

The Reed and the Aeolian Harp: Coleridge's "The Aeolian Harp", Rumi's "The Song of the Reed" and Jubran's *Al-Mawakib* and Imaginal Perception

Fazel Asadi Amjad
Assistant Professor of English Literature
Teacher Training University, Tehran, Iran

...music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts.
(Eliot, The Dry Salvages)

Abstract

The language of poetry is universal, for unlike other discourses it strikes the responsive chords in the imagination rather than a particular linguistic competence. This universal appeal stems from its archetypal imagery, music and elemental philosophical and mystical notions- at we call metaphorically the language of the soul, which triggers and finds response in man's imagination. The language of literature manifests the deep affinity between apparently different

cultures and emphasises that common aesthetic appreciation that is rooted in imaginal perception. Two archetypal images in this universal language are the reed and the Aeolian harp, the wind instruments that aptly manifest the common epistemological concerns of mysticism, Christian and Muslim, and the European Romanticism.

This article attempts to discuss the epistemological implications of these images as reflected in the poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi, the great Persian Sufi master and poet, Jubran Khalil Jubran, the modern Christian Arab poet and writer, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the English Romantic poet. The works selected for this study are “The Song of the Reed” which begins the Persian poet’s monumental *Mathnawi*, Jubran’s finest ode, *Al-Mawakib* (‘Procession’), and Coleridge’s “The Aeolian Harp”. These relatively short poems indicate the shared sensibility in the three traditions and reflect the basic elements of Sufi and Romantic epistemologies, which neither threaten the existence of truth nor deny the possibility of true perception. For the Sufis and Romantics, despite some fundamental differences, truth, at least in the cases of this study, is not transcendent but is present within a system of changing signs or relations and is perceived in a frame of mind or logic that accepts and unites the opposites in contradistinction to that which is based on the principle of non-contradiction.

Introduction

It is truism that there is a close relationship between mysticism and Romanticism; evidently Romanticism in its nineteenth-century European form has often been studied in link with mysticism,¹ and some of the main principles of Romanticism such as pantheism and imagination would not be fully appreciated without reference to mysticism. Nor would be the Romantic ‘logic’ which, in contradistinction to both the Aristotelian and mathematical logic, is based on the reconciliation of the opposites, nor the Romantic theory of perception that looks for a new way to explain the world and the possibility of knowledge. In fact, the major concerns of mysticism and

Romanticism, such as revolt against tyrannical conventions both in “reasoning” and form of expression, mistrust of language and the ineffability of the poetic or spiritual experience bring the two traditions close together.

Sufism as a mystical tradition of the East claims the same affinity with Romanticism. The oneness of being, the renewal or constant change of creation, the supremacy of the imagination, and the possibility and even the necessity of knowledge are some fundamental philosophical principles that link Sufism and Romanticism. Such a link even more substantially exists between the modern Arabic romantic poetry and the nineteenth-century European Romanticism, for besides the Sufi lore the Romantic Arab poets inherited they were influenced by the European Romantics and American Transcendentalists in the wake of the cultural exchange that characterised the modern age. So, besides the views they shared with the Romantics on the unity of being and the imagination, they adopted the Romantic rhetoric and style of writing: simplicity of language, plainness of expression, natural imagery, and emotion in its uncontrolled passionate state.

Music and Audition in Romantic and Sufi Traditions

Romanticism by definition defies frame working and restriction. To repeat some of the oversimplified generalisations, Romanticism is freedom from the fetters of rules and questioning received poetic conventions and practices, and it is of such unbounded nature that it is hard for some critics, such as Lovejoy, to find a unified identity in the term.² However, although Romanticism contains different and sometimes contradictory prejudices that end in different traditions, the movement leans towards a few principles that justify its integrity. Critics and historians of literature give these principles differently; nevertheless three of them, namely imagination, pantheism, and metaphor,³ h¹⁶ re salient presence and give the Romantic philosophy and literature their relatively distinct form.

