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**On Becoming Naught:
Reading the doctrine of *Fana* and *Baqa*
in the *Mathnawi* of Jalal al-Din Rumi**

**AMINA KAUSAR KHAN
BA (HONS) ENGLISH**

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
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**School of Critical Studies
College of Arts
University of Glasgow**

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ABSTRACT

Notwithstanding the abundance of scholarship on Rumi's *Mathnawi*, in the Western world; the nature of the Sufi doctrine of self-annihilation (*fana*) and subsistence in God (*baqa*), in the poem, is a neglected area of research. Often misunderstood, or reduced to simply being one of the many themes in the *Mathnawi*, greater emphasis is placed on the concepts of Love, Unity and Ecstasy, as the central message. Equally, Rumi's intention that the *Mathnawi* should be used as a training manual, and the formal design of the poem in this regard, is generally overlooked. The focus of this research is to elucidate the core significance of the doctrine of *fana* and *baqa*, as Rumi's heuristic method, which informs the overall structure of the poem. The research approach adopted combines close and synoptic readings of select passages from each of the poem's six Books. The findings of this thesis show that the idea of self-effacement is the central feature and practice of the *Mathnawi*, informing every element of Rumi's Sufism. There is a progressive movement over the course of the six books towards higher and higher states of annihilation and subsistence, with Rumi offering specific instructions to the wayfarer at every stage in the process. *Fana* and *baqa* is, therefore, the heuristic method of the *Mathnawi*, which can be followed to arrive at the mystical apex. Enhancing the understanding of the doctrine in Rumi's epic, this thesis makes an original contribution to current scholarship. It is recommended that further research be made in this area, and that future discussions highlight dying to self as the essential feature of Rumi's *Mathnawi*.

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I dedicate this thesis to my dearest grandfather, Ghulam Nabi Malik (1919-2015), who passed away before this work was completed. An Urdu poet and lover of Sufi verse, he always kept a copy of Rumi's *Divan* beside him, which he recited to me in Persian. As a wonderful story-teller, he would use Sufi tales to comfort, inspire and guide me, always reminding me that '*Verily, unto Him we are returning.*'

INTRODUCTION

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines Sufism (*tasawwuf*) as:

Mystical Islamic belief and practice in which Muslims seek to find the truth of divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience with God. It consists of a variety of mystical paths that are designed to ascertain the nature of humanity and of God and to facilitate the experience of the presence of divine love and wisdom in the world.¹

Yet, Sufi esotericism is not uniform in outlook and there are varying definitions within the tradition itself.² There are also differences related to the Path /Way (*tariqa*) to God, but the formulations of the early Sufi masters are almost always constructed around the idea of states (*hal*) and stations (*maqamat*), which one must arrive at on the mystical journey. Annihilation of the self / ego (*fana*) and Subsistence in God (*baqa*) are generally amongst the highest steps on the spiritual ladder, essential for reaching the goal of Oneness (*tawhid*). Andrew Wilcox summarises that:

Fana is to die in God. It is to forsake the created world in contemplation of the unimaginable oneness of God. It is the passing away of the self and is thus the essential prerequisite to the survival (*baqa*) of the selfless divine qualities placed in man by God.³

Although the doctrine has been identified in Jalal al-Din Rumi's poetic commentary on Sufism, the *Mathnawi*, the theory of annihilation and subsistence has been poorly understood in the Western world. The relationship of *fana* and *baqa* to Rumi's *Mathnawi* is particularly under-researched; with commentators often failing to highlight the interrelatedness of the doctrine to many of the more prominent Sufi themes (Unity, Love and Intoxication etc.) discussed in the literature. Annemarie Schimmel has commented on areas such as this being neglected in Rumi studies, arguing that 'a conclusive evaluation of his style and mystical thought is still lacking although he has always been praised as the greatest and most ardent herald of mystical love.'⁴ Whilst, Zarrabi-Zadeh finds that

¹ Victor Danner, 'The Early Development of Sufism', in *Islamic Spirituality*, ed. by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (London: SCM Press, 1989), pp.240-241.

² For an interesting discussion on the use of the term 'mysticism' to describe Sufism, see Lloyd Ridgeon, 'Mysticism in Medieval Sufism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism*, ed. by Lloyd Ridgeon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

³ Andrew Wilcox, 'The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fanā' And Baqā' In Early Sūfism', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 38 (2011), 95-118 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13530191003794681>> [accessed 07 October 2014] (p.95).

⁴ Annemarie Schimmel, 'Rumi', in *Rumi: In the light of Eastern and Western scholarship*, ed. by M.I. Chaghatai (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2004), p.28.

Western studies of Rumi are sometimes ‘coloured by ethnocentric, political and nationalistic agendas,’ distorting his message.⁵

A survey of current literature observes a chronological movement from reductive to more nuanced readings of *fana* and *baqa* in the *Mathnawi*; but there are still several limitations and shortcomings to these discussions. The early Orientalist studies of R.A. Nicholson and A.J. Arberry, not only misunderstood Rumi’s theism, but did not provide an overall assessment of his teachings and decried the lack of any kind of system to the *Mathnawi*. Later authors, like K.A. Hakim and Afzal Iqbal provided correctives to these portrayals of Rumi, emphasising the relationship of the doctrine to the fundamental principles of Islam, but paid no attention to the development of the doctrine over the course of the poem. More recently, the significance of self-effacement and survival in God to Rumi’s overall message has been identified by Annemarie Schimmel, William Chittick and F.D. Lewis, all of whom emphasise the practical application of the *Mathnawi*. Unfortunately, these authors only examine isolated verses from the *Mathnawi* to decipher Rumi’s thoughts on *fana* and *baqa*; and consider his treatment of the subject to be quite distinct from the methodological systems presented in classical Sufi manuals, and unrelated to the overall structure of the poem. Chittick does observe that Rumi proposes three stages to the process of self-transformation, and Lewis highlights the heuristic method of the *Mathnawi*; but neither of them detail the specific nature of these aspects and how they relate to the structure of the poem. A recent paper by Saeed Zarrabi-Zadeh addresses the issue of *fana* and *baqa* in Rumi’s *Mathnawi* much more thoroughly, cementing the doctrine as the essential feature and practice of the poem, and underlining that the poem was intended to be used as a practical guide-book. Zarrabi-Zadeh identifies various aspects of *fana* detailed in the poem, and advances that Rumi portrays a two-stage movement, where the first half of the poem describes ‘inferior annihilation’ and the second half details ‘superior annihilation.’ Notwithstanding the value of Zarrabi-Zadeh’s research, it is somewhat generalised and only analyses short verses on *fana* and *baqa*, taken out of the overall context of the story / passage from which they come. Recent research by S.G. Safavi suggests that the *Mathnawi* has an innovative design structure, based on ring-composition. In fact, Safavi considers synoptic reading to be the key to understanding the *Mathnawi*, especially as ‘what these

⁵ Zarrabi-Zadeh, ‘Jalal al-Din Rumi’s Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation’, *Mawlana Rumi Review*, 5 (2014), 26-72 (pp.28-29).

rhetorical structures do is to define significances and distribute emphases.’⁶ Although the research has been disputed and is currently incomplete; preliminary findings propose that the individual structural elements of the poem convey the process of spiritual transformation, which revolves around three types of self (*nafs*). Of course, the structural theory is limited in scope by virtue of it being a ‘distant reading’ of the poem, and the findings have yet to be connected to the process of *fana* and *baqa*. As such, the literature review identifies several shortcomings to current scholarship on the doctrine of *fana* and *baqa* in Rumi’s *Mathnawi*.

The focus of this research comes from the need to redress the above limitations with a more thorough and detailed examination of the doctrine of annihilation and subsistence in Rumi’s epic. The specific aim of this thesis is then: to elucidate the core significance of the doctrine of *fana* and *baqa*, as Rumi’s heuristic method, in the *Mathnawi*; and to assess the relationship of this finding to the overall structure of the poem. To do this, a mixed methodological approach has been adopted. Close reading of an entire story or section drawn sequentially from each of the six Books of the *Mathnawi* will allow us to build a more comprehensive and coherent picture of the doctrine over the course of the poem, and to thread together Rumi’s thoughts on the subject of *fana* and *baqa*. As Chittick and Schimmel adduce, careful study of Rumi’s verses allows us to understand the whole body of his teachings and brings us closer to his poetical universe. The thesis considers the hermeneutical methodology required to interpret Rumi’s verses correctly. As Lewis reminds us:

To the extent that Rumi’s poems are difficult, this is because they assume a certain theological and mystical context, the allusions of which were not always transparent to late medieval readers of Persian, as the many commentaries show, much less to a modern Persian reader not trained in the Islamic sciences, and more still to a Western reader who has not read up on Rumi’s theology.⁷

Zarrabi-Zadeh has also identified two major methodological faults in most Western interpretations of Rumi’s thought:

de-contextualisation of his mysticism from the intellectual and epistemological context to which it belongs, thereby severing the links between his mysticism and its original setting ... [which also] disregards the interrelation between various aspects of Rumi’s Sufism, which is, as with any other mystical system made up of different

⁶ Seyed Ghahreman Safavi, *The Structure of Rūmī’s Mathnawī: A New Interpretation of Rumi’s Mathnawi as A Book for Love and Peace, Book One* (London: London Academy of Iranian Studies Press, 2005), p.64.

⁷ Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings and Poetry of Jalal Al-Din Rumi* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), p.334.

parts interacting in a cohesive multidimensional mystical structure, rather than being separate and independent identities.⁸

It is the aim of this thesis, therefore, to consistently bear in mind relevant contexts and the interrelated elements of Sufism when evaluating Rumi's verses on *fana* and *baqa*. Literary criticism is also combined with synoptic reading, applying and building on Safavi's theory of structural design by taking each story/section to be illustrative of the Book from which it comes, and examining the structural implications for the findings. This approach lets us 'love the whole and not [just] the part', as Rumi says.⁹ Combining all the above elements allows us to discern Rumi's doctrine and heuristic method of *fana* and *baqa*, and to view the *Mathnawi* as a pragmatic work, designed to inspire and guide the Sufi novice through the experiential process of annihilation and subsistence. The thesis brings to light areas of research that have been neglected in Western scholarship, and re-establishes Rumi's Sufism in context. To this end, this thesis (notwithstanding the limitations of such a brief study) makes an original contribution to Rumi scholarship and the wider field of Islamic and Sufi studies.

A brief introduction to Rumi, the Persian poetic tradition and the *Mathnawi* brings this Introduction to a close. Chapter One then investigates in greater detail the reasons and emerging issues prompting this study. We begin by outlining the theoretical background to *fana* and *baqa* and a consideration of the theistic implications of the doctrine. This is followed by a detailed literature review, justifying the need for this thesis and elaborating on the methodology employed. Chapter Two evaluates critically one story/section from each of the first three Books of the *Mathnawi*; and Chapter Three assesses a story/section from the last three Books. Key contributions are offered in these two Chapters, with the concluding Chapter drawing together the findings and making recommendations for further research.

Introducing Rumi

Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi was born on the 30th of September 1207, either in Vahksh or Balkh,¹⁰ eventually settled in Konya and died on the 17th of December 1273. There is a

⁸ Zarrabi-Zadeh, 'Jalal al-Din Rumi's Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation', p.30.

⁹ Safavi, *The Structure of Rūmī's Mathnawī*, p.24.

¹⁰ Parts of modern day Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

notable lack of factual evidence pertaining to Rumi's life, which has always made compiling a definitive biography a challenge. This is further complicated by the inconsistencies and nature of the early hagiographical accounts of Rumi's life, which belong to a tradition of myth-making, used to legitimise and venerate Saints.¹¹ However, it can be said with certainty that Rumi was the son of Baha al-Din Valad (d.1231), a renowned Islamic theologian, jurist and mystic. The Valad family also left Khorasan around 1216 and travelled extensively through the Middle East before their permanent arrival in Konya in 1229, towards the end of the Golden Age of the Seljuk Sultanate. It is unclear why Rumi's father decided to leave the Khorasan region, fleeing the Mongol invasion of Central Asia has often been suggested, but there are other possible reasons.¹² Any refuge that Rumi gained, however, would have been limited, given the political instability, dynastic wars, and cultural/religious tensions that were also plaguing the Near East. During their travels, it is also possible that Rumi met the famous Persian poet Farid al-Din 'Attar (d.1221), who predicted to Rumi's father that 'soon his son would set on fire the consumed ones of the world'.¹³ Having received a rigorous Islamic education, Rumi followed in his father's footsteps as a Hanafi preacher and jurist. Surrounded by Persian Sufi culture, which had reached maturity in the 12th century and become a 'mass movement',¹⁴ Rumi also received mystical training from his father and Burhan al-Din Muhaqqiq of Tirmidh. It was, however, his meeting on November 30th 1244 with the mysterious, 'wandering dervish', Shams al-Din (Sun of Religion) of Tabriz, which would prove life-changing for Rumi and fully transform him into an ascetic. Fated to meet each other, the two men were inseparable, with Rumi becoming a disciple to his master Shams, in whom he saw not only the Divine image reflected, but also a reflection of his own Divine self. Annmarie Schimmel likened their relationship to that of Socrates and Plato, whilst Badi' al-Zaman Foruzanfar described this meeting with Rumi as follows: 'Suddenly the sun of love and truth cast its rays on that pure soul, and so fired and inflamed him that his eyes were dazzled by its light.'¹⁵ The flame of love that had been sparked would continue to burn well after Rumi's heartache at Shams' disappearance in 1247,¹⁶ through

¹¹ For example, Sultan Valad's *Valad-nama* (1291), Faridun Sepahsalar's *Risala* and Shams al-Din Aflaki's *Manaqib* (both composed between 1312-1353).

¹² See Lewis, *Rumi*.

¹³ A. J. Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1958), p.214.

¹⁴ The major Sufi manuals had been written, partly as a response to increasing political chaos in the Muslim world. See Annmarie Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun: a study of the works of Jalāloddin Rumi*, rev. edn (London: East-West, 1980).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.24 and Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, p.215.

¹⁶ It would later be established that Shams had been murdered with Rumi's son 'Ala'oddin's involvement, whom Rumi disowned. Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, pp.22-24.

the relationships with his subsequent companions and successors, Salah al-Din Zarkub and Husam al-Din Chelebi.¹⁷

Deeply respected as a man of love, peace and unity, Rumi's funeral would bring together people from all faiths and walks of life, and his tomb remains a place of pilgrimage for people all over the world. Based on his mystical practices, Rumi's disciples would also go on to establish the 'Mawlawiyah' (Order of Whirling Dervishes). The significance of Rumi's life is immense, and his poetry especially has 'widely influenced mystical thought and literature throughout the Muslim world'. Indeed, al-Ghazali (d.1111), Ibn 'Arabi (1240), and Rumi form a sort of golden trinity of Sufi thinkers and Saints. But, Mawlana's legacy extends much further than this, his works have been translated and read in numerous languages across the globe. Through the twentieth century, Rumi's popularity in the West has seen him hailed as a New Age Guru, whose poems have even been performed by celebrities. And there is no sign of Rumi's popularity waning, since the 1990s Rumi has been the best-selling poet in the United States,¹⁸ and (in the process of writing this paper) it has been announced that Hollywood is working on a biopic of his life. As a global phenomenon, with such immediate cultural relevance, Rumi's life and works have and continue to be interpreted in a myriad of ways. It is therefore necessary to continually reassess the source material, so that the fundamentals of Rumi's teachings are not lost.

The Mathnawi and Persian Poetry

Rumi's popularity stems chiefly, of course, from his reputation as a poet. Compared to Shakespeare and Chaucer,¹⁹ and considered by some to be even greater than al-Ghazali and Ibn 'Arabi because of his poetic prowess, Rumi also has 'the distinction of being among the world's most abundant poets.' There are 3,229 *ghazals* (lyric poems), more than 1,983 *roba'iyat* (quatrains) and 1,700 *tarji'at* (strophe poems) collected in the *Divan-i Shams-i*

¹⁷ Zarkub was an 'illiterate but spiritually advanced goldsmith', Chelebi was a middle-class Sufi Sheikh. *The Philosophy of Ecstasy: Rumi and the Sufi Tradition*, ed. by Leonard Lewisohn (Indiana: World Wisdom, 2014), pp. xi-xiii.

¹⁸ Jane Ciabattari, 'Why is Rumi the best-selling poet in the US?' In *BBC Culture* [online], 21 October 2014 [cited 7 October 2016]. Available from: <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/culture/story/20140414-america-best-selling-poet>>.

¹⁹ In William Jones' letters, cited in Lewis, *Rumi*, p.529.

Tabriz ('The Works of Shams of Tabriz'), alone.²⁰ Rumi's relationship with Shams forms the basis of the poems in the *Divan*, which express 'spiritual intoxication and ecstatic love'.²¹ Then there are Rumi's prose works: *Fihi ma Fihi* ('In it is what is in it') a collection of his 'table talk', *Majales-e Sab'a* ('Seven Sessions') collected religious sermons, and the *Makatib* ('The Letters') collected personal correspondence.

This paper, however, focuses exclusively on Rumi's most significant literary contribution, his six-volume *magnum opus*, the *Mathnawi-i Ma'nawi* ('Spiritual Couplets'),²² which runs to 25,577 lines. Noticing that Rumi's students were reading the works of Sanai (d.1131) and 'Attar, Chelebi suggested that Rumi write something in the former's style and the latter's metre, in the hope that they would exclusively devote themselves to Rumi's words.²³ Rumi may have started composing his epic, as early as 1256 and worked on the poem up till his death.²⁴ The *Mathnawi* covers all of the topics related to 13th Century Sufism, and for eight centuries around the globe '[has] served [as] a vehicle to convey Sufism's ecumenical teachings, in this respect being unrivalled by any other Islamic work.'²⁵ Schimmel also noted:

Indeed, it would be difficult to find any literary and mystical work composed between Istanbul and Bengal which contains no allusion to Rumi's thought or quotation from his verse. This is particularly true of the *Masnawi*, which Jami called, in the late fifteenth century, the Qur'an in the Persian tongue.²⁶

Whilst the overall message of the *Mathnawi* is the subject of the following Chapters, it is worth summarising some of its key teachings here. Rumi himself explains in the Preface to the poem that:

This is the Book of the *Mathnawi*, which is the roots of the roots of the roots of the (Mohammedan) Religion in respect of (its) unveiling the mysteries of attainment (to the Truth) and of certainty; and which is the greatest science of God and the clearest (religious) way of God and the most manifest evidence of God...²⁷

²⁰ Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, p.231.

²¹ William C Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), p.6.

²² Referred to as the *Mathnawi*, and sometimes as the *Masnawi*. I have chosen to use the former style of transliteration, following R.A. Nicholson, whose translation of the poem has been used for this thesis.

²³ The *Mathnawi* was 'dedicated and dictated' to Husam Chelebi, see Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, pp.43-45.

²⁴ For more on the dates of composition and Lewis' rebuttal of Arberry's suggestion that the poem was left incomplete, see Lewis, *Rumi*.

²⁵ Lewisohn, *The Philosophy of Ecstasy*, p. xiii.

²⁶ Schimmel, 'Mawlana Rumi: yesterday, today, tomorrow', in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam*, ed. by Amin Banani, Richard G Hovannisian and Georges Sabagh (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.5.

²⁷ *The Mathnawī of Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī: Edited from The Oldest Manuscripts Available: With Critical Notes, Translation & Commentary, Volume I & II*, trans. and ed. by R.A. Nicholson (Delhi-6: Adam Publishers & Distributors, 1996), p.3.

