acknowledging the necessity of exploring a "hermeneutics of faith" in Rumi. This "hermeneutics of faith" diagnoses the cyclicity and complicity that allows, in Derrida's words, "the destroyers to destroy each other reciprocally"[40] : "*chun betauf-ekhud betaufi murtadi / chun be khaneh amadi ham bakhudi*" (When you are (engaged in) going about then are indeed wrapped in (your) going about / When you have come home, you are still with yourself).[41] Rumi's hermeneutics of faith invites us not only to challenge, but break through the epistemic

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[36] Ibid. , 34.
[37] Ibid. , 20.
[38] Ibid. , 18.
[39] Lewis, *Rumi*, 11.
[40] Deerida, *Writing and Difference*, 356.
[41] Rumi, *The Mathnawi*, I / 2204.

tyranny of philosophical reason, introducing *rah-e-digar* (another way), of "becoming naught" to realize the Emersonian dream of guiding "the steps to the East again, where the dawn is": *rah-e-fani gashteh rah-e-digar ast / zankeh hushyari gunah-e-digar ast*" (The way of him that has passed away is another way / Because self-consciousness is another sin).[42]

[42] Ibid., 2200.