For the Romantics the imagination is synthetic and creative, two

qualities that are at the core of the Romantic epistemology and also the new appreciation of art, elaborated by Coleridge in his brief but enlightening definition of the imagination in the thirteenth chapter of his *Biographia Literaria*.⁴ Accordingly the imagination not only recreates the world in the act of perception but also God-like in the act it perceives only itself. So the imagination simultaneously creates the world and perceives itself, or it brings together the world and the mind, which so far were held as opposites. Moreover, the world in every act of perception assumes a new form and stands in a different relation to the perceiver. In other words, the world is not made of established and fixed objects but of constantly changing relations, what Shelley calls metaphors⁵ or Coleridge symbols.⁶ However, the intellect reveals only one of these relations, or again to borrow Shelley's word, the dead metaphor, because it is concerned mainly with objects as objects rather than relations. It remains for the imagination to show these relations and meanings one.

This predilection for relational existence and constant change no doubt made music the favoured art with Romanticism, as classical taste was perhaps more inclined to visual arts, such as sculpture and painting. Music, as Riasanovsky rightly observes, "unrestricted by physical form, place, and (in a sense) time became the ideal art of German romanticism and other romanticisms" (*Emergence of Romanticism* 73). For Schopenhauer, who was one of the manifestation of the spirit of the age, as Anthony Kenny says in his *A Brief History of Western Philosophy*, music is also "not like, the other arts, a copy of the Ideas, but... the copy of Will itself, whose objectification the Ideas are" (296). This Schopenhauerian notion of "music emptying the self" (ibid.) is echoed by many Romantics.

The proximity and close relationship between mysticism and music is even more conspicuous and has been the subject of much research. Evelyn Underhill in his classical work *Mysticism* underlines the importance of this close connection and writes, "Were he a musician, it is probable that the mystic could give his message to other musicians in the terms of that art, far more accurately than language

will allow him to do” (*Mysticism* 76). He further adds:

Mysticism, the most romantic of adventures, from one point of view the art of arts, their source and also their end, finds naturally enough its closest correspondences in the most purely artistic and most deeply significant of all forms of expression. The mystery of music is seldom realized by those who so easily accept its gifts. Yet of all the arts music alone shares with great mystical literature the power of waking in us a response to the life-movement of the universe: brings us—we know not how—news of its exultant passions and its incomparable peace. (*Ibid.*)

Sufism as one of the mystical traditions also has an undeniable preference for music and audition (*sama'*) as a part of its creed to the extent that Titus Burckhardt writes, “the dances and music of the dervishes... are among the best known of the manifestations of Sufism” (*Introduction to Sufism* 104). Al-Hujwiri in *Kashf al-Mahjub* (“Uncovering the Veils”), which according to Nicholson is “the most ancient and celebrated Persian treatise on Sufism,” (*Kashf al-Mahjub* ix)⁷ gives a whole chapter to *sama*, “The Uncovering of the Eleventh Veil: concerning Audition (*sama'*),” which comes significantly at the culmination of his monumental work. He gives an account of the favourable views of several Sufi masters on audition and lists some of the major works written on the subject, including the well-known book of Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami *Kitab al-Sama* (“The Book of Audition”) (401). He holds that for the Sufi *sama'* is a kind of divine revelation:

Audition is an influence (*warid*) from God, and inasmuch as this body is moulded of folly and diversion the temperament of the beginner is nowise capable of (enduring) the word of God, but is overpoweringly impressed by the descent of the spiritual reality, so that some lose their senses in audition and some die, and there is no one whose temperament retains its equ **18** (407)

He further writes: “When diverse sounds are mingled together, the

natural temperament experiences a great delight. This sort of audition is common to all living creatures, because the spirit is subtle, and there is subtlety in sounds, so that when they are heard the spirit inclines to that which is homogeneous with itself.” (399) However, the effect of sama’ is more than inducing delight and joy in the listener. Al-Hujwiri clearly states, “In practicing audition, however, the sufi Shaykhs desire, not permissibility as the vulgar do, but spiritual advantages” (401), and he adds, “One who in that audition follows the truth will experience revelation” (404). Dhul Nun also, as Al-Hujwiri writes, declares, “spiritualists in audition penetrate to reality” (ibid.). Al-Hujwiri, quoting one of his masters without giving his name, writes, “Audition is that which makes the heart aware of the things in it that produce absence,” (405) and, as Al-Hujwiri himself comments, “the effect thereof is to make the heart present with God” (ibid.).