In no uncertain terms, Rumi states his grand intention to reveal the esoteric mysteries of Islam, and write a Sufi commentary on the path to God. Yet, as we shall see in more detail below, the *Mathnawi* has been read and understood in the light of many other traditions, and more recent translations have attempted to project a non-partisan Rumi, by removing explicit references to Islam from his verses.²⁸ Aside from this mystical unveiling, many scholars agree that the poem is fundamentally a distillation of the message of Islam, rooted in orthodox tradition, the Quran and Rumi's love of the Prophet Muhammed. Chiefly concerned with the 'expression of religious truth',²⁹ as we shall see further on, Rumi's message effectively reiterates the *Shahadah* (Islamic declaration of faith): *There is no god, but God*. In short, Rumi views the material world as temporal and illusory, but man's false sense of self blinds him to this truth and 'veils' him from God. This separation is the cause of pain and suffering, and Rumi holds that only Union with God can restore man to his original state of love, peace and harmony. To achieve this, one must escape the illusion of worldly existence and experience an absence of self, only then can one rejoice in the experience of ecstasy and intoxication. Rumi's genius is in being able to convey all of this in a manner that is 'simple, profound, humorous, uplifting and devastating' all at the same time.³⁰

Before attempting a thorough examination of the *Mathnawi*, in the following Chapters, it is necessary to situate Rumi's poetry in its literary context. Originally 'conceived and formulated in princely courts and ruling circles', one can date Persian poetry back to 9th century Iran (although the roots of the tradition go back much further, possibly even to pre-Islamic times). The poems were a form of entertainment, often accompanied by music, and principally political panegyrics, espousing the 'virtue and legitimacy' of the patron. The Arabic poetic model was adopted, with its established canon and principles, and it was the poet's function to use these forms in new ways to dazzle audiences.³¹ Playing with the poetic form was an end in itself, with established themes simply being reworked. It was Sanai who would alter the course of Persian poetry, using the prescribed forms to affirm a mystical worldview, whilst 'Attar would provide the artistry. Whether 'Attar actually gave Rumi his *Asrarnama*, a book of mystical poems, sowing the poetic seed in him as a boy,

²⁸ These include the translations of Coleman Barks and Kabir Helminski, see Lewis, *Rumi* and 'About the Masnavi'. In *Dar-Al-Masnavi* [online]. Updated July 2017 [cited 03 March 2016]. Available from: <<http://www.dar-al-masnavi.org/masnavi.html>>.

²⁹ Lewis, *Rumi*, p.328.

³⁰ *The Rubais of Rumi*, trans. and ed. by Nevit O. Ergin and Will Johnson (Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2007), pp.2-3.

³¹ Amin Banani, 'Rumi the poet', in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam* (see Schimmel, above), pp.29-30.

hardly matters, since Rumi himself acknowledged the influence of his predecessors. Sanai, in particular, is frequently alluded to in the *Mathnawi*. Although, it should be remembered that, over and above any external influence, it was meeting Shams that would catapult Rumi into the world of poetry and serve as his chief guide. In other words, it is the involvement of the Divine hand in his work that makes Rumi the epitome of Islamic poetry across all languages and times.³²

Unlike his predecessors, Rumi was not a court poet. In fact, his sympathies lay with the middle and lower classes, rather than the wealthy, and he belongs more to the tradition of ‘unlearned and illiterate poets.’³³ It should also be remembered that, whilst ‘Attar and Sanai preferred the *Mathnawi* form, Rumi devoted himself to the more popular form of the *ghazal* (turning only to *Mathnawi* later in life). More importantly, Arthur John Arberry highlights a particular ‘poverty of themes’ in classical Sufi poetry, and says that Rumi completely revolutionised the tradition’s subject matter.³⁴ Part fable, part scripture, Rumi’s *Mathnawi* is particularly ingenious in its descriptions of everyday life and current affairs, detailing Islamic and Greco-Roman traditions, combining history, legend and folktale with Neoplatonic ideas and the complexities of Sufism. Furthermore, all of this is masterfully expressed in fresh, new language, which is why Schimmel described Rumi’s poetry as surpassing that of Sanai and ‘Attar. But, not everyone was a fan of these innovations, and Rumi would be attacked for not living up to the standards of the Persian poetic tradition. Favouring the message of the poem, over his predecessors’ and contemporaries’ preoccupation with form, also resulted in some stylistic shortcomings.³⁵ In addition, rather than labouring over verses intended to impress, his poems were often composed whirling around in a state of ecstasy to music, and sung at the *sema* (mystical gatherings) as devotional prayers.³⁶ Whilst traditional Persian poets spoke through a ‘poetic persona’, Rumi is also noted as having the voice of a private individual.³⁷ That said, Rumi did not disregard the formal elements of the poetic tradition entirely, and his *Mathnawi* does follow standard rules. Rhyme is central to classical Persian poetry, and the *Mathnawi* form uses two rhyming hemi stitches (aa bb cc, etc.), separated by a line break or caesura, to

³² Ibid., p.28.

³³ See Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, p.30 and Lewis, *Rumi*, p.327.

³⁴ Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, p.231.

³⁵ Banani, ‘Rumi the poet’, pp.36-37.

³⁶ Rumi was also ‘[A] spontaneous wordsmith who would speak and compose his poems on the spot...his closest followers would walk with him and record the words that poured like a torrent from their beloved teacher’s mouth.’ Annemarie Schimmel, ‘Rumi | Sufi Mystic and Poet’, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [online] 2016 <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jalal-al-Din-al-Rumi>> [accessed 7 October 2016].

³⁷ Lewis, *Rumi*, p.329.

form a full stitch.³⁸ One Persian stitch equates to two lines of English verse, with density and complexity being key components. The *Mathnawi* also uses the Persian *ramal* metre (XoXX XoX), with eleven syllables per hemi stitch. Whilst the following Chapters consider the formal structuring of the *Mathnawi*, it is worth remembering that Rumi ultimately considered the poetic form a ‘shackle’, incapable of expressing the Truth that is essentially speechless.³⁹

³⁸ The Persian for couplet is *Beyt* (tent) and in the following Chapters Rumi’s couplets are given as B. followed by the couplet numbers used in Nicholson’s edition.

³⁹ Banani, ‘Rumi the poet’, p.32.

CHAPTER ONE: *Theoretical Background and Western Scholarship*

This Chapter details the reasons and emerging issues prompting the following study of *fana* and *baqa* in the *Mathnawi*. We begin with a basic outline of the theory of *fana* and *baqa* in Sufism, indicating the influence of Rumi's predecessors on his understanding of the doctrine, and highlighting the relationship of the process to the fundamental principles of Islam. It is shown that annihilation and subsistence are interwoven into the central Sufi concepts of Ecstasy, Love and Unity, and the interchangeability of Sufi terms such as *fana* and *baqa* is noted. The theistic implications of *tawhid* are also clarified, and Rumi's theism is discussed in relation to Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*. This is followed by a Literature Review, which assesses Western scholarship on *fana* and *baqa*, in Rumi's *Mathnawi*, especially as they relate to the theoretical aspects explored above. Discussion of the current models and frameworks for reading annihilation and subsistence in the *Mathnawi*, culminates in the identification of a gap in knowledge, justifying the need for the analyses of this thesis.

Fana and Baqa

Early Sufis formulated the idea of a Way (*tariqa*) to achieving Unity with God, comprising numerous 'states' (*hal*) and 'stations' (*maqamat*) to be attained by the traveller (*salik*) on the path,⁴⁰ which are also detailed in the *Mathnawi*. The Sufis developed differing variations of these states and stations, generally classifying them in ascending order, and resulting in gradations of varying number.⁴¹ Wilcox describes the 'stations' as follows:

These mystical stations are sequential and hierarchical, each one reflecting the psychological obstacles that the wayfarer must overcome in order to pass to the next stage and each one expressing the devotee's current relationship with God.⁴²

There is no single definitive list of stations and a distinction is also made between stations and 'states', which are:

⁴⁰ Given as a pair of 'complementary opposites', as in *fana* and *baqa*, and often correlating with the 99 names of God. Wilcox, 'The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fana' And Baqa' In Early Sūfism', p.98.

⁴¹ Ansari's *Manazil al-Sa'irin* classifies them under one hundred different headings. See Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, p.12. 'Attar's *Mantiq ut Tayr* lists 'seven valleys' and Abu Sai'd ibn Abil Khayr describes forty stations. See Neil Douglas-Klotz, 'Maqām and Hāl: The Mysticism of Ordinary and Extraordinary Life in Sufism', A juried paper presented at the Mysticism Group of the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in Denver, USA 19 November 2001, 1-19 <<http://abwoonco.ipower.com/abwoon/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/MaqamHal.pdf>> [accessed 28 May 2016] (pp.6-7). For the stations in Aziz Nasafi's *Kitab-i Tanzil*, see Ridgeon, 'Mysticism in Medieval Sufism', pp.125-149.

⁴² Wilcox, 'The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fana' And Baqa' In Early Sūfism', p.97.

spiritual graces bestowed directly by God and outside of man's power of acquisition. Unlike the stations, the states are not seen as moving in an ascending hierarchy, but rather coming and going as God wills.⁴³

In addition, what some Sufis consider a state, others describe as a station, or (depending on the context) a state can become a station, and vice-versa. Despite the obvious lack of consensus, Neil Douglas-Klotz aptly points out that the discrepancies, essentially, underline the desire for Divine Love that is at the heart of the systematic endeavour, and should not be considered a point of contention.⁴⁴ Rather than seeking to define Rumi's descriptions of *fana* and *baqa* (which are always included in lists of states and stations) one way or the other, the following study highlights the complexity of the experience being depicted in the *Mathnawi*.

Whilst the notion of obliterating the self, in order to transcend to a higher spiritual state, is not unique to Sufism, the theory takes on a life of its own within this tradition.⁴⁵ The process is considered fundamental in the traveller's quest to attain nearness to God and, in most Sufi works, *fana* and *baqa* are among the final and loftiest stages.⁴⁶ Though, in some lists, *fana* and *baqa* may appear at the beginning of the journey.⁴⁷ The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines *fana* as follows:

Fanā, (“to pass away”, or “to cease to exist”) ... When the Sufi succeeds in purifying himself entirely of the earthly world and loses himself in the love of God, it is said that he has “annihilated” his individual will and “passed away” from his own existence to live only in God and with God [Baqa].⁴⁸

Although defining Sufi terms is always complicated, and Wilcox notes that these terms are particularly rife for confusion and misinterpretation, it suffices here to note that: with ‘the dissolution of the false ego in the real’,⁴⁹ ‘it is not as himself but as the Self that one who has been extinguished can be said to subsist.’⁵⁰ This ‘annihilation’ is deemed necessary as the *nafs* (false sense of self) separates man from God, and veils the Divine qualities that God has placed in him. The effacement of the illusory self is a metaphoric death, and the

⁴³ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, p.12.

⁴⁴ Douglas-Klotz, ‘*Maqām and Hāl: The Mysticism of Ordinary and Extraordinary Life in Sufism*’, p.11.

⁴⁵ For more on the origins of the doctrine, see Zarrabi-Zadeh, ‘Jalal al-Din Rumi's Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation’.

⁴⁶ As in Abdullah Ansari's list of 100 grounds, where they are number 99 and 100, respectively.

⁴⁷ As in Abil Khayr's list. See Douglas-Klotz, ‘*Maqām and Hāl: The Mysticism of Ordinary and Extraordinary Life in Sufism*’, p.7.

⁴⁸ Schimmel, ‘Rumi | Sufi Mystic and Poet’.

⁴⁹ Neil Douglas-Klotz, ‘The Key in the Dark: Self and Soul Transformation in the Sufi Tradition’, *Modern Psychology and Ancient Wisdom*, ed. by Sharon G. Mijares (New York: Haworth Integrative Healing Press, 2003).

⁵⁰ Martin Lings, *What Is Sufism?* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), p.78.

subsequent survival in God is akin to the rebirth of man's original soul (*ruh*). Conquering the self is often referred to in the Quran and Hadith as the 'Greater *Jihad*' and 'Greater Resurrection.' Yet, there are significantly wider implications to the concept, which can symbolically transform all forms of severity into forms of gentleness (night to day, fear to hope, Hell to Paradise, etc.).⁵¹ That said, these transformations involve much pain and suffering. Granting that extinguishing the self is outwardly painful, Sufis, nevertheless, find the pain of separation from God to be infinitely worse. Moreover, suffering on the Sufi path is always considered positive, since the Prophet described himself and the most righteous of men as the most afflicted.⁵² The idea of opposites informs much of Sufism, and just as God's Wrath is considered a mask for His Mercy, so the trials of *fana* contain within them the source of true joy.

Through the course of *fana* and *baqa*, the *nafs* moves through various degrees of refinement, before complete elimination. Three types of *nafs* dominate Sufi thought: the *nafs-i ammarah* (self that commands to evil), the *nafs-i lawwamah* (self that reproaches itself), and the *nafs-i mutma'innah* (self at peace). These also relate to three levels of certainty and faith: *Ilm-ul-yaqeen* (the knowledge of certainty) and Iman (faith), *Ayn -ul-yaqeen* (the eye of certainty) and *Ihsan* (excellence in faith), and *Haqq-ul-yaqeen* (the truth of certainty) and *Yaqeen* (excellence of certainty). Furthermore, the three types of *nafs* correspond to three types of spiritual practice: *Sharia* (following the law), *Tariqa* (following the Way), *Haqiqah* (following the Truth). Although it can take years to move from one stage to another, the novice can also experience different types of *nafs* in one day, or even one moment.⁵³ Thus, the general practices related to *fana* and *baqa* outlined by Sufi masters invariably acknowledge that each mystical journey is unique, and traditionally guides would tailor the Path to the individual. It is also worth remembering that, although man can renounce certain attributes through his own volition, ultimately, true annihilation and subsistence is solely the result of God's grace.⁵⁴

When discussing *fana* and *baqa*, it is important to keep in mind that the concept is rooted in Scripture and the traditions of the Prophet, which form the basis of all Sufi doctrine. In terms of origin:

⁵¹ Once again, correlating with God's names, see Leonard Lewisohn, 'Principles of the Philosophy of Ecstasy in Rumi's Poetry', in *The Philosophy of Ecstasy* (see Lewisohn, above), pp.35-82.

⁵² Various Hadith

⁵³ See Lewisohn, 'Principles of the Philosophy of Ecstasy'.

⁵⁴ Wilcox, 'The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fanā' And Baqā' In Early Sūfism', p.117.

The terms *fana* and *baqa* occur only once in the Qur'an and do so as an interrelated pair. In the middle of The All Merciful (*Surah ar-Rahman*), the created realm is described as *fanin* (that which perishes or is perishing) whilst the Face of God is described as *yabqa* (remaining, enduring):

All that dwells upon the earth is perishing, yet still abides the Face of thy Lord, majestic, splendid.⁵⁵

Outwardly, the verse attests to God's omnipotence and transcendence over creation, yet Sufis uncover an inner meaning relating to transience, adding that 'creation has no more reality of its own, as it is in a constant state of passing away into the eternal reality of God, and this can be seen as a model for mystical practice.'⁵⁶ Another justification for the process comes from the Prophetic tradition (Hadith):

[I]f you seek life, O friend,
Then die before you die:
For in such a death,
Idris attained Paradise before us.⁵⁷

Rumi refers to the verses above from the Quran and from the Hadith throughout the *Mathnawi*, which we shall examine in the following Chapters, alongside numerous other verses from the Quran and Hadith, which he interprets in terms of *fana* and *baqa*. Our reading of the *Mathnawi* also shows that annihilation and subsistence are intrinsically linked to all the major principles underpinning Islam. At this juncture, it is worth highlighting especially the correlation of the theory with the *Shahadah* (Islamic declaration of faith): 'There is no God, but God', which evokes 'the two phases of spiritual realization... Being, effacement of the creature and return to the Creator, annihilation of the separate Self (*farq*) and reunification with God (*jam*)'.⁵⁸

Sufi literature also details various types of *fana*, the most common being:

Fana fi-Sheikh (annihilation in a teacher/guide)

Fana fi-Pir (annihilation in a deceased teacher/Saint)

Fana fi-Rasul (annihilation in the Prophet)

Fana fi'llah / Fana fi-Tawhid (annihilation in God/Divine Unity)

⁵⁵ Quran 5. 26-27 cited in Wilcox, 'The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fanā' And Baqā' In Early Sūfism', p.96.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.97. Idris is generally considered to be the second Prophet after Adam, often paralleled with Enoch.

⁵⁸ Jean-Louis Michon, 'The Spiritual Practices of Sufism', in *Islamic Spirituality* (see Danner above), pp.276-277. A fuller discussion on the *Shahadah* is given in Chapter Three.

Fana fi-Baqa (annihilation ‘in a resurrection into one’s true nature’)

Fana al-Fana (annihilation of annihilation)⁵⁹

The first three types are significant as they emphasise the importance of, and need for, a guide in the process of annihilation. To annihilate into a spiritual master who has already traversed the Path is to become “like a corpse in the hand of the body-washer”, since ‘[t]he goal of this submission is the total effacement of the ego, a psychic death, which signals the true birth into the spiritual birth.’⁶⁰ The following Chapters shows Rumi describing exactly how the guide facilitates *fana* and *baqa*, but also reveals Rumi’s own function as a *Sheikh* in the *Mathnawi*, guiding his readers towards annihilation and subsistence. Whilst the different types of *fana* are often listed in ascending order, the *Mathnawi* highlights the interchangeability and interrelatedness of the above terms, and Rumi generally prefers to use the umbrella term *fana* to indicate all kinds of annihilation. It should also be noted that there is a ‘lack of agreement that exists in the academic world on the specific nature of the two terms [*fana* and *baqa*] ... [which are] spiritual states to be experienced, not topics to be discussed’,⁶¹ a point that Rumi himself reiterates throughout the *Mathnawi*.

Key Figures and Texts

Of course, we cannot discount the tangible influence of the many examples and formulations of *fana* and *baqa*, developed by Rumi’s predecessors and contemporaries, on his understanding of the doctrine. Situating Rumi’s position on *fana* and *baqa* in context requires a look at two key figures associated with the concept, Bistami and Hallaj. The Iranian mystic Abu Yazid Bistami (d.874), ‘is generally accepted as one of the originators of the concept’ of annihilation and subsistence.⁶² Bistami’s notoriety stems from his infamous utterances, including his saying “*Subhani*” (“Glory be to me!”) in a moment of ecstasy, instead of “*Subhan-Allah*” (“Glory be to God!”).⁶³ This type of speech is an example of *shath*:

⁵⁹ Adapted from the list in Douglas-Klotz, ‘The Key in the Dark: Self and Soul Transformation in the Sufi Tradition’.

⁶⁰ Michon, ‘The Spiritual Practices of Sufism’, p.272.

⁶¹ Wilcox, ‘The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fanā’ And Baqā’ In Early Sūfism’, p.114.

⁶² Also known as Bayazid. See Ridgeon, ‘Mysticism in Medieval Sufism’, p.17.

⁶³ Hundreds of other *shathiyat* are ascribed to him, alongside controversial visions he is reported to have described. See ‘Bistami, Abu Yazid al-’, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* [online] 2014 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195125580.001.0001/acref-9780195125580-e-363?rskey=Dw84Y4&result=1>> [accessed 7 October 2016].

the verbal overflowing of the mystical encounter with the divine and in relation to *fana* is the expression of the divine through the vehicle of the physical body of the Sufi whilst his awareness of individuality is annihilated.⁶⁴

Naturally, orthodox Muslims found Bistami's *shath* scandalous, but he explained that any sense of separation from God (even linguistically) indicated duality and ran the risk of polytheism (*shirk*), further cementing the need for *fana*. Whilst many Sufis consider Bistami to be the embodiment of *fana* and *baqa*, he frequently spoke of being incapable of moving beyond duality, and seems to have suffered crushing doubts and uncertainty regarding his spiritual state.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, Bistami represents the beginnings of a schism in Sufism, related to the goal of *fana*. The School of Baghdad, which emphasised spiritual Sobriety (*sawh*) set itself against the School of Khorasan, which promoted spiritual Intoxication (*sukr*). Essentially, this was a battle between reason and love, with the Intoxicated Sufis seeing reason as getting in the way of true love, and needing to be 'obliterated' by drunkenness. On the other hand, Sober Sufis considered a return to reason, after intoxication, to be the mark of true love.⁶⁶ Furthermore:

The doctrine of Intoxication held that at the apex of the mystical experience of *fana*, when the Sufi's individuality had been entirely annihilated, the actions and speech of the mystic were not his own...but were instead a by-product of the divine encounter. For this reason, his behaviour and speech would seem to be as one who is drunk, indeed he could be considered as being drunk by the mystical union. To the contrary, the School of Baghdad maintained that the ecstatic behaviour of the intoxicant marked one who had not yet reached the zenith of the mystical path, and firmly held the belief that the Sufi master had an obligation as a role model to the greater community that forbade displays of behaviour contrary to the obligatory norms of *Shari'a* (Islamic Law).⁶⁷

In a recent paper,⁶⁸ Leonard Lewisohn relates Rumi's poems of 'ecstatic bacchanalia' directly to the music and songs of mystical sessions (*sema*), describing love and ecstasy as the 'leitmotifs' of his poetry. Lewisohn argues that the arousal of ecstasy (*wajid*) is the chief 'practical purpose' of Rumi's poems, but underlines that the term is inextricably bound up with *fana* and *baqa*, since the 'conception of ecstasy as the annihilation of self-existence in God's being' resounds in classical Sufi literature. Observing that ecstasy is synonymous with 'selflessness (*bi-khudi*)' in the Persian Sufi lexicon, Lewisohn also finds

⁶⁴ Wilcox, 'The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fanā' And Baqā' In Early Sūfism', p.100.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp.102, 117.

⁶⁶ See Danner, 'The Early Development of Sufism', pp.256-258 and Wilcox, 'The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fanā' And Baqā' In Early Sūfism', p.109.

⁶⁷ Wilcox, 'The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fanā' And Baqā' In Early Sūfism', p.103. The orthodox sets viewed the Intoxicated School as a threat.

⁶⁸ See Lewisohn, 'Principles of the Philosophy of Ecstasy'.

that this ‘concept of selflessness is all pervasive in Rumi’s poetry.’ Specifically, for Rumi ‘*wajd* is an *ekstasis*, an exit from self and entrance into egoless consciousness’, which ‘means to break and smash the self and find ‘Absolute Being Itself.’ Lewisohn equates this ecstasy with the highest type of Love, noting that this is termed ‘annihilation-in heart (*fana’ qalb*) in God’.⁶⁹ Thus, the interdependency of *fana* with the Sufi doctrines of ecstasy, unity and love is made explicit, and it is noted that ‘[t]rue perfection lies in the complete annihilation of human selfhood and its states...hearing [only] God, in God, through God, and from God.’⁷⁰ The following Chapters discuss the interrelatedness of these ideas in more detail, alongside Rumi’s allegiance to the Intoxicated School, his particular interpretations of intoxication and *shath* as expressions of *fana* and *baqa*, and the *Mathnawi* itself as ‘a breviary of ecstatic paradoxes (*shathiyat*).’⁷¹

Bistami’s influence on Rumi notwithstanding, by far the greatest example of *fana* and *baqa* for Rumi was the Persian born Sufi Mansur al-Hallaj (d.922). Regarded as the intoxicated Sufi *par excellence* and true figurehead of the Intoxicated school, Hallaj’s impact on the entire Persian Sufi tradition and beyond cannot be understated. A deeply divisive figure, who divulged ‘the mysteries of the path- [to the masses]; and [was] subjected to public humiliation, beating and execution,’ Hallaj went even further than Bistami when he said ‘I am the Truth’ (*Ana 'l-Haqq*).⁷² Whilst many understood this to be a claim to divinity, branded him a heretic and condemned him for his egotistical and ‘immoderate fervour’, others interpreted the saying as another example of the *shath* that comes from being in a complete state of annihilation and subsistence:

As such Hallaj would seem to be the ideal representative of the doctrine of Intoxication, a Sufi whose devotional focus is his experiential immersion (*istighraq*) in God and one who throws all control and caution to the wind by doing so in the public domain.⁷³

Ironically, Hallaj’s position is more balanced than normally assumed, he rejected the mystic’s attachment to states and stations as ends in themselves (only helpful in so far as they lead man to God), and warned ‘against the ‘crushing’ of the personality by Sobriety and the ‘disengaging’ from it caused by Intoxication.’ Unlike Bistami, Hallaj recognised

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp.35-49.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp.49-50.

⁷¹ Ibid., p.52.

⁷² ‘esoterically rendered as ‘my ‘I’ is God.’ Louis Massignon cited in Wilcox, ‘The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fanā’ And Baqā’ In Early Sūfism’, pp.103, 110-111. For more on the reasons behind Hallaj’s saying, see Danner, ‘The Early Development of Sufism’, pp.258-259.

⁷³ Wilcox, ‘The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fanā’ And Baqā’ In Early Sūfism’, pp.110-111.

both states as attributes of man, and in need of annihilation.⁷⁴ Significantly, it is annihilation rather than ecstasy which Hallaj equates directly with Unity, defining the mystical apex as the ‘annihilation of separation (*tafrid*),’ meaning *fana* of anything that separates man from God. Louis Massignon (1883-1962) referred to this as the “mystical exchange of wills”: the obliteration (*fana*) of the worshipper’s will in God’s will.⁷⁵ Purifying the heart (which then aligns to God’s will) ‘by acts of self-abnegation throughout the *via purgative* [is] symbolised in Sufism by the polishing of a mirror in order to reflect the beauty of God’ and align with God’s will. Although the polished mirror was already an established Sufi metaphor for *fana*, Hallaj added a caveat: ‘this purification of the heart is not complete without the action of love upon it: and it is love and not intoxication that Hallaj holds to be the supreme path to permanent union with God.’⁷⁶ Whereas, traditionally Love meant obedience, Hallaj spoke of ‘reciprocal and passionate’ Love as a necessary prerequisite for *fana*.⁷⁷ Chapter Two analyses Hallaj’s conception of *fana* in greater detail, as Rumi draws heavily on these ideas in the *Mathnawi*. Here, it is only necessary to mention that for Hallaj death is the doorway to life, and he himself is a symbol of dying for the sake of Love; and more than anyone, it is Hallaj that Rumi alludes to throughout the *Mathnawi*.⁷⁸

Although Bistami and Hallaj do not present systematic theories of *fana*, they personify the state, which is critical to this study as Rumi is ultimately concerned with the actual experience of annihilation. That said, it is worth considering the systematic descriptions of *fana* and *baqa* found in the manuals about the theory and praxis of Sufism, with which Rumi would have been familiar.⁷⁹ Abu Sai’d al-Kharraz (d.899), a notable Sufi from Baghdad, authored many works, including the *Kitab al-Kashf wa’l Bayan* (‘The Book of Unveiling and Elucidation’). The first to use *fana* and *baqa* as technical terms:

Kharraz was the first to develop an explanation of the states of annihilation and subsistence, defining fanā’ as ‘the annihilation of consciousness of manhood (*ubudiyyat*)’ and baqā’ as the ‘subsistence in the contemplation of Godhead (*ilahiyaat*). Hujwiri interprets the term manhood (servanthood) here as agency in one’s actions, thus fanā’ is the destruction of the illusion that one’s actions are one’s

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp.111-113.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.112.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp.112-113.

⁷⁸ Rumi’s veneration of Hallaj also contributed in part to his emergence historically as one of the great Sufi masters, despite the reprimands against him. Hallaj’s written works also demonstrate a solid Islamic foundation to his thoughts. Ibid., p.110-111.

⁷⁹ For more on sources that Rumi would have been familiar with, see J. A. Mojaddedi, *Beyond Dogma: Rumi’s Teachings On God and Early Sufi Theories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

own and *baqā'* is the experiential realisation that one's actions (indeed all actions) belong to God's agency alone. It is significant to note that both annihilation and subsistence here are states of awareness and not ontological states...⁸⁰

Here, Kharraz relates *fana* and *baqa* directly to the oneness of God (*tawhid*), the fundamental principle of Islam, and the same idea is echoed throughout the *Mathnawi*.

Of much greater significance was Kharraz's student, another Sufi of Baghdad, Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd (d.910), who developed the idea of annihilation and subsistence in God even further. Noted as the figurehead of the Sober school of Sufism, Junayd 'achieved a synthesis [in his doctrine] that is both far reaching in its vision and at the same time more generally socially acceptable [than Hallaj's model].'⁸¹ Junayd's writings on *fana* stressed the necessity of renunciation and mental struggle, in order to return to a pre-existing state when man was only a concept in God's mind. Thus, *fana* is directly related to the Primordial Covenant (*mithaq*) and the original state of man.⁸² Not only does Junayd describe *fana* as 'complete immersion in God's existence', Unity (*tawhid*) itself is removing one's 'consciousness from the temporal (created) realm and focusing it upon the Immortal (Divine) Reality.' The ultimate goal of the mystic is the 'ridding of attributes' and everything 'created', in order to 'taste' (*dhawq*) the reality of the Eternal. In fact, Junayd describes the whole of Sufism being 'that God should make thee die to thyself [*fana*] and make thee live in Him [*baqa*].'⁸³ The crucial qualification, however, in Junayd's theory is that the goal of mysticism is not complete loss of self, but the return to daily life transformed by a vision of God through the loss of self and constant remembrance of God's presence.⁸⁴ Consequently, whilst Junayd determined that Bistami and Hallaj's mystical experiences were valid, he found them to be only, "one stretch along the path...not the most advanced inner essence that those who are called are capable of."⁸⁵ For Junayd, the 'excess' desire typified by the two mystics was a type of imperfection, only constituting partial annihilation. The Sober School considered sobriety to be a Divine attribute, greater than intoxication, since it involves the annihilation of all desire, including longing and

⁸⁰ Kharraz is considered the first to use *fana* and *baqa* as technical terms. Wilcox, 'The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fanā' And Baqā' In Early Sūfism', pp.97-99.

⁸¹ Schimmel also observes that different schools refer to Junayd 'as their master'. Ibid., p.104.

⁸² Ibid.,107. Discussed further in Chapter Two.

⁸³ Ibid., pp.99-107.

⁸⁴ For Junayd, this can only be achieved through the fulfilment of God's will as expressed in the Quran and *Sunnah* (example of the Prophet Muhammed).

See 'Junayd, al- Abu al-Qasim ibn Muhammad', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* [online] 2014 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195125580.001.0001/acref-9780195125580-e-1216?rskey=YD43LL&result=3>> [accessed 7 October 2016].

⁸⁵ Wilcox, 'The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fanā' And Baqā' In Early Sūfism', pp.109-111.

love. In general, Hallaj and the Intoxicated School believed that this desire was ‘the natural consequence of selfless contemplation of the beatific vision of God.’⁸⁶ But, as we have seen, Hallaj also calls for the annihilation of intoxication, and it would be wrong to simply consider him the antithesis of Junayd. Paradoxically, Junayd is also a proponent of ecstasy (*wajd*), defining this as ‘dissociation, severance (*inqata*) from one’s personal qualities while one’s essence is graced with joy.’ Indeed, Lewisohn finds that *wajd*, ‘developed out of speculations concerning the spiritual psychology of annihilation (*fana*)’,⁸⁷ and Junayd relates this ecstasy to three stages of *fana*. The first involves a type of carnal annihilation, eliminating ‘egocentric qualities and habits’ (particularly desire); secondly, all worldly pleasure is renounced; thirdly: ‘abiding in God you are annihilated, finding real existence (*mawjud*) in your annihilation -through the Existence of the Other. Thus, your name is blotted out and only your barest trace remains.’⁸⁸ For Junayd, this final *fana al-fana* is also ‘the obliteration of *fana* by *baqa*’ (*fana fi-baqa*).⁸⁹ Lewisohn notes that in Junayd’s treatise “On Annihilation” (*Kitab al-fana*), ‘the Sufi’s very existence is understood to be a kind of rapture.’⁹⁰ Furthermore, Junayd underlined the ‘interdependent’ nature of *fana* and *baqa*:

Indeed it is true to say that they are both alternate expressions of the same state... Thus the mystical state of *baqā*’ in Junayd’s doctrine of Sobriety should not be considered the onset of a new state after *fanā*’ in which the devotee has returned to self-awareness... [It is] the obliteration of *fanā*’ by *baqā*’ [which] alludes to *fanā*’ al-*fanā*’ (obliteration of the awareness of obliteration), which is the highest degree of the mystical state of annihilation. [That is] (the state of *baqā*’) is so overwhelming that all else has been obliterated (the state of *fanā*’). This leads to a simultaneous interdependence... between the states of *fanā*’ and *baqā*’ that can only be resolved by understanding that [they] are the same state from different points of view.⁹¹

It is hoped that this thesis will clarify this aspect, which Wilcox sees as a ‘poorly understood aspect of *fana* and *baqa*’, alongside the other theories above, as they too make their way into Rumi’s *Mathnawi*.

It is likely that Rumi also drew his understanding of *fana* and *baqa* from the works of the Iranian Sufi, Abu Nasr al-Sarraj (d.988), who authored the ‘first systematic exposition of Sufism as a way of life and thought’, the *Kitab al-Luma fi al-Tasawwuf* (‘The Book of Shafts of Light on Sufism’). Sarraj’s work brought together earlier Sufi works and was studied extensively as an important source of the sayings and thoughts of early Sufi

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp.108, 113.

⁸⁷ Lewisohn, ‘Principles of the Philosophy of Ecstasy’, p.40.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.42 and Wilcox, ‘The Dual Mystical Concepts of *Fanā*’ And *Baqā*’ In Early Sūfism’, pp.100-105.

⁸⁹ Wilcox, ‘The Dual Mystical Concepts of *Fanā*’ And *Baqā*’ In Early Sūfism’, p.106.

⁹⁰ Lewisohn, ‘Principles of the Philosophy of Ecstasy’, pp.42-43.

⁹¹ Wilcox, ‘The Dual Mystical Concepts of *Fanā*’ And *Baqā*’ In Early Sūfism’, p.106.

mystics. The book describes seven mystical stations, one of which is *zuhd* (renunciation), where Sarraj lists three ranks of renouncers. Paralleling Junayd's three stages of annihilation, the first rank involves the renunciation of desire for material possessions; the second sees the desire for worldly status and the approval of others forsaken; whilst the third shuns the created world entirely.⁹² Again, we observe the interchangeability of the term *fana* with other technical terms, which we will also see in the *Mathnawi*.

Following on from Sarraj, Rumi's doctrine of annihilation and subsistence would also have been shaped by another Iranian, 'Abd al-Qasim al-Qushayri (d.1074), who wrote the 'most widely-read prose introduction to Sufism ever written,'⁹³ the *Risala al-Qushayri fi 'Ilm al-Tasawwuf* ('Treatise on the Science of Sufism'). Qushayri's synopsis of his predecessors' theories covers all of the major aspects and terms of Sufism. In an essay on 'Passing Away (*Fana*) and Abiding (*Baqa*)', Qushayri describes five degrees of *fana* and *baqa*, which are also reflected in the *Mathnawi*. One begins with the carnal annihilation of 'blameworthy acts', subsisting in faithfulness; this is followed by the annihilation of one's 'appetitive nature' (desiring material and worldly pleasures), where man endures through remorse and penitence; through the renunciation of negative characteristics, positive characteristics emerge; freeing oneself from dependency and attachment to the opinion of others, man then exists in the Divine attributes; and through complete detachment from the world of creatures, man survives solely through God.⁹⁴ It should however be remembered that Qushayri and his contemporaries often set out different variations of *fana* and *baqa* throughout their works. Therefore, any attempt at a direct comparison between the formulations of *fana* and *baqa* in the Sufi manuals and Rumi's poem must be approached with caution. In addition, Jawid Mojaddedi finds certain omissions by Qushayri particularly telling, especially the fact that he does not mention Hallaj in his list of biographies,⁹⁵ suggesting a distinct theoretical difference between Qushayri and Rumi.

Qushayri's Persian counterpart, Abdul Hassan Ali Hujwiri (d.1075),⁹⁶ presented equally complex discussions on *fana* and *baqa*. Hujwiri first described the Schools of Intoxication

⁹² Ibid., p.203.

⁹³ Mojaddedi, *Beyond Dogma*, pp.25-26.

⁹⁴ Michael Anthony Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, poetic and theological writings* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1996), p.120.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Hailing from Ghazna (modern Afghanistan), Hujwiri settled in Lahore and is commonly referred to as Daata Sahib or Daata Ganj Bakhsh in South Asia.

and Sobriety, and belonged largely to the latter. Unlike Qushayri, however, Hujwiri preferred to discuss controversial topics and was particularly fond of Hallaj, though he was not sure if he was a good example for the common man to follow.⁹⁷ Like Junayd, he considered intoxicated states of ecstasy to only be symbolic of partial annihilation, since human attributes remain intact.⁹⁸ In fact, in his *Kashf al-Mahjub* ('Revealing the Hidden'), which described twelve schools of Sufism, Hujwiri declared that ten sects asserted truth and belonged to orthodox Islam, but he '[c]ondemned the *Hululi* sect for the adoption of beliefs about incarnation, incorporation, and anthropomorphism and the *Hallaji* sect for the abandonment of sacred law.'⁹⁹ Although 'Hujwiri's theology was reconciled with the concept of Sufi annihilation',

he seriously campaigned against the doctrine that human personalities can be merged with God, instead likening annihilation to burning by fire which allows the substance to acquire fire like properties while retaining its own individuality.¹⁰⁰

In addition, Hujwiri stresses that, "whoever explains these terms otherwise, i.e. annihilation as meaning 'annihilation of substance' and subsistence as meaning 'subsistence of God (in Man)', is a heretic and a Christian."¹⁰¹ Despite belonging to different Schools, and their apparent theoretical differences regarding intoxication and *fana*, Rumi's theism is the same as Hujwiri's. As we shall see in the *Mathnawi*, Rumi reiterates the above sentiments almost verbatim.

Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi's Theism

Given the complicated nature (and history) of the doctrine of Unity in Sufism, it will be helpful here to summarise exactly what is meant by this, especially as *fana* and *baqa* are both based on *tawhid*. Rumi famously refers to the *Mathnawi* as 'the shop of oneness', but does this mean 'an ontological unification of man with God'? Maryam Sadatmir rightly finds this implication to be absurd, as it is in direct opposition to the monotheistic Islamic

⁹⁷ Mojaddedi, *Beyond Dogma*, p.27.

⁹⁸ Wilcox, 'The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fanā' And Baqā' In Early Sūfism', p.109.

⁹⁹ 'Hujwiri, Sayyid Ali al-', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* [online] 2014 <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e889?_hi=0&_pos=1> [accessed 7 October 2016].

¹⁰⁰ Hujwiri [also] believed that individuals should not claim to have attained "*marifat*" or gnosis because it exhibits spiritual pride, and that true understanding of God should be a silent understanding. *Kashf al-mahjūb of al-Hujwīrī: The revelation of the veiled: an early Persian treatise on Sufism*, trans. and ed. by R.A. Nicholson (Wiltshire: Aris & Phillips, 2000).

¹⁰¹ Wilcox, 'The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fanā' And Baqā' In Early Sūfism', p.99. These explanations are heretical as they contradict the fundamental tenets of Islam and align more generally with Christian theology.

tradition.¹⁰² So, the theistic implications of this *Unio mystica* need to be situated in context in order to clarify exactly what is meant by Unity. Although Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328) was a staunch opponent of any theory suggesting that man could unite with God, and sought to reformulate *fana* accordingly,¹⁰³ classical Sufis had always:

rejected the heretical notion of the incarnation of the essence of God in the human (*hulul*) as in the Christian tradition. Similarly, the idea of the merging of the essences of man and God, as found in the Hellenic conception of *ekstasis*, [was] seen to violate the core Islamic understanding of the transcendent nature of God.¹⁰⁴

Accordingly, Bistami ‘outlined the theory of union with certain divine attributes but not with the Essence’, and Hallaj’s theory also ‘carries no trace of duality.’¹⁰⁵ Unsurprisingly, Junayd was even more emphatic about the limits of Unity, and in his descriptions of *fana* he explains that, ‘There is no merging of essences (*ittihad*) and no incarnation of God in man (*hulul*), the process is therefore an experiential witnessing not an ontological becoming.’¹⁰⁶ Despite these clarifications, early Western scholarship tended to describe Rumi’s understanding of Unity in terms of a pantheistic monism, directly relating this to the influence of Ibn ‘Arabi (1165-1240) and his doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* (‘Oneness of Being’ or ‘Unity of Existence’).¹⁰⁷ Whilst this particular explanation of Rumi’s theism, and the assumption that Ibn ‘Arabi had any significant influence over Rumi’s thought, has subsequently been rejected by most commentators, William Chittick still encourages students to be aware of the implications of early Orientalists calling Ibn ‘Arabi ‘a pantheist or to claim that he stood outside of “orthodox” Islam’.¹⁰⁸ Chittick deems the term pantheism to be particularly alien to Rumi’s own religious context, and finds attempts to categorise his theism according to Western classifications to be deeply problematic and misleading.¹⁰⁹ Another point to note is that, even though the term *wahdat al-wujud* is

¹⁰² Janis Eshots, ‘Why is the “*Mathnawi*” called “the Shop of Oneness”?: Reflections on Rumi’s Methodology’, in *Rumi Teachings*, ed. by S.G. Safavi (London: London Academy of Iranian Studies Press, 2008), pp.150-158.