Avicenna, the great Muslim rationalist and peripatetic philosopher, who once trenchantly accepted nothing but the judgment of the analytical intellect, by the time of his spiritual maturity tends to Gnosticism and in one section of *Al-Isharat wa al- Tanbihat* (“Remarks and Admonishes”) commonly known as “The Stations of the Gnostics” writes:

He [the Gnostic] needs some spiritual exercise, and the exercise should aim at three purposes: first, to remove every thing other than the Real from the way; second, to make the evil soul surrender to the tranquil soul that the powers of the imagination may turn to issues of holy nature and turn away from those which are base and lowly; and third, to refine and make the soul ready for perception. The first is helped by true piety; several things, however, assist the second: devotion accompanied by reflection, melodies that rule the powers of the soul and make the melodious discourse acceptable to the imagination...⁸

Rumi in *Mathnawi* gives the same role to music and audition. He says:

Hence it is that listening to music is lovers' food,
Because it recalls to them their primal union with God.

The inward feelings of the mind acquire strength,
Nay, are shown outwardly, under influence of music.
The fire of love burns hotter under stimulus of music,
Even as occurred in the case of the nut-gatherer. (4: 1484-89)

Rumi then recounts the story of the thirsty walnut gatherer who used to sit on the tree and throw the gathered nuts in the well to hear the sound of water. When a calculating passer-by admonished him not to throw the fruit of his labour into the well for that would neither quench his thirst nor restore his nuts he answered that his aim was not the nuts but the sound of water which both increases his joy and thirst. So according to both Avicenna and Rumi music helps the Gnostic to turn his imagination to the divine and gives strength and concentration to the imagination, which they believe is the proper medium for mystical perception.⁹

The other reason for the Sufis' emphasis on *sama'* may be related to their inherent mistrust of language and its adequacy in reflecting the mystical experience, which demands a language of relations and metaphors. They know that it is the nature of language to turn metaphors into dead metaphors and the relations into reifications. Perhaps here also they act as the prototypes of the Romantics who in their mistrust of language claim even poetry is not the original emotional experience, but it is "emotions recollected in tranquillity"¹⁰ and the experience of writing poetry is only "a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet."¹¹ For the Sufis, to repeat, the mystical experience is ineffable for it cannot be explained in a language made of dead metaphors, and therefore they look for a more appropriate, direct and open-ended medium such as music and audition (*sama'*).

Coleridge and the Aeolian Harp

The Aeolian harp for the English reader is a familiar image. It has been appropriated by many Romantic poets, and Coleridge in particular, as the proper image that reflects their sensibility, the work of the imagination, and their pantheistic experience.¹²

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,

At once the Soul of each, and God of all? ("The Aeolian Harp" 44-48) Coleridge in these lines underlines some basic Romantic conceptions, such as unity, passivity, things as modifications of the one substance, the world Soul and immanence. He puts these philosophical principles in the form of a question, a rhetorical question, a stratagem, I think, that shows his concerns are mainly epistemological; he does not doubt the truth, but the way to verify and emphasise it.