¹⁰³ Ridgeon, ‘Mysticism in Medieval Sufism’, pp.20-22.

¹⁰⁴ Wilcox, ‘The Dual Mystical Concepts of *Fanā*’ And *Baqā*’ In *Early Sūfism*’, p.96.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.102, 111-114.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.106.

¹⁰⁷ The leading Islamic theosophist. For the origins of this concept, see Zarrabi-Zadeh, ‘Jalal al-Din Rumi’s Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation’, p.48.

¹⁰⁸ Chittick, ‘Rumi and *wahdat al-wujud*’, in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam* (see Banani, above), pp.88-91. Moyne could be considered a contemporary author who still equates Rumi’s theism with *wahdat al-wujud*. See J.A. Moyne, *Rumi and The Sufi Tradition* (California: Mazda Publishers, 2009).

¹⁰⁹ Ridgeon suggests that Henry Corbin’s term ‘theo-monist’ comes closer to being a more accurate description. Ridgeon, ‘Mysticism in Medieval Sufism’, p.13. See also Lewis, *Rumi*, pp.285-286.

generally associated with Ibn ‘Arabi, and does not appear before him, similar terms did exist. Interestingly, these terms are also always connected to *fana* and *baqa*.¹¹⁰

Addressing the misreading of Rumi’s theism in his seminal paper, ‘Theism and Pantheism in Rumi’ (1967),¹¹¹ Alessandro Bausani (1921-88) described Islamic monotheism (where God is completely distinct from his creation, and the perfected human figure of the Prophet is nevertheless still ‘other’) as the opposite of Pantheism (where God is emanated through his creation, Prophets and Saints, who reflect the Divine image). Although Bausani suggests that Rumi straddles the two ideas, he is adamant that Rumi is not a pantheist:

The active creativeness of God is by Rumi clearly kept distinct from the created thing... even when the pure soul, the ego of man is, after death, or in ecstasy, extremely near God, this nearness is never felt by Rumi as a real absorption in God without any residual.¹¹²

Likening Rumi’s idea of annihilation and subsistence to being ‘killed by the Beloved and then caressed by Him again to Life’, Bausani explains that this is ‘no more the fruit of pantheistic magics, but of theistic *taslim*, Islam (in the etymological sense).’¹¹³ Bausani also emphasises that Rumi’s *fana* is not the equivalent of Nirvana, since Rumi is a lover of God’s creation and ‘he does not fly away from the world like the Buddhist who considers things ugly and despicable’.¹¹⁴ In this sense, *fana* ‘does not allude to the cessation of individual life but to its development and perfection.’¹¹⁵ In fact, most Sufis hold that *fana* alone is a ‘negative state’ and it is considered necessary for man to return to consciousness, in order to, ‘attain the more sublime state of *baqa*...and finally become ready for the direct vision of God.’¹¹⁶

Having touched on some of William Chittick’s (b.1943) findings, we will now detail further his valuable research on the relationship between Rumi and Ibn ‘Arabi. In his

¹¹⁰ For example, al-Qassab (d.970) said, ‘There is nothing in the two worlds except my Lord. The existent things (*mawjudat*) – all things except His *wujud* – are non-existent (*ma’dum*).’ al-Ansari (d.1089) spoke of five levels of *tawhid*, the highest being, ‘the absorption of that which never was into that which ever is.’ al-Ghazali (d.1111) described the Gnostics as, ‘They [who] see through direct witnessing that there is nothing in *wujud* save God and that ‘All things are perishing except His face’’. Chittick, ‘Rumi and *wahdat al-wujud*’, p.71.

¹¹¹ Alessandro Bausani, ‘Theism and Pantheism in Rumi’, *Iranian Studies*, 1 (1967) 8-24 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00210866708701345>> [accessed 07 October 2014].

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp.10-11.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.17.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.14.

¹¹⁵ Wilcox, ‘The Dual Mystical Concepts of *Fanā*’ And *Baqā*’ In *Early Sūfism*’, pp.95-6.

¹¹⁶ ‘*Fana* | Sufism’, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [online] 1998 <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/fana-Sufism>> [accessed 7 October 2016].

excellent paper, ‘Rumi and *wahdat al-wujud*’ (1987), Chittick begins by refuting the perceived notion that *wahdat al-wujud* is unique and fundamental to Ibn ‘Arabi’s philosophy.¹¹⁷ Not only does Chittick explain that Ibn ‘Arabi never used *wahdat al-wujud* as a ‘technical term’, he also stresses that it is a loaded expression.¹¹⁸ Besides, where Ibn ‘Arabi does make reference to the doctrine, he explains the concept, ‘in hundreds of different contexts, each time adding nuances that are lost when any attempt is made, as it soon is in most Western studies, to “come to the point”.’ Therefore, Chittick says that it is difficult to provide even a basic outline of the idea, since it is not ‘a philosophical or theological system.’¹¹⁹ Still, he attempts to summarise *wahdat al-wujud* as follows:

There is only one Being, one *wujud*, even though we are justified in speaking of many “existent things” (*mawjuddat*) in order to address ourselves to the plurality that we perceive in the phenomenal world... If *wujud* belongs only to God, then everything other than God is non-existent in itself, though it is existent to the extent that it manifests in the Real.¹²⁰

The idea of ‘multiplicity in Unity’ stems from the descriptions of God’s transcendence and immanence in the Quran, where he is both: ‘the absolutely non-manifest (*al-batin*)’ and the ‘manifest (*al-zahir*)’. Consequently, Ibn ‘Arabi draws on ‘the intimate inward interrelationships among phenomena’, but also describes the Perfect Man (*Al-Insan al-Kamil*) as one who negates the existence of everything other than God, affirming only His existence.¹²¹ The Prophet defined *tawhid* as ‘worshipping God as if you see Him’, and for Ibn ‘Arabi *fana* is this witnessing of God.¹²² In this vein, Maryam Sadatmir recently defined *fana al-baqa* as, ‘[man’s] ever unification in God and God’s ever-unification in man,’ which makes the Perfect Man.¹²³ Whilst the ideas of multiplicity and Unity, ‘are [also] inseparably interlaced in Rumi’s poetry,’¹²⁴ Janis Eshots adds that Rumi is particularly keen to “destroy the battlements of manyness by the catapult of oneness”. Referring to this as the “oneness of intoxication”, Eshots observes that in the *Mathnawi* anything other than God is part of the ‘manyness of forms,’ becoming an idol for Rumi. And, ‘Unlike Ibn ‘Arabi, Rumi is not willing to grant these idols even a relative value: they

¹¹⁷ Various figures attached the doctrine to Ibn ‘Arabi and his school. Of note is Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328) who violently opposed any notion of unification and single handily made it ‘a point of contention in Islamic history’. Chittick, ‘Rumi and *wahdat al-wujud*’, pp.82-88.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.70-73.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.74.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.75.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp.76-77. For the relationship to the idea of ‘the one and the many’ in Neoplatonism, see J. Christopher Bürgel, “‘Speech is a ship and meaning the sea’: some formal aspects of the ghazal poetry of Rumi”, in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam* (see Banani, above), p.48.

¹²² Wilcox, ‘The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fanā’ And Baqā’ In Early Sūfism’, p.98.

¹²³ Maryam Sadatmir, ‘Mystical Unification of Man with God’, in *Rumi Teachings*, (see Eshots, above), pp.194-195.

¹²⁴ Bürgel, “‘Speech is a ship and meaning the sea’: some formal aspects of the ghazal poetry of Rumi”, p.55.

simply must not be taken into account,’ and this is achieved solely through *fana* and *baqa*. Additionally, Eshots argues that, since Rumi spoke of seven ‘bottoms’ (levels of meaning) to the *Mathnawi*, there must be, ‘several levels of oneness [contained therein], each of which is experienced, when we reach the relevant level of consciousness.’¹²⁵ But, whether or not Ibn ‘Arabi concerns himself more with the ‘manyness in oneness’, whilst Rumi sees only the ‘oneness in manyness’, the essential point is that neither believed in Unity as the complete identification of creation with God, and vice versa.

It should also be kept in mind that whilst many biographers have suggested the feasibility of Rumi’s actually meeting Ibn ‘Arabi, there is no evidence of the two mystics knowing each other personally. Although, as a contemporary, Rumi would have been aware of Ibn ‘Arabi’s doctrines, he makes no direct reference to him in any of his writings. Chittick clarifies that any connection to Rumi comes through Sadr al-Din Qunawi (d.1274), Ibn ‘Arabi’s disciple, who was a friend of Rumi’s and for whom the concept of *wahdat al-wujud* was much more central.¹²⁶ Still, Rumi never employed the term, nor does it have any ‘technical significance’ in his works. Furthermore, Shams is known to have been particularly critical of Ibn ‘Arabi, and it is possible that Rumi held the same view.¹²⁷ That said, Chittick suggests that Rumi would not have been averse to the term, *per se*:

When one says that *wahdat al-wujud* is simply *tawhid* expressed in the language of the Sufis...then of course Rumi was a spokesman for *wahdat al-wujud*, and innumerable passages from his works can be cited to support this contention.¹²⁸

Nevertheless, Chittick holds that ‘Ibn al ‘Arabi exercised no perceptible influence on Rumi’, and that they both represent “two forms of spirituality” which, as forms, are different.’ Whilst Ibn ‘Arabi brings together the age-old spirituality of Andalusia, North Africa and Egypt, Rumi brings to climax the tradition of Sufism in Persia. Likewise, there are no specific linguistic similarities between the two that cannot be found in earlier authors. Moreover, Ibn ‘Arabi addressed deeply learned men, in contrast Rumi ‘spoke the language of the masses, and much of his “technical” terminology was derived from everyday discourse’. Most notably, Chittick differentiates the two Sufis, saying, ‘One can

¹²⁵ Janis Eshots, ‘Why is the “*Mathnawi*” called “the Shop of Oneness”?: Reflections on Rumi’s Methodology’, pp.152-157.

¹²⁶ See Chittick, ‘Rumi and *wahdat al-wujud*’, pp.77-80.

¹²⁷ Schimmel notes that ‘even the most important classics of Sufi literature were, for Shams, less valuable than a single authentic Prophetic tradition’. It should also be remembered that Rumi did become ‘more interested in theoretical thought’ later in life. See Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, pp.19, 29.

¹²⁸ Chittick, ‘Rumi and *wahdat al-wujud*’, p.92.

imagine Ibn al ‘Arabi without love...but one cannot imagine Rumi without love’.¹²⁹ This thesis also proposes that one cannot imagine Rumi without *fana*. Ultimately, what unites both mystics is, in fact, their perception of God as an unknowable entity, which is rooted in the Hadith, ‘incapacity to attain comprehension [of God] is comprehension itself.’¹³⁰ As Schimmel says, *tawhid* is the ‘central mystery of Islam’,¹³¹ an idea that we shall see echoed throughout the *Mathnawi*.

Literature Review

Having briefly outlined the theoretical background to *fana* and *baqa*, it is now worth examining how the doctrine has been discussed in relation to the *Mathnawi*, in Western Rumi scholarship.¹³² Whilst much of this literature is considered in the following Chapter, a summary of key texts and authors is given here. Particular attention is paid to: discussions on the theory of *fana* and *baqa*, the influence of Rumi’s predecessors on his understanding, the connection of the process to fundamental principles of Islam, the relationship of *fana* and *baqa* to the key aspects of Sufism (ecstasy, love, unity) and Rumi’s theism. Findings that relate to the overall structure of the *Mathnawi* are also highlighted. From here, gaps in knowledge and emerging issues are identified.

The first proper introduction of Persian poetry to the West began in the late eighteenth century, through Sir William Jones (1746-1794), with select passages of the *Mathnawi* being translated into European languages in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹³³ These were, at best, loose renderings of very poor quality, and Rumi was often left out of introductions to and anthologies of Persian literature. Though many academics rated Rumi, simply put, other Persian poets were much more popular, widely translated and studied. In particular, Ferdowsi (d.1020), Sa‘di (1291/1292), Jami (1492) and Hafez (1389/90) amassed a huge following; whilst Edward Fitzgerald (1809-83) notoriously captured the

¹²⁹ Ibid., pp.92-6.

¹³⁰ Ridgeon, ‘Mysticism in Medieval Islam’, p.12.

¹³¹ In Wilcox, ‘The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fanā’ And Baqā’ In Early Sūfism’, p.98.

¹³² Due to the constraints of this paper, the primary focus is on selected works, originally written in English. A chronological approach has been adopted, as it is particularly useful in charting how scholarship on annihilation and subsistence has developed over time.

¹³³ The first German ‘study’ of the poem appearing in 1851, followed by an abridged edition by E.H. Whinfield in 1887, and a translation of Book Two by C.E. Wilson in 1910. See Lewis, *Rumi*.

public imagination with his first translations of Omar Khayyam (d.1131) in 1956.¹³⁴ The tide would eventually turn in Rumi's favour, through the efforts of Reynold Alleyne Nicholson (1868-1945) who rendered the first complete English-language translation of the *Mathnawi* between 1925 and 1940, along with a line by line commentary, drawing directly from Persian manuscripts and commentaries.¹³⁵ The Western world is forever indebted to Nicholson for his labours. Even though the twenty-first century has seen new translations of the *Mathnawi* begun, these exciting efforts remain incomplete for the moment, making Nicholson's copy the only complete English translation and commentary currently available.¹³⁶ Despite Franklin D Lewis' misgivings about Nicholson's prose translations losing much of the original sense by virtue of the lack of rhyme, and the 'sentimental' dated language reflecting 'Victorian sensibility',¹³⁷ his is still the go-to version of the *Mathnawi* for scholars, and has been used as the primary source for this paper.

In his Introduction, Nicholson describes, 'the author's passion for self-effacement,'¹³⁸ and his Commentary, which elaborates on the specific Sufi teachings, concepts and terminology that Rumi refers to, makes frequent reference to the theory of *fana* and *baqa*. These explanations have proved extremely helpful in ascertaining Rumi's understanding of annihilation and subsistence. But, if a reader were to simply use Nicholson's Index of Technical Terms, to find verses on *fana* and *baqa*, they would be left with the impression that Rumi barely touches on the topic (at best, a few lines are indexed under these headings, for each book, if at all). Moreover, the words 'annihilation' and 'subsistence' do not appear at all in the Subject Index. So, one must scour interchangeable terms, such as 'death' and 'transmutation', not only to find select passages, but to sense more of the significance of the doctrine in Rumi's work. Of course, the Indices are clearly not meant to be exhaustive, and Nicholson never intended his Commentary to be a full discussion on 'the subtle points of mystical doctrine.'¹³⁹ The real limitation to Nicholson's Commentary

¹³⁴ Although, Fitzgerald did repeatedly appeal to the Persian scholar E.B. Cowell to translate the *Mathnawi*.

¹³⁵ Nicholson was a Trinity College Fellow/Persian Lecturer/Professor of Arabic. Lewis comments that, although he never 'spoke' these languages, he 'could read and interpret them better than most native speakers.' For more on the sources used by Nicholson, see Lewis, *Rumi*.

¹³⁶ Using more accurate versions of Rumi's original manuscript: Jawid Mojaddedi has translated Books One, Two and Three; Alan Williams has translated Book One using iambic pentameter; Victoria Holbrook has translated Book One in the original *ramal* meter (alongside an Ottoman commentary of this Book). Although, M.G. Gupta translated all six Books with some commentary (1995), this is not considered a reputable edition. See 'About the Masnavi'. In *Dar-Al-Masnavi* [online]. Updated July 2017 [cited 03 March 2016]. Available from: <<http://www.dar-al-masnavi.org/masnavi.html>>.

¹³⁷ Lewis, *Rumi*.

¹³⁸ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II*, p. xi.

¹³⁹ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, pp.vi-vii.

is that he draws heavily from early Persian and Turkish commentaries, which have been noted for their shortcomings.¹⁴⁰ He also admits that for the Commentary, ‘I have usually chosen a single [theory] or stated my own opinion.’¹⁴¹ A particular problem is that Nicholson reads and explains the *Mathnawi* through the lens of ‘Ibn Arabi, paralleling the two mystics and even claiming that Rumi, ‘derived some of his teachings from Ibn al-‘Arabi.’ Therefore, for Nicholson, Rumi’s central philosophy is often described in terms of Pantheistic Monism (discussed above). Specifically, Nicholson suggests that Rumi borrowed the term “not-being” (‘*adam*’), which underpins *fana*, from Ibn ‘Arabi. Chittick, however, disputes this, arguing that the term was part of the common currency of Sufi poets and can also be traced back to the Quran. Chittick also stresses that one must be careful of times where Nicholson attempts to read in Rumi’s use of terms [including *fana* and *baqa*] specific Neoplatonic influences.¹⁴² Despite these limitations, this author does not find Nicholson’s commentary on *fana* and *baqa* to be fundamentally flawed, rather, he is found relating the idea to most of the fundamental principles of Islam and central aspects of Sufism. Where Nicholson’s labours fall short is in the absence of a detailed work that brings together the various strands of the poem and explains the overall teachings of the *Mathnawi*. Nicholson’s commentary does not provide a systematic analysis of Rumi’s doctrine of *fana* and *baqa*, nor does it suggest any relationship to the structure of the poem. In fact, Nicholson asserts that, ‘Rumi is a poet and mystic, not a philosopher and logician. He has no system, he creates an aesthetic atmosphere which defies analysis.’¹⁴³ The following analysis of the *Mathnawi* disputes this claim, by bridging the gap in Nicholson’s findings, and discovering a very definite ‘system’ of *fana* and *baqa* being presented by Rumi, for the Sufi novice to follow.

Nicholson’s foremost student, Arthur John Arberry (1905-69), who contributed greatly to the study of Persian literature and Sufism, also formulated his own translations of select stories from the *Mathnawi*, intended for the wider public.¹⁴⁴ Like Nicholson, Arberry did not provide an extended analysis of the *Mathnawi*. It is interesting, however, that in *Sufism: An account of the Mystics* (1950), despite a sound description of the theory of *fana*

¹⁴⁰ See Lewis, *Rumi*. Nicholson was also unacquainted with the teachings of Rumi’s father and Shams, see Chittick, ‘Rumi and wahdat al-wujud’, pp. 97-100.

¹⁴¹ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, p. viii.

That said, Nicholson was fully aware of the problems of translation, interpretation and the complexity of Rumi’s meaning. Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II*, p.vii.

¹⁴² Chittick, ‘Rumi and wahdat al-wujud’, pp.98-100.

¹⁴³ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, p.vii.

¹⁴⁴ *Tales from the Masnavi* (1961) and *More Tales from the Masnavi* (1963) were also based on a more credible Persian manuscript by Foruzanfar.

and *baqa*, which he ascribes to both Junayd and Bistami, Arberry does not even mention the concept in his section on Rumi.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, in *Classical Persian Literature* (1958), Arberry does not refer to the terms when discussing Rumi's work. This dearth of detail could be forgiven, given that Arberry's books were only intended to provide a brief introduction to Persian poets, except he does manage to convey the finer points of Neoplatonism, Darwinism and Pantheism, which he finds influencing Rumi's thought. The lack of a solid connection between Rumi's Sufism and the central principles of Islam, along with the misreading of his theism, show Arberry continuing to advance Orientalist interpretations of Rumi.¹⁴⁶ As such, Arberry's studies do not suggest that the practical method of *fana* and *baqa* has any primary significance in the *Mathnawi*. Again, this paper acts as a redress to this proposition.

It would be amiss to regard the early discussions of *fana* and *baqa*, in Rumi's poetry, as entirely reductive, given the posthumous publication of Khalifa Abdul Hakim's (1896-1959) *The Metaphysics of Rumi: A Critical and Historical Sketch* (1959). Hakim appreciated the various branches of philosophical thought influencing Rumi, which he described as 'beautifully woven into the texture of a system of thought which is from beginning to end purely Islamic'.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, Hakim deduces that Rumi's theism is an 'ultrarational truth,' which allows for God's transcendence and immanence at the same time. Hakim also relates Unity directly to *fana* and *baqa*, as it involves the 'moral transformation' of the lower self by higher self. For Hakim, this transformation is all important and synonymous with religion itself. Hakim acknowledged that a comprehensive analysis of Rumi's thought and method in the *Mathnawi* would be a colossal endeavour, so chose to focus on what he considered the central problem, 'the problem of Personality, divine and human'. In his Chapter on 'The Survival of Personality (*fana and baqa*)', Hakim starts to advance annihilation and subsistence as a major theme in Rumi's work. Concluding that 'the conception of *adam* and *fana* is of fundamental importance to understand Rumi's outlook on life,'¹⁴⁸ Hakim argues that for Rumi life is nothing more than a series of continuous negations and affirmations, which correlates to the ego's death and rebirth.¹⁴⁹ It is worth noting that he returns to the doctrine, again and again, in all the

¹⁴⁵ A. J Arberry, *Sufism, An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950), pp.54-61.

¹⁴⁶ Though, it is noted that both Arberry and Nicholson emphasise the influence of Hallaj on Rumi's thought.

¹⁴⁷ K.A. Hakim, *The Metaphysics of Rumi* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1965), p.iii.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.3, 113-117, 121.

¹⁴⁹ K. A. Hakim, 'Jalal al-Din Rumi', in *Rumi: In the light of Eastern and Western scholarship* (see Schimmel, above), p.91.

other Chapters of his book: The Nature of the Soul, The Problem of Creation, Evolution, Love, Freedom of the Will, The Ideal Man, God, and even Sufi Pantheism. Hakim also details the theory with reference to Hujwiri, Bistami, Junayd and Hallaj, adding that the question of Sobriety and Intoxication is ‘very closely allied to the question of *fana* and *baqa*.’¹⁵⁰ Most importantly, Hakim underlines Rumi’s particular concern with spiritual evolution, declaring that ‘the idea of progressive immortality is absolutely original with him.’ In this vein, Hakim comments on Rumi’s understanding of the Prophet’s ascension to the heavens (*Mi’raj*) as a symbol for *fana* and *baqa*, the only way that ‘frees man from all fear of death.’¹⁵¹ Detailing *fana* and *baqa* in this way, Hakim does a much better job at cementing the concept in Rumi’s work, and conveying how it connects to the major aspects of Sufism. Nevertheless, Hakim actually concurs with his predecessors’ statements that the *Mathnawi* does not depict any kind of system of philosophy, theology or metaphysics.¹⁵² Despite commenting on the stages of the ego’s development, presented in the *Mathnawi*, Hakim does not suggest that this relates to the overall structure of the poem. This paper, on the other hand, proposes that the poem is designed as a template for a wayfarer to follow, detailing the theory and practice of *fana* and *baqa*.

Building on Hakim’s findings, *The Life and Work of Jalal-ud-din Rumi* (1956) by Afzal Iqbal (1919-94), was the first truly comprehensive critical study of Rumi’s thought and life in English.¹⁵³ Iqbal confirms that Rumi’s sense of *fana* and *baqa* is rooted in the fundamentals of Islam, and sees Rumi’s own life, especially his relationship with Shams, as symbolic of this *fana* and *baqa*.¹⁵⁴ Of particular interest, is Iqbal’s definition of Rumi’s formulation of annihilation and subsistence, in the *Mathnawi*:

By dying to self (*fana*) the mystic returns, as it were, to his original state of potential existence as an idea in God’s consciousness, and realises the Unity of the Divine Essence, Attributes, and Action... In such a mood of surrender Rumi discovered individuality in non-individuality. But man must emerge from this ecstasy and rapture in order consciously to capture greater heights. From self-negation he must leap forward to self affirmation [affirmation of God as the only Self] ...In the ultimate reaches of life the subtle difference between existence and non-existence

¹⁵⁰ Hakim, *The Metaphysics of Rumi*, pp.115-116.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.123.

¹⁵² Hakim, ‘Jalal al-Din Rumi’, p.79.

¹⁵³ Iqbal also translated the many of the controversial and lewd passages from the *Mathnawi*, rendered into Latin by Nicholson.

¹⁵⁴ Iqbal also adds that, after guiding him to consciousness, the physical form of Shams needed to be sacrificed, for the Divine presence to fully encompass Rumi. Afzal Iqbal, *The Life and Work of Jalal-ud-din Rumi* (London: Octagon Press, 1983), pp.148, 154.

disappears. Both negation and affirmation are possible at the same time. Both are true. Both are valid.¹⁵⁵

Like Hakim, Iqbal then starts to link Rumi's *fana* and *baqa* to the key tenets of Islam and Sufism: the origin of creation, Unity, the nature of God, free-will, survival of personality, ecstasy, and the *Shahadah*. These aspects are explored in more detail in the following Chapters, including Iqbal's discussions on the Perfect Man's 'certainty' being the result of burning in fire, the constant *fana* and *baqa* of creation itself, and immortality and Love as Rumi's mystical goal. Nevertheless, for Iqbal, Rumi is not a passive figure, rather he believes in a worldly life, in which active effort is vital.¹⁵⁶ Iqbal's findings are somewhat limited, in that he does not refer to Rumi developing the theory of *fana* and *baqa* systematically throughout the course of the *Mathnawi*.¹⁵⁷ Still, Iqbal's contribution to the understanding of Rumi's theism is significant to this study, especially his clarification that Rumi's concept of Unity was neither related to Ibn 'Arabi's 'pantheism', nor the extreme duality of orthodox monotheism.

Like Iqbal, Annemarie Schimmel (1922-2003), who devoted her life to the study of Rumi, also described him as 'a model of the experience of spiritual death and resurrection, of *fana* and *baqa*.'¹⁵⁸ Schimmel's seminal work, *The Triumphal Sun: A study of the Works of Jalalōddin Rumi* (1978), provided a thorough investigation into Rumi's theology. Cementing Rumi's thought in the Islamic tradition, Schimmel intended to present, 'a corrective to portrayals of Rumi as a non-denominational mystic.'¹⁵⁹ Although Lewis complains of some shortcomings in Schimmel's study, in terms of the significance of *fana* and *baqa* to Rumi's work, the Preface of her book alone emphasises this more strongly than any of the above works. Noting that, '[for Rumi] every moment of human life is a step along the upwards journey which culminates in death – spiritual or corporeal – and then resurrection,'¹⁶⁰ Schimmel confirms the influence of Rumi's predecessors (chiefly Hallaj's) on his mystical model of annihilation and subsistence. Schimmel concludes that one of the central concepts of Rumi's philosophy is '*adam*, non-existence in both negative and positive meaning, often bordering on the definition of Nirvana as 'bliss, unspeakable.'¹⁶¹ Whilst, the idea of '*adam* (non-existence) as the premise for *fana* and

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., pp.253-255.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp.225-231.

¹⁵⁷ Referring to Rumi's *Divan*, he also sees 'no attempt to preach, to persuade, to convince'. Ibid., p.161.

¹⁵⁸ Schimmel, 'Mawlana Rumi: yesterday, today, tomorrow', pp.19-20.

¹⁵⁹ Lewis, *Rumi*, p.540.

¹⁶⁰ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, p.326.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p.xii.

baqa is explored in the following Chapters, it is interesting to note here that Schimmel highlights this at the outset of her book, as the core aspect of Rumi's work. Even though there are only a few pages devoted exclusively to the topic of *fana* and *baqa*, Schimmel sees the concept embedded in all the different facets of Rumi's theology. Notably, Schimmel underlines Rumi's preoccupation with the spiritual 'ladder' of Sufism, and the correlation of Love, prayer and Unity with death, the essential feature of the Path. Schimmel acknowledges that:

such a progress is impossible without sacrifice: death is the prerequisite for eternal life, destruction the condition for new building. God's activity reveals this constant change; 'He brings forth the living from the dead and the dead from the living' (Sura 30/19 and often). This constant sacrifice in order to gain access to higher stages of being, the unending experience of *Stirb und werde* would be impossible were not love the force behind every movement in the world...But the last and highest experience of this mutual love between man and God is found in prayer, when man obeys the Divine invitation 'Call, and I shall answer' (Sura 40/62) and reaches perfect union of will through loving surrender.'¹⁶²

Schimmel considers that Rumi is ultimately concerned with the practical application of *fana* and *baqa* in one's life.¹⁶³ Still, Schimmel's study is somewhat limited, in that she only presents isolated verses from Rumi's corpus of poems and arrives at the conclusion that Rumi simply repeats the formulations laid out by his predecessors.¹⁶⁴ This thesis refers to an entire story or section from each of the six Books of the *Mathnawi*, in order to build a more coherent picture of the doctrine as it develops over the course of the poem, and contends that Rumi uses the theories of early Sufi masters to create his own unique vision of annihilation and subsistence. Although Schimmel dismisses the idea of Rumi presenting any kind of 'system' in his works, it is worth reiterating the importance of Schimmel's book, which underscores the idea of selflessness as the apex of Rumi's mystical journey. In no uncertain terms, Schimmel states that Rumi, 'tells of a state which transgresses even love, longing and union', saying: 'I am so submerged in not-being (*nisti*), that my beloved keeps saying: / "Come, sit a moment with me!" Even that I cannot do.'¹⁶⁵

Having commented above on William Chittick's (b.1943) invaluable contributions to the study of Rumi's theism, above, it is worth reflecting on his more comprehensive studies here. Following in the same vein as Schimmel, Chittick breaks away from Orientalist

¹⁶² Ibid., p. xvii. Schimmel also sees the idea of *stirb und werde* buried in the letters, syntactical structures and verse forms of the poem.

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp.73, 308, 330-32.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p.309.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., pp.309-10.

readings in order to engage in more authentic, traditionalist understandings of Rumi. Despite this also being the intention of Hakim and Iqbal, interestingly, Chittick finds both of their studies to be unsuccessful attempts at understanding Rumi's doctrine. Referring to the terminology used in their discussions on Rumi's theism, Chittick says that both authors' 'hopelessly confuse the issue by referring to categories of Western philosophy which have no relevance to Rumi.'¹⁶⁶ In *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (1983), Chittick provides his own translations of Rumi's poems, with some commentary, under three main headings: Theory, Practice and Attainment to God. These are then divided into more nuanced sections, which detail specific teachings. Chittick includes a specific section on 'Naughting the Self' (under Attainment to God), which discusses *fana* and *baqa*. Determining that for Rumi it is only through this process that one can achieve true 'spiritual realization', Chittick makes much of the imagery of death and rebirth, which Rumi associates most with *fana* and *baqa*. Additionally, Chittick finds Rumi making frequent reference to the Prophet's advice "Die before you die!" and to Hallaj's saying: "Kill me, my faithful friends! For in my slaughter is my life – my death is in my life and my life is in my death."¹⁶⁷ Consequently, Chittick adduces that *fana* and *baqa* is:

The primary goal of ascetic discipline and spiritual warfare: the elimination or transformation of the ego, which veils man from perceiving and actualizing his true selfhood... [Rumi's] discussions of the necessity of self-naughting permeate all his poetry and prose.¹⁶⁸

Indeed, this is evidenced by the fact that almost all the teachings mentioned in Chittick's book are supplemented with Rumi's verses on spiritual death and survival. Thus, Chittick links *fana* and *baqa*, not just to the goal of Attainment to God, but also to the fundamentals of Rumi's Theory and Practice. Like Schimmel, Chittick stresses the connection that Rumi makes between annihilation and subsistence with the idea of '*adam* and *wujud*. The process of *fana* and *baqa* stems from the fact that 'God "created the world from non-existence."' In as much as:

[w]hat outwardly appears existent is really non-existent, and what seems to be non-existent is really Existence. The outwardly paradoxical conclusion is that if man desires existence, he must seek it in his own non-existence.¹⁶⁹

More importantly, Chittick appears to be the first scholar to discuss the complexity of different types of annihilation as detailed in Rumi's poetry. Chittick identifies a three-stage process, similar to those set out by earlier Sufi masters, where: the carnal self / 'partial

¹⁶⁶ William Chittick, *The Sufi Doctrine of Rumi* (Indiana: World Wisdom, 2005), p.1.

¹⁶⁷ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, pp.179, 183.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p.173.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., pp.175-76.

intellect' is naughted and man then subsists under the 'Universal Intellect'; eventually the latter must also be annihilated, in order to survive solely through Divine Love itself. Chittick details Rumi's illustration of the Prophet's ascension to the heavens as the perfect metaphor for these stages of *fana* and *baqa*. The Angel Gabriel (subsisting under the Universal Intellect) travelled with the Prophet on his journey, but could not continue to 'the last step of the journey, that can only be travelled upon the legs of Love and self-naughting,' in order to safely enter the presence of God.¹⁷⁰ Chapter Three discusses this metaphor in greater detail, suffice to say here that Chittick indicates a complex method of *fana* and *baqa* being presented in the *Mathnawi*. Chittick advances that *fana* and *baqa* is, for Rumi, synonymous with the mystical goal itself:

At the highest stages, "union" is equivalent to "subsistence" in God. Subsistence in turn is the other side of annihilation: Annihilation or the negation of the self, results in subsistence, or the affirmation of Self. Union with God is self-annihilation, so separation from Him is self-existence. As long as man continues to live under the illusion of the real existence of his own ego, his own selfhood, he is far from God. Only through negation of himself can he attain to union with Him.¹⁷¹

Though Chittick's findings underpin this paper, his work does not suggest any difference in Rumi's message of *fana* and *baqa* between the Books, nor does he presume that the books are arranged according to any kind of practical system. In fact, Chittick does not consider Rumi's discussions to be explicitly about Sufi states and stations at all, adding that, since his Sufism is not detailed 'in terms of the systematic schemes found in the classical textbooks,' students of Rumi must provide their own frameworks for his teachings.¹⁷² This paper hopes to fill in some of the gaps in Chittick's research and, to a large extent refutes this particular statement.

Following on from Schimmel and Chittick's efforts, Franklin D Lewis' (b. 1961) award-winning, *Rumi-Past and Present, East and West: The life, Teachings and Poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi* (2000), is arguably the most comprehensive, factually correct and up-to-date study of Rumi in the English language. Whilst Lewis' book is referenced throughout this thesis, it is worth including some comment on his own Chapter on Rumi's 'Teachings'. In a relatively short Chapter, largely letting Rumi's poetry speak for itself, Lewis identifies twelve generalised teachings, one of which is annihilation and subsistence. Strangely enough, having defined *fana* in his Introduction, Lewis does not actually use the term in

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., pp.220-21.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p.232.

¹⁷² Ibid., pp.12-13.

this section, and the term *baqa* does not appear at all in his book. Nevertheless, Lewis connects *fana* to the central themes of Rumi's work, especially ecstasy and *shath*. Although Lewis does not view Rumi's own verses as expressions of *shath*, this thesis hopes to prove otherwise. Lewis does an exceptional job in covering the many influences shaping Rumi's thought, like Chittick, he establishes a definite link between *fana/baqa* and the *Shahadah*, which he also describes as the fundamental aspect in destroying the veil of the 'partial intellect.' For Lewis, the *Mathnawi* emphasises spiritual poverty (*faqr*) and self-effacement (*mahv*) as the only means to attaining true knowledge, certainty and gnosis. Describing Rumi's insistence on Islam as the bedrock of Sufism, the need for spiritual guides, and the importance of the Prophets and the Quran, Lewis (indirectly) relates *fana* and *baqa* to these fundamental aspects.¹⁷³ That said, although Lewis alludes to the significance of this doctrine in Rumi's work, he stops short of asserting it as the crux of his teaching. Moreover, Lewis continues the idea that 'Rumi does not present a philosophical system per se, and that the poetic and discursive nature of his *oeuvre* makes it difficult to abstract a systematic theology.' Neither does Lewis consider that there are any structural implications to the doctrine of *fana* and *baqa* as it unfolds in the *Mathnawi*. For Lewis, Rumi deliberately chose to use a non-cohesive style, which would mirror the structural form of the Quran. This is not to say that Lewis finds the *Mathnawi* lacking in richness and complexity. In fact, he notes Rumi's own rebuttals to the accusation that the poem is deficient as an explanation of the intricacies of Sufism, in which Rumi argues that the very same was originally said of the Quran by its detractors.¹⁷⁴ Sure enough, just as the Quran does in fact have a hidden schematic structure, this thesis reveals that, similarly, the structural organisation of the *Mathnawi* relates to Rumi's doctrine of *fana* and *baqa*. Lewis does also detail Rumi's background as a preacher and his particular desire to affect change in his readers as the underlying intention of the *Mathnawi*:

One has the feeling reading the Masnavi that Rumi considers doctrinal points of secondary importance to his principle goal of touching the heart of the listener and helping transform him or her into a lover of God, the Prophet, and the Perfect Man.¹⁷⁵

Rather than a system, Lewis refers to this as Rumi's 'heuristic method', which essentially 'describes a path for the purification and sanctification of the soul that leads the soul back home to its heavenly abode.' Moreover, Lewis determines that the 'all-consuming problem of human existence' (stemming from the imperfections of the self, separated from the

¹⁷³ Lewis, *Rumi*, pp.25, 129, 402-404.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.395.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.398-399.

Source) cannot be understood by logic and reason, and for Rumi ‘can only be solved phenomenologically and heuristically.’¹⁷⁶ The following Chapters detail more precisely *how* the *Mathnawi* is Rumi’s heuristic method of *fana* and *baqa*.

A more recent paper that develops Lewis’ identification of a heuristic method in the *Mathnawi*, and is most relevant to this study, is Saeed Zarrabi-Zadeh’s *Jalal al-Din Rumi’s Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation* (2014). Zarrabi-Zadeh concentrates on systemising the practical elements of Rumi’s mysticism, focusing on *fana*, with the specific aim of:

[differentiating] between the emotional, moral, cognitive, and ontological aspects [of annihilation] ...avoiding a reductionist methodology and neglecting some of these aspects at the cost of highlighting others.¹⁷⁷

Zarrabi-Zadeh cautions that Schimmel was only concerned with the moral aspect of *fana*, maintaining that annihilation is ‘basically an ethical concept.’ Zarrabi-Zadeh, on the other hand, insists that ‘Rumi was not a speculative mystic’ and it is his concern with the practicalities of the Way that prevent the *Mathnawi* from becoming a purely theoretical work, the latter being something that Rumi deliberately wanted to avoid. Noticing that in the *Mathnawi*, Rumi offers very little ‘explicit material’ on subjects like the metaphysics of creation, but ‘ample material there regarding the practical way of return to the divine origin’,¹⁷⁸ Zarrabi-Zadeh instigates a new framework for reading the *Mathnawi*. Describing annihilation as the ‘pivotal feature’ of Rumi’s practical mysticism, Zarrabi-Zadeh discovers that:

He even characterises his masterpiece, the *Mathnawi*, as being the shop where the wares of spiritual poverty (*faqr*) and annihilation are sold, and he relates all mystical practices in one way or another to the practice of *fana*.¹⁷⁹

In line with the previous literature, Zarrabi-Zadeh holds that:

it is clear that Rumi’s metaphysical cornerstone and main ontological theory about the relationship of God with the world is the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, according to which God produces everything from nothingness or nonexistence ...¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p.399.

¹⁷⁷ As discussed in the Introduction, Zarrabi-Zadeh argues against ‘The imposition of foreign structures onto Rumi’s works’ and the decontextualizing of Rumi’s work in the West. But, he also observes that Eastern scholarship does not acknowledge the multidimensional nature of his work. Zarrabi-Zadeh, ‘Jalal Al-Din Rumi’s Mysticism of Love-Based Annihilation’, pp.30-32.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 32, 33, 39. Zarrabi-Zadeh also cites Bausani, who advances that Rumi’s doctrine anticipates Lutheran ideas.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p.66.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p.34.