Evidently the world of Coleridge is pantheistic, "the one Life within us and abroad" (26), where the Soul is immanent and the different beings are qualifying modes of one substance: "all of animated nature/ Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd" (44-45). On the other hand, the warbling breeze and "mute still air" are one in kind but differ in the distinction we make of them. Reality, perceived either as thought or music, is the synthesis of the harps and the intellectual breeze, that is, thought or music is neither the harp nor the intellectual breeze, but the result of the collaboration of the two, and therefore it is neither the transcendent breeze nor the reified object. We can think of the music as an autonomous text that contains the opposites, and to hear such music or to read such thought one needs a new logic that unlike the old logic, which is based on the principle of non-contradiction, allows for contradiction and reconciliation of the opposites, where one can see "A light in sound, a sound-like power in light" (28). Therefore, Coleridge does not transcend the text to find a transcendent truth nor copy the universe of things empirically to find a constellation of dead metaphors nor deconstructs the text to find but an endless and purposeless play of signifiers. He aptly chooses the Aeolian harp as a metaphor for the new imaginal perception and deliberately compares the minds to harps and the universal truth to breeze and the outcome of the interaction of the two he calls thought

which is the new perception and he compares it to music. Evidently he makes a distinction between two kinds of perception, one is speculative and grounded in the language of dead metaphors and the other is the product of the synthetic act of the imagination, and is compared to music, where the sound is not separate from the meaning, as dancing, for Yeats, is not separate from the dancer.

The mind in this new perspective is passive and is visited and animated by the one Soul that brings into thought all the “organic Harps” (45). The perceiver must be passive or wisely passive as Wordsworth puts it and sit “tranquil [to] muse upon tranquillity” (38). The passive mind becomes a free playground for the influencing powers of the Soul and the flux of ‘thoughts’ that, as Shelley puts it, “the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or departure” (“A Defence of Poetry” 504).

Full many a thought uncall'd and undetain'd,
 And many idle flitting phantasies,
 Traverse my indolent and passive brain,
 As wild and various as the random gales
 That swell and flutter on this subject Lute!” (39-43)

In the epistemology of Coleridge, however, the passive mind paradoxically plays an important role in the creation of the universe of things, that is, as much as it is dependent in its perception on the Soul, the “intellectual breeze”, it is active and creative in giving ‘meaning’ to It, which otherwise would have existed unheard and unnoticed, as Shelley’s Mont Blanc would have appeared “Still, snowy, and serene” (“Mont Blanc” 62), unrecognised but for “the human mind’s imaginings” (ibid. 143).

Rumi and the Story of the Reed

Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-73), who according to Nicholson is “the greatest mystical poet of any age” (cited in Arberry 241), is a poet of many talents. He is the poet, Arberry writes in his *Classical Persian Literature*, who “invented the whirling dance to the song of the reed-pipe, and with it set the entire universe of emotion, thought and

language spinning to a fresh and exhilarating rhythm” (231). Although in “a quieter and more reflective mood,” according to the same author, “Rumi is inspired to compose a neo-Platonic hymns of greater beauty and deeper insight than any Greek follower of Plotinus had the power to write” (234), it is in his ecstasy and excitement that the “challenge of the music resurrected long-buried responses,” (232) and in “the transformation of the dance, the mystic feels himself to be one with circling stars” (233).

Rumi’s greatest verse work is *Mathnawi-yi Ma’nawi* (“Rhymed Couplets of Spiritual Meaning”), which in the words of poet in his prose introduction to Book one of *Mathnawi* is “the Roots of the Roots of the Religion in respect of (its) unveiling the mysteries of attainment (to the Truth) and of certainty” (3).¹³ The introductory lines to this huge and marvellous compendium of Sufi poetry are perhaps the most fascinating of his verse and Sufi poetry in general in terms of meaning and beauty. This is why this part of *Mathnawi*, with or without other parts, has been translated by different translators, such as Sir William Jones (1772), Sir James Redhouse (1881), E. H. Whinfield (1887), Nicholson (1926), Arberry (1961) and Coleman Barks (1994), to mention but a few of them. Rumi begins his book of Sufi poetry with the image of the reed that runs through the whole poem to be its recurring motif and the summary and reminder of the whole theosophy of the poet. It is the story of the reed, the Sufi poet says, that “is the very marrow of our inward state” (71).¹⁴ In this story, which is written in eighteen couplets, the reed complains of the pain of separation and says since the day it was cut from the reed-bed its plaintive song has made all to moan and cry. It sings mournfully that one who is separated from his home will always yearn to return there and adds, “I have cried and wept in all circles and befriended the happy and the unhappy; every one assumes he knows me, but they do not look deeply into me to find my secret.”¹⁵ The reed is commonly interpreted as a symbolic image of the divine wayfarer and the accomplished Sufi master, such as Rumi himself, released from the tyranny of the self and turning into a passive instrument in the hand of

love and the beloved.¹⁶

Two traits of the reed are emphasised in these verses. First it is empty inside and it has no sound of itself; it has no self and therefore it represents or echoes the universal soul, and in that aspect it could be a parallel to Coleridge's Aeolian harp that comes into sound as soon as it is caressed by the wind. Second it contains the contraries: the reed is "a poison and antidote" (24), its sense is confided "only to the senseless" (28), and in its grief "the days (of life) have become untimely" (30). It is the companion of the sad and the happy (11), speaks of hazards and the sweet story of the love of Majnun (26-27), and its song is fire but it gives existence: "This noise of the reed is fire, it is not wind/ Whoso hath not this fire, may he be naught" (18-19). However, a discourse based on the reconciliation of the opposites is not understandable to those who make the intellect their judge. So Rumi finally writes, "None that is raw understands the state of the ripe/ Therefore my words must be brief. Farewell!" (36-37).

Like Coleridge Rumi, as was said above, equates the song of the reed with a life giving fire and love with truth. He does not speak of transcendent truth, but truth that is produced by the interaction of the reed and wind, a point that distinguishes Rumi's theosophy who, like Ibn Arabi and perhaps contrary to the Muslim Neo-Platonists, thinks truth is epistemological and is nowhere outside the text or the song of the reed. Although the sad song of the reed is interpreted in different ways, he does not leave the meaning undetermined and argues that if most readings are misreading it is because, in the words of the reed, "none sought out my secrets from within me" (13). The secrets, however, are no other than the song itself; therefore, the truth is an integral part of the discourse and the text. It is Rumi's belief that "Body is not veiled from soul, nor soul from body," (16) and if "none is permitted to see the soul" (17) it is because such speculators base their judgment on non-contradiction. Therefore, in order to see the truth, the text must be read differently.

Rumi in these verses shows his distrust in language that is based on the principle of non-contradiction and turns to love as a strategy to

obliterate the divisions and overcome the oppositions. At the end of the tale he leaves all complaints to celebrate the new awareness gained through love:

He (alone) whose garment is rent by a (mighty) love
Is purged entirely of covetousness and defect
Hail, our sweet-thoughted Love—
Thou that art the physician of all our ills,
The remedy of our pride and vainglory,
Our Plato and our Galen!
Through Love the earthly body soared to the skies:
The mountain began to dance and became nimble. (44-51)

Here I may add, although most commentators have taken the reed to signify the perfect man, it can stand also for the imagination. Like the Aeolian harp of the Romantics, the reed is the imagination of the Sufi poet that receives passively the divine inspiration, or as Rumi says “’Tis the fire of Love that is in the reed” (20), and reconciles the opposites by being the “poison” and the “antidote”. It is synthetic and comes into tune and sings when it is visited by the inspiring wind—“Were I joined to the lip of one in accord with me,/ I too, like the reed, would tell all that may be told” (54-55). This active or creative imagination, Rumi holds, is the only faculty that distinguishes the living from the dead:

This noise of the reed is fire, it is not wind:
Whoso hath not this fire, may he be naught! (18-19)