Returning to this idea in the following Chapters, we will also examine why Zarrabi-Zadeh refers to *fana* as ‘love-based’ annihilation and his fondness for the phrase *amor est mors*. It is, however, worth mentioning here that Zarrabi-Zadeh sees Rumi’s sense of *fana* as an unchanging ‘station’, rather than a fleeting ‘state’, since this is more suited to his practical mysticism.¹⁸¹ Zarrabi-Zadeh also more accurately describes Rumi’s theism as the witnessing of Unity in multiplicity, as opposed to multiplicity in Unity.¹⁸² More than this, Zarrabi-Zadeh sees *fana* as the ‘central practice’ of the *Mathnawi*, becoming ever more refined throughout the course of the poem. Zarrabi-Zadeh uncovers a ‘two-stage’ scheme, based on two mystical practices. Firstly, an inferior type of *fana*: ‘the practice of moving from the starting point of ordinary man to the stage of domination of the intellect and becoming united with the highest angelic being.’ Secondly, a superior *fana*: ‘passing through this intermediary stage to attain the stage of domination of the heart wherein one becomes non-existence itself.’¹⁸³ Like Chittick, Zarrabi-Zadeh sees the process consisting of stages directly related to three types of *nafs*: the partial intellect (*nafs-i ammarah*) transforming into the illuminated intellect (*nafs-i lawwamah*), which transforms even further by subsisting in the Divine Heart (*nafs-i mutma‘innah*). Crucially, however, it is his emphasis on ‘love-based annihilation’ that distinguishes ‘[Rumi’s] mystical way from other systems of mystical practice’, says Zarrabi-Zadeh.¹⁸⁴ In fact, Zarrabi-Zadeh argues that Rumi refers to an infinite number of ‘way-stations’ and various sets of ‘major landmarks and stages’ that mark the *Mathnawi*’s journey. Furthermore, despite the criticisms that have been levelled at Rumi for not presenting one mystical system, these landmarks ‘in Rumi’s *oeuvre* can be utilised, in spite of such inconsistencies and insufficient elaboration, in arranging Rumi’s own practical system.’¹⁸⁵ To this end, Zarrabi-Zadeh observes that the imperfect man described at the beginning of the *Mathnawi* transforms into the Perfect Man by the end, through the implementation of Rumi’s ‘practical system’ of annihilation and subsistence. Whilst Zarrabi-Zadeh tentatively connects inferior annihilation to the first half of the *Mathnawi* and superior annihilation to the second half, this thesis connects these findings more precisely to each of the six books, sequentially, and discovers that in each book Rumi details exactly *what* needs to be annihilated, *why* and *how*. This thesis also considers the many other theoretical discussions

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p.41.

¹⁸² Ibid., p.63.

¹⁸³ Ibid., pp.43, 66.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p.68.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., pp.41-43.

underpinning Rumi's doctrine of *fana*, which are nowhere near as 'sketchy' as Zarrabi-Zadeh suggests.¹⁸⁶

A note on Structure

It is necessary to briefly mention the recent studies of Seyed Ghahreman Safavi, Mahvash Alavi and Simon Weightman on the formal structure of the *Mathnawi*.¹⁸⁷ In contrast to the numerous assertions that Rumi has not organised the *Mathnawi* according to any system, and that the structure is entirely random, Safavi *et al.* suggest otherwise.¹⁸⁸ The authors claim to have discovered the synoptic structure of the *Mathnawi* and suggest that the work is based on parallelism, chiasmus and numerical symbolism (also known as ring-composition).¹⁸⁹ The theory is controversial and disputed, and at time of writing the study remains incomplete.¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless, Safavi asserts that, '[i]n the organisation is the design, the significance and the rationale of the entire work and its manifold parts.'¹⁹¹ As the Table below shows, preliminary findings argue that:

1. The chiasmic and sequential structure of each discourse,¹⁹² individual Book, and the six Books together is related to the process of spiritual transformation. They specifically portray the metamorphosis of the *nafs-i ammarah* (NA) into the *nafs-i lawwamah* (NL), which eventually becomes the *nafs-i mutma'innah* (NM).
2. Books One to Three emphasise the transformation of NA into NL, whilst Books Four to Six are more concerned with the transformation of the NL to the NM. Therefore, the end of Book Three and beginning of Book Four also acts as a turning point in the poem.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p.34.

¹⁸⁷ Valuable contributions have been made to Safavi's research by Simon Weightman and Mahvash Alavi, see Bibliography for list of related papers.

¹⁸⁸ Julian Baldick has previously suggested that the *Mathnawi* and 'Attar's *Ilāhi-nāme* share the same generic plan: Book One concerns the *nafs* (self), Book II *Iblis* (the Devil), Book III *'aql* (intelligence), Book Four *'ilm* (knowledge), Book Five *Faqr* (poverty) and Book Six *tawhid* (unity). But, he does not consider there to be any significance to this structure. Safavi, *The Structure of Rūmī's Mathnawī*, pp.19-20.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., pp.45-47.

¹⁹⁰ See Mojaddedi, *Beyond Dogma* and Lewis, *Rumi*. The findings for Books Four and Five are yet to be published.

¹⁹¹ Safavi, *The Structure of Rūmī's Mathnawī*, p.24.

¹⁹² Safavi describes a 'discourse' as the united sections of a Book, apparently hidden by Rumi. Each Book is proposed to be made up of 12 discourses.

3. The Books are also paired sequentially as follows: One and Two (NA), Three and Four (NL-NM), Five and Six (NM).

4. The chiasmic structure also parallels Books One and Six (NA-NM), Two and Five (NA-NM), Three and Four (NL-NM).

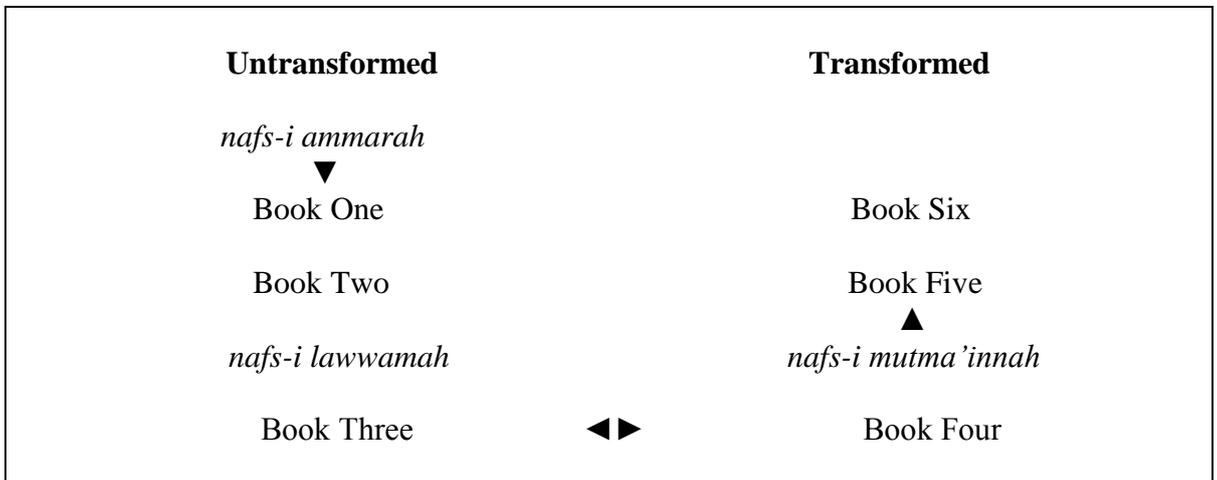


Table 1-1: *Sequential and Chiasmic Structure of the Mathnawi*¹⁹³

Safavi's theory is closely allied to this thesis' concern with the doctrine and practice of *fana* and *baqa* presented in the *Mathnawi*. However, the 'distant reading' that informs this kind of research only allows for tentative connections and generalised discussions to be made by the authors. Therefore, an original attempt has been made to apply the theory to the close readings that follow, to appreciate both the 'part' and the 'whole'.¹⁹⁴ An added benefit to this approach is that, if the theory holds, the findings for each story/section chosen should also prove the authors' suggestions for each Book. Unfortunately, the constraints of this thesis do not allow for extended discussion on the connections to Safavi's theory, but the original methodological approach does make use of this new framework for reading the *Mathnawi*.

This Chapter began by outlining the theoretical background to *fana* and *baqa* in Sufism, contextualising Rumi's understanding of the doctrine by detailing the influence of his predecessors, and underlining the relationship of the process to the fundamental principles of Islam. It was also shown that the central Sufi concepts of Ecstasy, Love, and Unity

¹⁹³ This table has been adapted from Safavi's table for the 12 discourses of Book One and applied to all six books. Safavi, *The Structure of Rūmī's Mathnawī*, p.249.

¹⁹⁴ Based on Rumi's injunction to 'love the whole, not the part.' Ibid., p.24.

correlate with the idea *fana* and *baqa*, and that the latter terms are interchangeable with other technical terms. The theistic implications of *tawhid* were also explained, and Rumi's theism, in relation to Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*, was clarified. This was followed by a Literature Review, which summarised some important Western scholarship on *fana* and *baqa* in Rumi's *Mathnawi*. This assessment focused on how *fana* and *baqa* has been discussed in relation to the theoretical aspects identified above. Discussion of the current models and frameworks for reading annihilation and subsistence in the *Mathnawi* discovered a movement over time from rather reductive scholarship to that which is increasingly nuanced. The complexity and fundamental importance of *fana* and *baqa* as the practical Way of the *Mathnawi* has generally been noted by later authors, but they do not detail specifics. And, despite the general usefulness of Safavi's research on ring-composition in the *Mathnawi*, our understanding of *fana* and *baqa* in the *Mathnawi* remains limited. In this regard, Safavi's theory needs to be applied, tested and combined with close reading. These gaps in knowledge justify the need for further analysis and prompts the following study of *fana* and *baqa* in the *Mathnawi*.

CHAPTER TWO: *Waging the Battle (Books I-III)*

Book I - 'Another Jewish King who persecuted the Christians' ¹⁹⁵

Through this story we observe that, at the outset of the *Mathnawi*, Rumi explains his theory of *fana* and *baqa* to the Sufi novice, guiding him towards annihilation of the carnal self/partial intellect (*nafs-i ammarah*). Rumi begins his practical Way in Book One by detailing specific attributes to be eliminated at this initial stage, and recommending practices to facilitate this first type of *fana*.

One of the first points that Rumi emphasises is that the process of self-annihilation is solely the result of God's grace. The state of *baqa* instigates *fana*, which produces more *baqa* and *fana*. Clearly drawing on Hallaj's notion of reciprocal Love, Rumi highlights these states of subsistence and annihilation as a continuous, mutual exchange between the lover and the Beloved. The beginning of the *Mathnawi* makes it clear that:

The dominant light (of the saints) is secure from defect and
dimness between the two fingers of the Light of God.
God hath scattered that light over (all) spirits, (but only) the
fortunate have held up their skirts (to receive it);
And he (that is fortunate), having gained that strown largesse
of light, has turned his face away from all except God.
Whosoever has lacked (such) a skirt of love is left without share
in that strown largesse of light.
The faces of particulars are set towards the universal:
nightingales play the game of love with the rose. (B.759-764)

Whilst the overall message of the passage is the uniting of the lover (nightingale) with the Beloved (rose),¹⁹⁶ the verses also depict Junayd's conception of *fana* and *baqa* as interdependent states. The 'game of love' here is reminiscent of nature's game of give and take. Extending Rumi's metaphor, we can think of the rose providing the nightingale with nectar, which is then sacrificed by the nightingale through the distribution of pollen, making room for the acquisition of more nectar, and so on. Thus, Unity arises directly from a constant exchange of annihilation and subsistence. Indeed, for Rumi, Unity is:

¹⁹⁵ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II*, pp.42-50.

This story recounts the fable told in the Quran 85. 10, of a Jewish King intent on destroying the people of Jesus, and revolves around a mother and child.

¹⁹⁶ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*.

[n]ot merely a quality of the mystical goal or the mystical goal itself, but a progressively unfolding process that occurs along the entire Sufi path. The mystical way is, hence, nothing more than a chain of mutual *fana*'s and *baqa*'s similar to what is called *Stirbe und werde* ('Die and become!') by Goethe.¹⁹⁷

Rather than being mutually exclusive states, in the *Mathnawi*, *fana* and *baqa* operate as an eternal cycle of Divine action, with no beginning and no end. This leads Schimmel to assert that, 'Rumi's theology is a constant dialogue with this living God who has created the world and is able to create every instant something new from the abysses of non-existence.'¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, Rumi seems to be cautioning the reader, in Book One, that *fana* and *baqa* are not static states. As Zarrabi-Zadeh explains, '[t]o become an angel requires continual progress and is not an instant transformation, not least because there are different degrees of angelhood.'¹⁹⁹ And, at this early stage, Rumi sets out the idea of repeated and different types of annihilation and subsistence occurring as one progresses on the Path. In other words, the 'activistic trend in [Rumi's] spiritual attitude' is already being revealed here.²⁰⁰ Due to the ever-increasing temptations and dangers that lie in wait for the *salik* along the Path, Bausani sees this 'dialogue' (of *fana* and *baqa*) continuing well into infinity.²⁰¹ Furthermore, there is a sense that, in the manner of Junayd, Rumi considers the state of *fana fi-baqa*, being described here, to be the same as the ultimate state of *fana al-fana*. To this end, the beginning and end state/station of the Sufi journey is essentially the same, which is also seen through the correlation of Book One with Book Six (discussed in Chapter Three).

That said, Rumi does complicate the theory of *fana* and *baqa* by relating the start of the process to the concept of predestination. Man is only led to self-annihilation through the descent of an initial grace, which appears to be synonymous with *baqa*. Nicholson argues that this idea of being 'chosen' by God is clearly justified by Hadith, which state that: '[One only receives] the Light in proportion to the capacity (*isti'dād*) with which they are created ... There is no light where the gift of Divine Love is withheld by eternal fore-ordainment ... [Some men are] created for damnation...'²⁰² Rumi's emphasis at the outset of the *Mathnawi* on 'fortunate particulars' born under lucky stars²⁰³ initially sets up the

¹⁹⁷ Zarrabi-Zadeh, 'Jalal Al-Din Rumi's Mysticism of Love-Based Annihilation', pp.54-55.

¹⁹⁸ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, p.xvi.

¹⁹⁹ Zarrabi-Zadeh, 'Jalal al-Din Rumi's Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation', p.55.

²⁰⁰ Bausani, 'Theism and Pantheism in Rumi', p.17.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp.13-17.

²⁰² Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, p.67.

²⁰³ B.755-758

attainment of Unity as something pre-ordained. At this stage, novices may question to what extent they can (of their own free-will) achieve *fana* and *baqa*? This theological conundrum becomes even more pressing when a few lines on, Rumi refers to Union as ‘*The baptism of God*’, and separation as ‘*the curse of God*’ (B.766). It is worth reading this passage in conjunction with a section from Book Five, where Rumi clarifies that man is ‘sought’ by God only after he has extinguished his self. Rumi reverses the previous formula, saying:

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.
 (If) you are living, how should the corpse-washer wash you?²⁰⁴
 (If) you are seeking, how should that which you seek go in
 search of you? (B.4140-4143)

Developing the idea of *fana* and *baqa* as co-dependent states, which extends equally to the notion of free-will and predestination, Rumi explains that God’s ‘seeking’ is not at all random, He chooses those who have already consciously chosen to annihilate. Therefore, an ego-less (or ‘I’-less) state of *fana* is really the mitigating factor in being ‘sought’ out by God, and this initiates the Sufi journey.²⁰⁵ The messages of Books One and Five may seem paradoxical, but the problem is resolved by understanding that man’s ‘seeking’ implies a sense of self (‘I’) existing independently from God, so demands *fana* as the first step. At the same time, the Oneness of God as the only Existence, whilst everything else is essentially non-existent, necessitates *baqa* as the first state. As noted in the previous Chapter, *fana* and *baqa* being opposite sides of the same coin creates the apparent contradiction. The theory of *wujud* (existence) is particularly important to Rumi’s doctrine of *fana* and *baqa*, and Chittick notes that whilst *wujud* has ‘no satisfactory equivalent in English’, it does come from the same root as ‘to find’.²⁰⁶ This allows us to interpret both of Rumi’s passages as meaning: the annihilated man is sought and found by God, who is the seeker and finder of annihilated men.²⁰⁷ Consequently, we return to the symbiotic

²⁰⁴ The corpse-washer is identified with the spiritual guide.

²⁰⁵ There is a correlation here with the evolutionary selections found in nature: ‘bird pollination is considered a costly strategy for plants...Plants need to protect against nectar being taken by non-pollinators...nectar robbers, which may destroy the flower and nectar thieves that obtain nectar without pollinating the flower.’ ‘Ornithophily’. In *Wikipedia* [online]. Updated 20 August 2016 [cited 4 April 2016]. Available from: <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ornithophily>>.

²⁰⁶ Chittick, ‘Rumi and wahdat al-wujud’, pp.74-75.

²⁰⁷ Rumi makes the same point in *Fihi ma Fihi*:

relationship between annihilation and subsistence, which involves the voluntary dissolution of free-will.

Not only does Rumi correlate *wujud* with *fana* and *baqa*, in Book One he also stresses that Love is interrelated with these states. Chittick concludes that throughout the *Mathnawi*, Rumi describes Love as the root of *fana*, noting that: “Love is an attribute of God” (V, 2185), which burns up “the attributes of self, hair by hair” (III, 1922). But, Rumi also contends that Love is only found when ‘the limitations of the individual self are surpassed’.²⁰⁸ Similarly, Zarrabi-Zadeh says that Love is the force behind all creation, motivating the return to perfection it is tied up with Unification, and ‘is crucial in [Rumi’s] practical mysticism’ of *fana*. Conversely, Zarrabi-Zadeh adds:

fana is the prerequisite of love in the process of return...the mystical path initially starts with pure annihilation lacking any influence of love... Yet it should be taken into account that for Rumi even that initial attempt to cast off the bonds of the *nafs* and worldliness is the result of divine love and attraction, and ‘wherever there is a wayfarer, ‘tis the pull of God that draws him on’... [Love] fills the soul...thereby enabling it to attain sequential modes of subsistence in God, after already having been repeatedly emptied from illusory self-existence and having endured successive levels of annihilation.²⁰⁹

Noting that the term *Fana fi’llah* is interchangeable with *Fana fi’qalb* (annihilation in heart) Zarrabi-Zadeh refers more accurately to Rumi’s sense of *fana* as ‘love-based annihilation’, acknowledging that there is no Love without *fana*, and no *fana* without Love.²¹⁰ In this sense, Book One also leads the wayfarer to the *nafs-i mutma’innah*, which subsists in Divine Love itself.

Having detailed his theory of *fana* and *baqa*, Rumi then explains that the process begins with naughting the carnal self, which ‘rejects the divine love and tries to convince man to

“The (mystic) finder (*wājid*) has found all: God is the seeker.” The meaning of the verse is: ‘O man, so long as thou art engaged in seeking, which is a temporal and human attribute, thou art far from thy object; but when thy seeking is lost in God’s seeking, and God’s seeking entirely overpowers thy seeking, then thou seekest with God’s seeking.’ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, p.373.

‘[Rumi] also follows Hujwīrī here, who holds that there is no “seeking” without “finding”, i.e. immediate perception by the “inner light”, and that ultimately the former depends on the latter, just as man’s love of God depends on Divine love and favour.’ Ibid., p.343.

²⁰⁸ Chittick, *The Sufi Doctrine of Rumi*, p.73.

²⁰⁹ Zarrabi-Zadeh, ‘Jalal al-Din Rumi’s Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation’, pp.63-66.