Jubran and the Eternal Song of the Reed

Jubran Khalil Jubran (1883-1931) is one of the leading Arab Romantic and mystic poets, whose universal fame made him known to many readers of poetry and his books have been translated into different languages, including English, though he wrote some of them in English, such as *The Prophet* (New York, 1923). Evidently he, along with many of his contemporaries, was influenced by the Romantic tradition, especially the American Transcendentalism and European Romanticism. Badawi of this wide influence writes in his *Short History of Modern Arabic Literature*, “Romanticism was to

spread very fast indeed in Arabic poetry, shaping the works of an unusually large number of gifted poets who were active particularly during the inter-war period” (44), and commenting on a long list of poets including the name of Jubran he says, “they seem to have been influenced by the latter-day romanticism and transcendentalism of American literature, namely Thoreau and Emerson” (45). As an example of this influence Badawi argues that much of the new forms Jubran introduced in Arabic poetry such as “al-shir al-manthur” (*vers libre*) was done “under the influence of Western poetry, in particular that of Walt Whitman” (57).

Jubran’s simple style, his devotion to nature and dislike for civilization and city life bring him very close to the European Romantics and American Transcendentalists. His mysticism also finds an echo in the works of his Romantic predecessors, and according to some critics even exceeds them in its depth and intensity. Martin Wolf in his introduction to *A Treasury of Khalil Gibran* contends that Jubran’s writing “possess a rare and distinctive flavour of ancient wisdom and mysticism that is equalled by few—if any—in the history of world literature,” (v) surpassing even William Blake (vii).¹⁷ It must be noted, however, that his mysticism does not separate him from human concerns or the society and he remains unflinchingly committed to human life and man’s worldly affairs, as is seen in many of his novels and poems.

One of the works of Jubran which reflects his mysticism and Romantic philosophy in a compact but exceedingly beautiful way is his poem *Al-Mawakib* (“The Procession”) (1918). The central unifying image in this poem is the reed or the flute that reflects the epistemological biases of the Romantics and the Sufis equally. Although the poem is relatively short, it is indeed a comprehensive synopsis of Jubran’s views. Besides hinting at some fundamental Romantic questions such as the individual and the society, equality, nature, and the ideal form of expression, it tries to discuss a few philosophical questions such as free will and necessity, the possibility of knowledge, and unity.

The poem, to begin with, is dialogical: an aged person, apparently an intellectual bound to city life and strained by its boredom and dearth of imagination is speaking to a youth who is the child of nature and imagination. The dialogue of the two shows the difference between two attitudes formed by the intellect and the imagination respectively. The poem begins with the speech of the intellectual and is followed by the comments of the youth. The former almost in all stanzas betrays his beliefs in division, pessimism, determinism, and the shallowness and absurdity of conventions and beliefs. In the first stanza, as an example, he says:

Men follow the good only when they are forced to,
But evil will not die even when people are put to grave.
Most people are but instruments moved
By the fingers of Time a day and then break.
So do not say this man is a great scholar
Nor say that man is a grave lord.
For the best people are but flocks herded by the shepherds' voice
And he who does not move will be trampled. (1-8)¹⁸

Evidently the stanza manifests the cynicism of the speaker, scepticism, and his belief in determinism and the insignificance of man's life and effort. In contrast to the pessimism and despair of the former stands the youth's optimism and confidence indicating his belief in unity and harmony in nature and the significance of man's will. In answer to the elder's comments he retort:

There is no shepherd in the woods
Nor are there flocks.
True, winter comes,
But it is not rivalled by spring.
People are created slaves,
To one who surrenders not.
So when he rises one day
All others will rise. (9-16)

The youth no doubt is Jubran's philosopher and ideal Romantic hero. All the stanzas where he is the speaker end with an abrupt

reference to the flute and singing. The youth cuts his commentary short at the end of each stanza as if words fail him and calls for the flute as a better substitute for verbal expression. He finds in the flute the secret of existence and all that endures. The flute indeed turns into the one image that binds the different sections of the poem and connects its separate sociological, theological and philosophical remarks, and makes the refrain and the main motif of the poem and its symbolic meaning. At the end of the stanza cited above, as an example, he says:

Give me the flute and let's sing,
For singing cherishes the minds,
The moaning of the flute endures
More than the lowly and the great. (17-20)

The youth begins the almost all the stanzas with the repeated structure "There is neither in the woods... nor" to negate opposition or perhaps like Coleridge to reconcile them, which in turn shows Jubran's belief in the unity of being: "There is no shepherd in the woods/ Nor there are flocks." He continues to argue that there is neither belief nor disbelief, neither justice nor punishment, neither determination nor weakness, neither knowledge nor ignorance, neither the free nor the blameworthy, neither hope nor disappointment, neither soul nor body, etc.:

I find no difference in the wood
Between the soul and the body.
The air is but water evaporated, and
The dew is motionless water.
The fragrance is a moving blossom, and
Earth is a frozen flower.
The shadow of the houri is but a houri;
It thought it is night and slept.
Give me the flute and let's sing,
For singing is both body and soul. (308-317)¹⁹

Evidently this new perception is taught by or is understood only from the song of the flute, which unlike reifying language, reconciles

the opposites and is above “the noble and the ignoble,” “the weak and the strong”, and “the soft and the gross.” In the words of Jubran, the song of the flute “opens the secret of life,/ Bringing peace, abolishing strife” (360-361).²⁰ This is why Jubran opens the concluding stanza of the poem with the total abandonment of language:

Give me the flute and let’s sing,
Forget what I and you said.
Talk is indeed but dust,
Let me know what you did. (362-65)

Conclusion

To sum up, Coleridge, Rumi, and Jubran despite their differences, and they are not a few, show some similar epistemological concerns in the poems discussed in this paper manifested mainly in the way they deploy certain images, such as the Aeolian harp and the reed. It seems truth for them is neither transcendent nor purely empirical; nor is it imprisoned in a text of dead metaphors or mere signifiers. It is perceived where the opposites are reconciled or the differences are abolished, and therefore it is essentially in discord with a logic that is founded on the principle of non-contradiction. For these poets this new perception is best reflected in music, which is both universal and self-grounded. In this they reflect many of the mystical prejudices inherent in the two traditions of Oriental Sufism and European Romanticism, such as unity of being and the identity of subject and object.



NOTES:

1. Jonathon Wordsworth writes:

Essentially, the Romantic imagination is the wish of a number of creative geniuses (living at a certain period, but never a group) to ‘lose, and find, all self in God’. In their inspired creativity they felt an analogy – or something more than an analogy – to the central mystical experience which they craved. Imagination in its highest moments appeared to them godlike, and, with differing degrees of assurance (Blake with certainty, Keats rarely and with

hesitation), they dared to assert that it was indeed the link between man and God. ("The Romantic Imagination" 493).

2. See Arthur O Lovejoy, "On Discrimination of Romanticisms," in *Essays in the History of Ideas* (New York, Putnam's, 1960).

³ See M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York, OUP, 1953) and Rene Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1963).

4. Perhaps this is the best and the most comprehensive Romantic definition of the imagination that shows not only the creativity of the imagination but also other principles of Romantic philosophy, such as the unity of subject and object or the perceiver and the object of perception:

The imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in the degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolve, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all event, it struggle to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead" (*Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XIII).

5. Shelley of the poets says, "Their language is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things" ("A Defence of Poetry", 482).

6. For Coleridge the imagination is that "reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the Reason in Images of the Sense... gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths, of which they are the conductors" (*Lay Sermon* 29).

7. *Kashf Al-Mahjub*, "Preface to the first edition", ix (Trans. Reynold A. Nicholson. Norfolk, Lowe & Brydone, 1936). All references to Al-Hujwiri's book are to this translated version and to this edition.

8. Avicenna, *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, vol. 3, p. 380. The text is in Arabic and the translation is mine.

9. Ibn Arabi contends that when the question is complicated and fundamental "Only men of imagination may understand it through the spiritual sensitivity they possess, while those devoid of imagination are far from such an understanding" (*Fusus al-Hikam* 224).