²¹⁰ Compared to the partial intellect, ‘the illuminated intellect, on the contrary, is allied with faith and acknowledges the supremacy of love over itself.’ At the same time, ‘it is love that...becomes the major purgative and annihilative power that purifies the soul from all refined modes of impurity, whether these be intellectual or angelic.’ Ibid., pp.56-57, 66, 68.

refute the existence of heavenly love entirely.²¹¹ The Jewish King who commands the Christians to bow down before an idol or face burning in fire, symbolises the *nafs-i ammarah* (the self that commands to evil). It is in this vein that Rumi insists the '(material) idol is (only) a snake, while the (spiritual) idol is a/ dragon' (B.772). Moreover, it is, 'from the idol of his self that the other idol was born' (B.771). The King's ego is infinitely more dangerous than the false God that he calls the people to worship. Likening the King's deceit to that of Pharaoh, Rumi warns the wayfarer that, although the physical idol can easily be destroyed, destroying the self, 'the mother of (all) idols' (B.772), is near impossible: 'Tis easy to break an idol, very easy; to regard the self as / easy (to subdue) is folly, folly' (B.778). Describing this lowest form of self as 'iron and stone', almost impossible to break, Rumi manages to convey the difficult experiential reality of the Sufi Path in a way that none of the theoretical works of the early Sufi masters do. We will return to the idea of the *nafs* resisting the experience of *fana* and *baqa*, as it is reiterated in Book Two. For the moment, it is worth noting that Rumi believes that annihilation of the *nafs-i ammarah* is still possible. In fact, here we find his first 'instruction' regarding the practical way of beginning the process:

Flee to the God of Moses and to Moses, do not from
Pharaoh's quality (rebellious insolence) spill the water of the
Faith.

Lay your hand on (cleave to) the One (God) and Ahmad
(Mohammed)! O brother, escape from the Bū Jahl²¹² of the body! (B.781-782)

The first stage of *fana* involves turning to God and His Messengers, holding up the 'skirt of love' so to speak. In addition to this, Rumi implies certain attributes that one should seek to destroy, saying: 'O son, if you seek (to know) the form of the self, read the/ story of Hell with its seven gates' (B.779). Nicholson finds Rumi constantly equating the *nafs-i ammarah* with Hell, and comments that in the *Mathnawi*:

The *nafs* is Hell (I 1375) or a part of Hell (I 1382); in essence it is one with the Devil (III 4053). Therefore, Hell, being the nature of the *nafs-i ammarah* (the soul that commands to evil), is really within you... The seven gates or limbos of Hell... typify the vices which lead to perdition... According to *Sārī* on I 1376, these are pride, cupidity, lust, envy, anger, avarice and hatred. Hell is called "a seven-headed dragon" (VI 4657).²¹³

Given that Rumi is clearly pointing the reader towards a consideration of the seven deadly sins, we can deduce that he is first guiding the *salik* to annihilate these specific attributes.

²¹¹ Ibid., pp.56-57.

²¹² 'Father of Ignorance', Bu Jahl was the nickname of an enemy of the Prophet. Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, p.69.

²¹³ Ibid., p.68. Chittick also describes separation from God as 'one of the profound implications of the concept of "Hell"'. See Chittick, *The Sufi doctrine of Rumi*, p.83.

Although Rumi's formulation seems reminiscent of Junayd's instruction to destroy negative attributes first, it is interesting to note that this *fana* is also a strong feature of Book Six. As we shall see, this type of annihilation is especially important not just at the beginning, but also at the end of the journey. Rumi becomes increasingly emphatic about the need for this type of *fana*, identifying the Jewish King with the Devil himself (B.809). As a matter of fact, throughout the *Mathnawi* Rumi equates the *nafs-i ammarah* with Satan, 'who not only caused Adam's fall from Paradise but is still allowed by God to constantly lead man astray from the true path of God...' ²¹⁴ Annihilation of the *nafs-i ammarah* is essential to Rumi's Sufism, as he sees it as the primary reason for Adam's fall, which Zarrabi-Zadeh describes aptly as 'the descent of man into the non-mystical stage of ego.' More specifically, the fall is symbolic of:

the carnal soul being activated within [Adam] due to Satan's temptation, causing 'the vain fancy of egoism' to enter his mind, thus transforming him into the very antagonist of his sovereign...[Satan] is a personification of man's ego and fleshly soul, which hinders him from realising his original purity and innocence, concealing his innermost heart. ²¹⁵

Warning that there are profound eschatological implications for the carnal soul, at the beginning of the *Mathnawi*, not only provides the wayfarer with the impetus needed to set out on the journey of *fana* and *baqa*, but also connects the process to the desired end of Salvation, freedom from Hell and the annihilation of the Devil. As will be shown, Rumi also parallels the same idea in Book Six, structurally connecting the beginning and end of the *Mathnawi* with this specific kind of *fana*, thus, mirroring the Sufi narrative of Adam's restoration to the Perfect Man through self-mortification. It is worth remarking that it was knowledge of what had happened, specific words of repentance and certain practices, ²¹⁶ given to Adam by God, which allowed his *nafs* to dissolve. To this end, carnal purgation results in 'a mystical stage that is referred to on several occasions by Rumi as becoming an angel or the intellect'. This is the positive side of '*aql* (reason) which Rumi endorses, since it actively opposes the *nafs* and 'provides man with true knowledge, shows him the right way, and brings him to the door of the divine King'. ²¹⁷ Through conscious awareness the angelic intellect is 'reborn' and 'reinforced', starts to polish the heart's mirror and acts as, 'a guardian within the soul, which is able to imprison the *nafs* and retrain it from bad deeds

²¹⁴ Zarrabi-Zadeh, 'Jalal al-Din Rumi's Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation', pp.44-45. Like the Devil deriding Adam, the Jewish King also derides the Prophet (B.812-822).

²¹⁵ Ibid., p.39. Whilst Sufi interpretations of the Fall vary, in all the traditions Adam is the recipient of God's forgiveness.

²¹⁶ There is some suggestion that these relate directly to the five pillars of Islam.

²¹⁷ Ibid., pp.48, 52, 53.

and the pursuit of vice'.²¹⁸ Bearing particular relevance to Rumi's thoughts on the early stages of *fana*, the story of Adam is returned to in our discussions of Books Two and Three, further on. At this juncture it is worth observing that, just as we have seen many of the early Sufi masters relate the first degree of *fana* to the elimination of desire, so too does Rumi in this story.

The severity of the *fana* needed at the start of the process is illustrated when the King casts a child into the blazing furnace. As his mother starts to lose her faith, the child cries out that the fire 'hath no fieriness' (B.796), and that what appears is only the semblance of death and he is now experiencing true life. Not only is God's Sovereignty contrasted with the false powers of the King, the treachery of the Satanic King is compared to the child, who through this baptism of fire becomes the Perfect Man. The child says:

"Verily, I am not dead.

Come in, O mother: I am happy here, although in appearance
I am amidst the fire.

The fire is a spell that binds the eye for the sake of screening
(the truth); this is (in reality) a Divine mercy which has

Raised its head from the collar (has been manifested from the
Unseen).

Come in, mother, and see the evidence of God, that thou
mayst behold the delight of God's elect.

Come in, and see water that has the semblance of fire; (come
away) from a world which is (really) fire and (only) has the
semblance of water.

Come in, and see the mysteries of Abraham, who in the fire
found cypress and jessamine." (B.785-790)

In this fire I have seen a world wherein every atom possesses
the (life-giving) breath of Jesus.

"Lo, (it is) [the fire] a world apparently non-existent (but essentially
existent, while that (other) world is apparently existent (but)

has no permanence."²¹⁹ (B.794-5)

The call to *fana* could not be more direct and the child's repetition to his mother to 'come in' and join him acts an almost hypnotic refrain, also enticing the *salik* to enter the fire.²²⁰

In addition, Rumi is detailing precisely how the fire acts as a purging source. Finding

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ 'The importance of correlation and opposites for Islamic thought in general is obvious to anyone who has read the Koran with care, and it reappears in all sorts of connections throughout Islamic intellectual history.' Chittick, 'Rumi and wahdat al-wujud', p.100.

²²⁰ Nicholson discovers the same story in other Persian manuscripts, where the child is depicted as an even more willing martyr, demanding that he be burned, in order to save himself (and his mother) from disbelief. See Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, p.69. This adds another dimension to Rumi's reference to Abraham, recalling both his willingness to sacrifice his own son, and the self-sacrifice that his son was willing to make. Abraham is an immensely significant figure in Islam.

himself still alive, the child gains knowledge of impermanence, realising that true existence (*wujud*) lies in non-existence, so removing his desire for material life. Indicating *fana fi-Pir* and *fana fi-Rasul*, Rumi goes on to describe a host of Prophets and righteous men, who from the same knowledge became free of ‘the fire of lust’ (B.862). Thus, ‘to those who know God (*‘arifān*) the wind of Death/ is soft and pleasant as the breeze (B.860). Imparting this knowledge through the *Mathnawi*, Rumi reminds the apprehensive Sufi novice that *fana* is really God’s Mercy in the guise of Wrath. Again, we see this enlightened intellect causing the carnal self to dissolve. Nicholson summarises the story in similar terms:

The fire of martyrdom symbolises the fiery tribulation of dying to self (*fanā*), which is the way to everlasting life (*baqā*)... “When the child, Reason (*‘aql*), parts from its mother, Nature (*tabi‘ah*), and enters the fire of asceticism, it finds therein the spiritual delights enjoyed by God’s elect and attains to perfect faith and calls its mother and every follower of sensuality to throw themselves into the same fire”...²²¹

More than just a ‘state of awareness’ as posited by Kharraz, Rumi’s *fana* is an active process. In addition to the seven deadly sins, Rumi guides the wayfarer towards the annihilation of the specific negative attributes that characterise the King. Cunning, deception, lust for power, injustice, denial and ‘false imagination’, which results in an individual sense of agency, are all traits of the *nafs-i ammarah*, in need of *fana*.

In this story, we also find Rumi recommending particular practices to aid the destruction of the carnal self. Describing the abasement of the King when he derides the Prophet, Rumi urges (in all Books) controlling one’s tongue from reviling holy men, and veiling the faults of others. Compassion, which is lacking in the King, is considered a powerful weapon, especially towards the weak and vulnerable as it softens the hardened self. Not only does mercy beget mercy, this manifests itself when man weeps in prayer, which Rumi also offers as a marker for the *salik* to check his progress.²²² The child also exhibits this merciful nature by calling his mother into the fire, despite his personal salvation and state of ecstasy, saying: ‘Tis (only) out of pity that I am drawing thy feet (hither), for / indeed such is my rapture that I have no care for thee’ (B.799). Noting that the child’s annihilated state of ecstasy is fully compatible with an altruistic endeavour, Rumi refutes the attacks of the Sober School of Sufism that consider ecstasy to be only a partial annihilation. As detailed in Chapter One, Junayd especially disliked the idea of an egocentric state,

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² See B.812-822.

detached from the rest of humanity. However, Rumi makes it clear that, ‘The saint detached from natural desires and affections and intoxicated with God is moved by Divine mercy to lead other souls to salvation.’²²³ Furthermore, the child becomes a *Sheikh*, guiding others to salvation:

After that, the folk, men and women (alike), cast themselves
unwittingly into the fire –
Without custodian, without being dragged, for love of the
Friend, because from Him is the sweetening of every bitterness – (B.804-805)

Just as Mount Sinai ‘became a perfect Sufi’ when it saw ‘the radiance of Moses’ (B.867), so the gathered crowd see the child and are compelled to annihilate themselves. Again, we see Rumi introducing the idea of *fana fi-Sheikh* here, which he explores further in Book Two.

This story comes full circle as Rumi reminds us that no *fana* is possible without God’s power and discrimination. Returning to the theory laid out at the beginning of the story, we see the King and his company being consumed by the fire, since ‘the way of particulars is/towards the universal (B.875). The absence of love and predominance of the *nafs-i ammarah* causes them to perish, rather than annihilate and survive like the child and his followers. Everything returns to its predisposed origin, hellishness to Hell and heavenliness to Heaven: ‘Before God, fire is always standing (ready to do His behest), / writhing continually day and night, like a lover’ (B.839). The fire of the carnal self will re-join the fire, but if it no longer exists it cannot be touched by it. We explore the chiasmic relationship of Books One and Six in the following Chapter, but now turn our attention to the sequential relationship of Book One with Book Two, where Rumi develops his theory of *fana* and *baqa* even further and more of his heuristic method is evidenced.

Book II - ‘The man who planted a thornbush in the road and delayed to uproot it’²²⁴

Continuing Rumi’s call to annihilate the carnal self / partial intellect, this story from Book Two details more of the theory and practices of *fana* required by the *salik*. The need for a guide to remove the negative attributes of the *nafs-i ammarah* (detailed in Book One) is

²²³ Chittick, ‘Rumi and wahdat al-wujud’, p.70.

²²⁴ In this parable, Rumi relates the tale of an evil man instructed to remove a thornbush from the road, which he puts off doing. Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II*, pp.284-292.

emphasised. As the wayfarer starts to progress, and with a renewed sense of urgency, Rumi cements the particulars of *fana fi-Sheikh* in Book Two.

Just like the Jewish King, the thornbush symbolises an ‘evil nature’ and ‘bad habits’, which ‘torment’ the self and others (B.1240-1243). Rumi is adamant that there is no time to spare in digging up the *nafs-i ammarah*, as it grows stronger and ‘younger’ with each passing moment, whilst man grows weaker and older (B.1236-1239). So, the instruction is to:

Either take up axe and strike like a man – like ‘Alī, destroy
this gale of Khaybar-²²⁵
Or unite these thorns with the rosebush: unite the light of
the friend (of God) with the (sensual) fire,
In order that his light may extinguish your fire, (and that)
union with him may make your thorns roses.
You are like Hell, he is a true believer: the extinction of the
fire (of Hell) by means of a true believer is possible
Mustafā (Mohammed) said concerning the speech of Hell, that
on account of fear, it begins humbly to entreat the true believer,
And says to him, “Pass quickly away from me, O king: hark,
for thy light has taken away the burning of my fire.”
Therefore the true believer’s light is the death of fire,
because without an opposite the removal of the (other) opposite
is impossible. (B.1244-1250)

Since few men possess the axe-wielding strength of Ali, it is essential that the novice attach the thorns of his carnal self to the rosebush of a *Sheikh*. Though, the previous story saw the fire of God destroying the *nafs*, here the fire of selfhood is extinguished by the light of the spiritual guide (*nafs-i mutma’innah*).²²⁶ Nicholson explains exactly how this process works:

The “rosebush” signifies the pure nature of the spiritual guide (*murshid*), which assimilates to itself and endows with its own goodness the evil dispositions that were “grafted” onto it. ...The *mu’min* in this passage represents the Perfect Man. Faith (*īmān*) “is really the absorption of all human attributes in the search for God”.²²⁷

Linking back to the Jewish King’s ridiculing of the Prophet and holy men, Rumi addresses those who condemn the idea of intercession by providing the theoretical background to the concept of *fana fi-Sheikh*. The power of the *murshid*’s light literally absorbs the *murid*’s *nafs* causing an alchemical transformation to occur, where bad deeds (thorns) bloom into

²²⁵ Ali was the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, and became the fourth Caliph of Islam known for his esotericism. Shia Muslims believe that, instead of Abu Bakr, he should have been the first Caliph.

²²⁶ For more on the importance of Saints, see Bausani, ‘Theism and Pantheism in Rumi’, p.16.

²²⁷ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, p.284.

good deeds (roses). Thus, man is perfected and led to salvation by the Prophets and Saints. Not only does Rumi justify the process by referencing the Prophet's Hadith on the speech of Hell, he goes on to describe light opposing fire on the Day of Judgement, acting as the water of God's mercy (B.1251-1253). Once again, we return to the idea of opposites informing the process of *fana* and *baqa*. In fact, this story clarifies the way the child, in the previous story, survives in the fire and guides others towards annihilation. Not only does the child's light douse the burning flames of the fire, as a Sheikh he also absorbs the fiery selves of his followers as they merge with him. The theistic implications of this assimilation are explored further below, whilst the correlation of this idea in Book Two with Book Five is examined in Chapter Three.

The pragmatism of the *Mathnawi* persists, as Rumi turns his attention to the resistance of the *nafs* to *fana fi-Sheikh*:

Hence your fleshly soul is fleeing from him, because you are of fire, (while) he (is) the water of the stream.

Fire becomes fleeing from water for the reason that its fire (flame and heat) is ruined by water.

Your sense and thought are wholly of the fire; the sense of the Shaikh (spiritual guide) and his thought are beautiful Light .

When the water of his light trickles on the fire, *chak* (a gnashing sound) rises from the fire, and it leaps up (in fury).

When it makes (the sound) *chak*, say you to it, "Death and woe, (to thee)," in order that this hell, (which is) your fleshly soul, may become cold (quenched),

So that it may not burn your rose-garden, so that it may not burn your justice and well-doing.

After that, anything that you sow will yield fruit (or flowers); it will yield anemones and wild roses and thyme. (B.1256-1260)

The carnal self flees the Sheikh as it is fully aware that this means death, which Rumi also illustrates as 'The sea of the body...dashing against the sea of the heart' (B.1371), i.e. the *nafs-i ammarah* against the *nafs-i mutma'innah*. Setting forth the difficulties of the process, Rumi provides specific, practical instruction on what to say at such times. In fact, this story correlates with the well-known story of the chickpea boiling in a pot, in Book Three.²²⁸ There we find the chickpea (*nafs*) attempting to jump out of the pot as it is being 'cooked' away and continuously beaten by the cook's (*Sheikh's*) ladle. Rumi does not shy away from informing the novice of the pain to be endured if one wishes to annihilate the self. Just as the cook imparts to the chickpea knowledge of this Wrath as God's Mercy in

²²⁸ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III & IV*, pp.232-235.

disguise, so Rumi explains here that the evil fire of self is the real cause of suffering. Only *fana* through the water of the Sheikh can preserve the attributes of justice and good-deeds, which yield the fruit of eternal life (B.1378). As in Book One, it is the knowledge of self-sacrifice as returning to one's origin which facilitates change. Rumi instructs us to beat ourselves back down, like the chickpea that understands this Truth and then himself asks to be beaten into submission, in order to 'pass beyond animality' (B.4208). In relation to the resistance of the *nafs*, Chittick deduces that:

In Rumi's works this whole discussion only serves to illustrate the moral he wishes to draw. Every time man "dies" in relation to one state, he is "reborn" into a higher state. Hence he should never fear the trials and tribulations of the spiritual path, which represents so many deaths in relation to the false life of the world and the ego. For the death of one thing is always the rebirth of something better and higher.²²⁹

Significantly, Rumi notes that, alongside carnal lusts and pleasures, it is miserliness and anger that are destroyed by *fana fi-Sheikh* (B.1271-1272, 1307-1308). For Rumi, these attributes are embodied by those who reject the Saints, not understanding that they act as God's instruments. The following Chapter discusses this being the very attitude which resulted in Satan breaking the command of God by refusing to bow down before Adam. Had he done otherwise, Satan would have been raised in his rank, not diminished. As Rumi explains:

This munificence is a branch of the cypress of Paradise: woe to him that lets such a branch go from his hand!

This abandonment of sensuality is *the firmest handle*: this branch draws the spirit up to Heaven.

(So act) that the branch of munificence, O righteous man, drawing you aloft may bear you to its origin.

You are Joseph (full) of beauty, and this world as the well, and this rope (to draw you forth) is patience with (submission to) the command of God. (B.1273-1276)²³⁰

Alluding to Hadith, Rumi's conception of *fana fi-Sheikh* also draws on the following verses in the Quran: "Whoso denieth Tāghūt²³¹ and believeth in Allah, he surely hath grasped the firmest handle" and "Whoso giveth himself up to Allah in doing good, he surely hath grasped the firmest handle".²³² The *Sheikh* is the branch, the handle and the rope dangling the knowledge of Truth (B.1277-1284), which the wayfarer must grasp. Just as every horse needs a rider, so the carnal self needs a guide to steer it towards God, as

²²⁹ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, p.76.

²³⁰ Refers to 'the *Hadīth* that generosity (*sakha*) is a tree of Paradise with branches drooping to the earth, and that anyone who grasps a branch thereof is drawn to Paradise.' Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, pp.284-285.

²³¹ 'Sufis identify *Taghut* (idols or the Devil) with the *nafs*.' Ibid.

²³² Quran 2. 257 and 31. 21.

only he knows the ‘marks of the road’. The Light of God ornaments the [false] light of sense, illuminating the Way, which Rumi interprets as the inner meaning of the Quranic verse so often referenced by Sufis, ‘*light upon light*.’²³³ Still, returning to the fundamentals of *tawhid*, Rumi clarifies that the rider is God himself. Rumi maintains God’s omnipotence, likening the *Sheikh* to a flying arrow, which is visible, whilst the Bow cannot be seen (B.1285-1306). We will consider the particular Hadith that Rumi refers to here, alongside the notion of intercession and God as the only Agent, in our discussion of Book Five, where the ideas are paralleled.