10. See William Wordsworth's often quoted definition of poetry in the 'Preface' to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*.

11. Shelley holds that poetry as the expression of the imagination begins when the imagination is almost at the end of its activity. He writes, "the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an

inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness.” He continues, “when the composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poets” (“A Defence of Poetry,” 504).

12. Shelley, for example, in his prose essay “On Christianity” writes:

We are not the masters of our own imaginations and moods of being. There is a Power by which we are surrounded, like the atmosphere in which some motionless lyre is suspended, which visits with its breath our silent chords at will. Our most imperial and stupendous qualities... are... active and imperial; but they are passive slaves of some higher and more omnipresent Power. (202)

13. Arberry cites and translated the same passage in his *Classical Persian Literature*: “[It] contains the roots of the roots of Religion, and treats of the discovery of the mysteries of reunion and sure knowledge” (235). It is a very strange coincidence which I came across during my study of Sufi poetry and Romantic literature. I believe the “root” offered by Rumi is the same which Coleridge sought for and found it in the teaching of the mystics. On his debt to their writings he writes:

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15. These paraphrases are mine.

16. See for example Badi al-Zaman Furuzanfar’s *Sharhe Mathnawi Sharif* (Tehran, Zawwar, 1367 AH) and Abd al-Hussein Zarrinkub’s *Ba Karavane Hullah* (Tehran, Javidan Publication, 1353 AH). Both in Persian

17. According to Wolf, Jubran even surpasses other Sufi poets; he argues that he stands “alone on the summit of all that is fascinating, terrible and beautiful in *Sufi* literature” (xxi).

19. All translations of Jubran’s verses are mine unless stated otherwise.

20. This stanza has been translated beautifully by Anthony Rizcallah Ferris in *A Treasury of Khalil Gibran*, edited by Martin L. Wolf (Reading, Cox & Wyman, 1974), but it is too free to serve our **31** here. Ferris’s translation comes in these words:

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Are all but one, whether clouded
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For song is all of body and soul,
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- ¹ Jonathon Wordsworth writes:
Essentially, the Romantic imagination is the wish of a number of creative geniuses (living at a certain period, but never a group) to 'lose, and find, all self in God'. In their inspired creativity they felt an analogy – or something more than an analogy – to the central mystical experience which they craved. Imagination in its highest moments appeared to them godlike, and, with differing degrees of assurance (Blake with certainty, Keats rarely and with hesitation), they dared to assert that it was indeed the link between man and God. ("The Romantic Imagination" 493).
- ² See Arthur O Lovejoy, "On Discrimination of Romanticisms," in *Essays in the History of Ideas* (New York, Putnam's, 1960).
- ³ See M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York, OUP, 1953) and Rene Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1963).
- ⁴ Perhaps this is the best and the most comprehensive Romantic definition of the imagination that shows not only the creativity of the imagination but

also other principles of Romantic philosophy, such as the unity of subject and object or the perceiver and the object of perception:

The imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in the degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolve, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all event, it struggle to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead" (*Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XIII).

⁵ Shelley of the poets says, "Their language is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things" ("A Defence of Poetry", 482).

⁶ For Coleridge the imagination is that "reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the Reason in Images of the Sense... gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths, of which they are the conductors" (*Lay Sermon* 29).

⁷ *Kashf Al-Mahjub*, "Preface to the first edition", ix (Trans. Reynold A. Nicholson. Norfolk, Lowe & Brydone, 1936). All references to Al-Hujwiri's book are to this translated version and to this edition.

⁸ Avicenna, *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, vol. 3, p. 380. The text is in Arabic and the translation is mine.

⁹ Ibn Arabi contends that when the question is complicated and fundamental "Only men of imagination may understand it through the spiritual sensitivity they possess, while those devoid of imagination are far from such an understanding" (*Fusus al-Hikam* 224).

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¹² Shelley, for example, in his prose essay "On Christianity" writes:

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