Because of the *salik*’s vulnerability at this stage of the process it is also necessary for him to follow the *Sheikh*’s example if he wishes to stay on course. Rumi alludes to God’s names, where He is both the Creator and the Destroyer.²³⁴ Going back to the idea of being ‘chosen’, detailed earlier, God may also place you in a state of Union only to take you out of it. We are, in fact, nothing more than ‘(hunted) prey.../the ball (for the blows) of the polo-bat’ (B.1310). God is not just the Batsman, He is the Tailor, who tears and sews, and the Fire-kindler, who blows and burns (B.1311). Though, ‘At one hour He makes the true saint an unbeliever; at another/ hour He makes the (impious) deist an (orthodox) ascetic (B.1312), the novice can be protected from this play by annihilating himself fully and subsisting in the Light of God.

For the *mukhlis* (sincere worshipper) is in danger of the snare
 Until he becomes entirely purged of self,
 Because he is (still) on the Way, and the brigands are numberless:
 (only) he escapes who is under God’s safeguard.
 (If) he has not become (selfless, like) a pure mirror, he is (no
 more than) *mukhlis*: (if) he has not caught a bird, he is (still) hunting;
 (But) when the *mukhlis* has become *mukhlas*, he is delivered:
 he has reached the place of safety and won victory.
 No mirror (ever) became iron again; no bread (ever) became
 the wheat in the stack.
 No full-grown grape (ever) became a young grape; no mature
 fruit (ever) became premature fruit.
 Become mature and be far from (the possibility of) change
 for the worse: go, become the Light, like Burhán-i Muhaqqiq.²³⁵
 When you have escaped from self, you have become wholly
 the proof (of God): when the slave (in you) has become naught,
 you have become the King. (B.1313-1320)

²³³ For a fuller discussion on this famous verse see Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.286.

²³⁵ Rumi’s first spiritual guide, see Introduction.

Like the previous story, these verses show that God is not indiscriminate. Nicholson comments that the *mukhlis* is a devotee, but still with a sense of agency, whilst the *mukhlas* ‘attributes all his actions to God.’²³⁶ To use Zarrabi-Zadeh’s terms the former symbolises inferior annihilation, while the latter has achieved superior annihilation. The wayfarer actually risks altering his own state when his *nafs* still exists. The only protection comes from the *fana* exhibited by the Sheikh, which is an unalterable state of perfection, from which there is no going back.²³⁷ Book Two becomes an ode to the *Sheikh* as Rumi refers to his first spiritual guide, Burhan-i Muhaqqiq, then describes the seal-ring mark of the Goldsmith (a possible reference to Salahuddin Zarkub), which contains the Divine Names and Attributes.²³⁸ Furthermore, as each Book of the *Mathnawi* is addressed to Husam Chelebi, one cannot think of the poem without him, nor can one think of the Light without being reminded of Shams.

Nicholson paraphrases B.1320 as: “you have become a Perfect Man, by whom the Truth is verified and made evident to every one capable of receiving it...when the creaturely attributes are ‘naughted’ in *fana*.”²³⁹ Drawing on Hallaj’s depiction of *fana* as the ‘proof of Love’, Rumi also manages to connect the process back to the fundamental purpose of man as a vicegerent of God on earth, as detailed in the Quran. As discussed, when looking at Book One, Adam’s *nafs* was responsible for his fall, but his earthly role as *khalifa* (God’s representative) is linked to his original relationship with God and subsequent restoration. Adam was made in God’s image and, ‘Living in the divine garden, the mirror-like Adam was non-existent (*adam*), existing purely and selflessly in a transparent manner in God,’ moreover, ‘he contained and encompassed all things in their interior realities in God, and knew their ontological names.’²⁴⁰ Zarrabi-Zadeh adduces that, for Rumi, ‘the hidden centre of the human being is [thus] God’s viceroy and the ‘true transcription art of the archetype of the Divine’, a mirror containing God’s image and an ‘astrolabe’ that is never empty of divine reflection and beauty.’²⁴¹ The polishing of this mirror, through *fana*, to uncover the hidden ‘astrolabe’ is fundamentally important as it restores man to his original Adamic perfection. Then, ‘the innermost part of the soul, its ‘pure untarnished

²³⁶ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II*, p.289.

²³⁷ ‘None but the mystic who has died to self is safe from temptation...When the Sufi has attained to perfection, he can never again become subject to the illusion of egoism...’ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, p.286.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.287.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.287.

²⁴⁰ Zarrabi-Zadeh, ‘Jalal al-Din Rumi’s Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation’, pp.37-38.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.38.

essence'...dominates and rules the whole soul while man's mature intellect, which is now united with the Universal Intellect, is totally subordinate to it.²⁴² As the 'proof of God', the angels are compelled to bow down before Adam (B.1353-1354), just as Mount Sinai transforms at the sight of Moses (B.1332). Such is the power of *fana* and *baqa*, which is no less than a Resurrection. Rumi reflects that:

Inasmuch as the (temporal) Resurrection shall dig up the mountains, how shall it cast the shadow (of protection) over us?
How is this (spiritual) Resurrection inferior to that (temporal) Resurrection? That (temporal) Resurrection is the wound, and this (spiritual) Resurrection is the plaster.

Every one that has seen (experienced) this plaster is safe from the wound: every evil one that has seen this good is a well-doer. (B.1338-40)

As a spiritual Resurrection, the process of annihilation and subsistence has eschatological implications, in so far as it leads to righteousness and guarantees salvation.²⁴³ The return to the Origin and the Resurrection are emphasised in all six Books, and are explored further in our discussions on Books Three and Six.

Continuing to present the theory of *fana fi-Sheikh*, Nicholson notes that, 'The next verses illustrate the transmutation (*fana*) of the carnal self in communion with the pure spirit of the Perfect Man.'²⁴⁴ Using Biblical analogy, Rumi clarifies the theistic implications of the *salik*'s merging with the Guide:

Oh, happy is the ugly one to whom the beauteous one has become a companion; alas for one of rosy countenance with whom autumn has consorted!

When lifeless bread is companioned with life, the bread becomes living and is turned into the substance of that (life). (B.1341-1342)

It may be a stretch to suggest that Rumi is consciously attempting to explain the concept of transubstantiation and the mechanisms of the Eucharist, but the metaphor provides an apt description of how *fana fi-Sheikh* results in Unity with God (and is interchangeable with *fana fi'llah*). As detailed in Chapter One, this Unity does not imply the complete assimilation of one into the other. To clear up any confusion, Rumi returns to the symbolism, introduced in Book One, of Unity as a baptism of fire:

The baptism of Allah is the dyeing-vat of *Hú* (the Absolute God): therein (all) piebald things become of one colour.

When he (the mystic) falls into the vat, and you say to him, "Arise," he says in rapture, "I am the vat: do not blame (me)."

²⁴² Ibid., p.59.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, p. 288.

That “I am the vat” is the (same as) saying “I am God”:
he has the colour of the fire, albeit he is iron.

The colour of the iron is naughted in the colour of the fire:
it (the iron) boasts of its fieriness, though (actually) it is like
one who keeps silence.

When it has become like gold of the mine in redness, then
without tongue its boast is “I am the fire.”

It has become glorified by the colour and nature of the fire:
it says, “I am the fire, I am the fire.

I am the fire; if thou have doubt and suspicion, make trial,
put thy hand upon me.

I am the fire; if it seems dubious to thee, lay thy face upon
my face for one moment.” (B.1345-1352)

Once again, reading the previous story in conjunction with this one allows us to understand that the annihilation of the ‘iron’ *nafs* in the fire means taking on ‘the colour of fire’ (the attributes of the *Sheikh*/God). Rumi makes it clear that the mystic still survives, but his colour is essentially ‘naughted’ by the overpowering colour of God, just as Light absorbs the fire. It is worth reflecting on Nicholson’s comment that ‘In the essential Unity of the Divine nature all “colours” are one’²⁴⁵ as an example of early Orientalist readings that suggest a kind of Pantheism in Rumi’s works. Particularly obvious here is Nicholson’s reliance on (a mistaken understanding of) Ibn ‘Arabi’s theory of *wahdat al-wujud*, in order to explain Rumi’s theism.²⁴⁶ With this in mind, it is necessary to reiterate that Rumi is, ‘an uncompromising theist [who] rejects the pantheistic idea of emanation’.²⁴⁷ *Fana* and *baqa* does not imply the *murid*’s complete identification with the *murshid*, much less with the Divine. Zarrabi-Zadeh advances that:

These examples show that he does not believe in an absolute, undifferentiated identity of man and the divine essence in the climax of mystical perfection, but rather in restoring the mode of unity in multiplicity wherein, the work and the Worker exist together.²⁴⁸

This co-existence maintains the essential principle of *tawhid*, but also allows for the acquisition of God’s qualities to result in the fundamental transformation of man. Although Schimmel endeavoured to restore Rumi’s image as a monotheist by saying, ‘*fana* is not a substantial union’, Zarrabi-Zadeh presents a more accurate picture of Rumi’s theism. He contends that, ‘In Rumi’s Sufism...such perfection consists of both an ontological aspect as well as substantial unification, yet God and man remain separate and differentiable even at the height of their union.’²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Discussed at length in Chapter One.

²⁴⁷ Iqbal, *The Life and Work of Jalal-ud-din Rumi*, p.251.

²⁴⁸ Zarrabi-Zadeh, ‘Jalal al-Din Rumi’s Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation’, p.63.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

In any case, Schimmel advises that Rumi's use of alchemy, as an image for spiritual transformation (*kimiya*), concerns the practical Way of *fana* and *baqa* more than theological arguments around Union.:

The Divine call *irji 'ī* 'Return!' (Sura 89/28) is the great alchemy which transforms the low material beings into spiritual gold; only after such a transformation has taken place, the copper will become aware of its previous miserable state...For only when the black stone is transformed by chemical processes and loses its identity, when it so to speak experiences *fana*, it turns into precious metal and can be used as money. Only after annihilation of its base qualities it becomes useful in the world.²⁵⁰

Yet again, Rumi's verses indicate a return to the world, having become 'glorified' like 'gold', through *fana fi-Sheikh*. The iron expresses concern for the doubts and suspicions of the non-believers, despite the state of ecstasy which makes it proclaim, like Hallaj: "I am the vat" / "I am the fire" ("I am God").²⁵¹ Rumi's discussions on *shathiyat* (ecstatic utterances), Unity and the survival of personality continue in the following Book. It is, however, significant that Rumi ends this story with reference to his own state of 'madness', brought about by the marks of all the different seal-rings (*Sheikhs*) that have branded him (B.1382-1385). The wayfarer is encouraged to purify his body through a Guide, who offers 'reinforcement', despite any 'shame' he may feel before him. Only the heart of a water-tank connected to the Sea can clean the defiled self (B.1361-1372), and the 'blood-price' paid for this sacrifice is everlasting life (B.1358).²⁵²

Having observed Rumi detailing the theory and practices associated with *fana fi-Sheikh*, we see how Book Two builds sequentially from Book One. The chiasmic relationship of Book Two to Book Five is noted in the following Chapter, but now we now assess the nature of the doctrine of *fana* and *baqa* in Book Three.

²⁵⁰ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, p.73.

²⁵¹ This is repeated seven times, which may relate to the significance of the number seven in Sufi numerology.

²⁵² Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, p.288.

Book III - 'The question of the *fana* and *baqa* of the dervish'

The only section of the *Mathnawi* to use the terms *fana* and *baqa* in its title appears in the latter part of Book Three.²⁵³ Exploring the doctrine even further, Rumi cements annihilation and subsistence as the fundamental principle of Sufism, and the *Mathnawi*. Book Three appears to be addressing the self that has transformed from the partial intellect and carnality to the illuminated intellect (*nafs-i lawwamah*); explaining the need to move beyond this state, in order to achieve the fully transformed *nafs-i mutma'innah* of the dervish. Rather than specific attributes, at this juncture Rumi emphasises the annihilation of a sense of agency in one's actions. In the following Chapter, we will see the chiasmic relationship with Book Four. But, Book Three (as with each of the other Books) can also be said to be individually complete as it covers all the stages of man's evolution,²⁵⁴ and distils the entire theory and practise of *fana* and *baqa*.

Around the halfway point of both the *Mathnawi* and the mystic's journey, Rumi establishes the theoretical significance of self-annihilation and subsistence in God:

The speaker said, "There is no dervish in the world; and if there be a dervish, that dervish is (really) non-existent."

He exists in respect of the survival of his essence, (but) his attributes have become non-existent in the attributes of Him (God). (B.3669-3670)

Nicholson translates 'dervish' here as: 'the perfect *faqir*, who is free from all connexion with the phenomenal world ...has become "deified" ... [and] non-existent as an individual agent'.²⁵⁵ The Saint has transcended even the illuminated intellect, which Zarrabi-Zadeh describes as moving to a state beyond angelhood. But given that Rumi calls the way of becoming non-existent, 'the creed and religion of all lovers of God',²⁵⁶ the lines also infer that all stages and types of *fana* relate to dervish-hood, including the carnal annihilation of

²⁵³ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III & IV*, p.206. Book Three develops the theme of spiritual poverty even further, with Rumi cautioning the *salik* against the guidance of false Saints. Many contrasts are made between Moses and Pharaoh, alongside other Prophet's and their adversaries. Emphasis is also given to the importance of the Quran and prayer, at this stage of the journey.

²⁵⁴ See analysis of Book Six, in Chapter Three. The stages of man develop as follows: inorganic, vegetable, animal, man, angel and non-existence. It has been posited that Rumi's description pre-empts Darwinian theory. Rumi also offers alternative stages in other Books, and at times also suggests an infinite number of gradations of soul. See Zarrabi-Zadeh, 'Jalal al-Din Rumi's Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation', pp.41-42.

²⁵⁵ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III-VI Commentary*, p.93.

²⁵⁶ Zarrabi-Zadeh, 'Jalal al-Din Rumi's Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation', p.66.

the wayfarer.²⁵⁷ Both interpretations are valid and do not affect the core message being conveyed, which is that the entire tradition of Sufism boils down to the principle of *fana* and *baqa*. Our analysis of Book Six shows Rumi reiterating this message even more emphatically at the end of the *Mathnawi*. Yet, despite Rumi's unequivocal position, as observed in Chapter One, this connection is not always made explicit.

In a recent paper, Lewisohn does refer to this passage in Book Three as a definition of *fana*, which he relates directly to Qushayri's doctrine of ecstasy (*wajd*): "*wujūd* [Oneness of Being] occurs when one transcends *wajd*, for the mystic understands the Rapture-of-God's-Being (*wujūd al-haqq*) only after his mortal being passes away (*basharīyya*)."²⁵⁸ Once again, Rumi presents numerous analogies, to clarify the implications of this non-existent/existent Unity, likening it to: a candle-flame that exists, but becomes 'non-existent' in the presence of the Sun (B.3671-3673), vinegar that becomes virtually non-existent when thrown into 'maunds of sugar' (B.3674-3675), and a deer whose existence is veiled in the presence of a lion (B.3676). Although personality (or essence) survives, and *fana* clearly does not imply material non-existence, Rumi emphasises that one is so overpowered in the presence of God, that (in this sense) he is 'naughted' and no longer exists. Chittick reflects that:

union with God or deliverance as expounded in oriental doctrines is complete extinction such that the individual is "a drop of water in the sea" and thus loses all that he ever was. In some respects, this is true, as is witnessed by many of Rumi's formulations. But if the individual loses that which he was, he only loses what in itself is privation and nothingness...man does not "achieve" anything by realising union with God; rather he becomes what he had always been in his inmost nature.²⁵⁹

Referring to the Saint's perfect state of *fana* and *baqa*,²⁶⁰ like Junayd, Rumi connects this to the pre-existent state of man, where man's individuality and God's *tawhid* are both

²⁵⁷ Wali Muhammed's Commentary, *Sharh-i Mathnawi* (Lucknow, 1894) also relates B.3670 to two types of *fana*:

- (1) When the essence of the creature (*dhāt-i 'abd*) passes away (*fāni shavad*) in the Essence of God (*Dhāt-i Haqq*) and ceases to exist, just as a drop of water loses its individuality (*ta'ayyun*) in the ocean. This *fana* occurs at the manifestation of the Divine essence (*tajalli-yi Dhāt*).
- (2) When the attributes of the creature (*sifāt-i 'abd*) pass away in the attributes of God (*Sifāt-i Haqq*): then his human attributes are replaced (*mubaddal*) by Divine Attributes, and God becomes his ear and eye.

Cited in Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III-VI Commentary*, pp.92-93.

²⁵⁸ Lewisohn, 'Principles of the Philosophy of Ecstasy', p.41. The relationship between *wajd/wujud* and *fana* was also discussed in the Introduction.

²⁵⁹ Chittick, *The Sufi Doctrine of Rumi*, pp.78-79.

²⁶⁰ Wali Muhammed also relates B.3671-3676 specifically to the highest state of *fana*:

preserved. In the original realm, men are ‘distinguishable from each other as well as from God, and therefore, enjoy the state of multiplicity in unity...’²⁶¹ This is the essence of Rumi’s saying, ‘Come then into the workshop, that is to say into non-existence, that you may see the Work and the Worker together;’ although Bausani makes the important observation that, for Rumi, ‘Non-existence is the house and workshop of God, not, it must be remarked, God himself.’²⁶²

In addition to this Origin being a realm of perfect harmony, Schimmel argues that ‘The central point in Rumi’s view about creation is that of a *creatio ex nihilo* – God has produced everything from ‘*adam*, ‘nothingness’ or ‘non-existence.’ As such, the process of *fana* and *baqa* also replicates the way that God creates:

‘*adam* is the treasure-house and mine from which God, as *mubdi*’, ‘originator’ brings forth everything, producing the branch without the root, which is why everyone seeks not-being as a prerequisite for being... The Koran has attested that God ‘brings forth life from death,’ (Sura 6/95 etc.), and that means in scholarly language, that He produces being from not-being.’²⁶³

Created from non-existence, man can only be ‘recreated’ (transformed) through the non-existence of mystical annihilation. The importance Rumi places on ‘*adam* cannot be understated as he equates it with the Divine Essence and Heaven itself, throughout the *Mathnawi*. Additionally, through this section, Rumi reasserts Junayd’s instruction to ‘[b]ecome nothing, nothing from selfishness, for there is no / sin worse than your existence.’²⁶⁴ Schimmel concludes that, for Rumi:

‘*adam* is not only the first and initial station which is the prerequisite for being – it is likewise the final position and end of everything. In many cases one would like to substitute for ‘*adam* the term *fana*, ‘annihilation’, but in other cases ‘*adam* seems to lead even deeper... Rumi has at times expressed the feeling that ‘*adam* is the abyss of Divine life, which is beyond everything conceivable, even beyond the ‘revealed God.’ We may call it *deus absconditus*, or the Positive Non-Being, or the sphere which is beyond everything and in which contrasts fall once more together.’²⁶⁵

(3) When the essence of the creature disappears (*makhfi shavad*) in the Light of the Divine Essence, like the disappearance of the stars in the light of the sun, his creatureliness (*khalqiyyah*) does not cease to exist, but he is concealed under the aspect of Creativeness (*Haqqiyah*): the Lord (*Rabb*) is manifest and the slave (*‘abd*) invisible.

Cited in Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III-VI Commentary*, pp.92-93.

²⁶¹ Chittick, *The Sufi Doctrine of Rumi*, p.36.

²⁶² ‘This is something quite different from what pantheism has always asserted.’ Bausani, ‘Theism and Pantheism in Rumi’, pp.11-13.

²⁶³ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, pp.239-241.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.242.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Having touched on the relationship of *fana* and *baqa* to the origin of ‘*adam*, it is worth considering the correlation between the doctrine and the Primordial Covenant (*mithāq*) that was also made in this realm. The Quran states that, after creating all souls, God asked ‘Am I not your Lord?’ and all replied ‘Yes, we witness it.’²⁶⁶As such:

This primordial Divine address leads man into conscious and responsible life, but it leads him also, if understood correctly, into *fana*. For the goal of the mystic is, as Joneyd has expressed it, to become as non-existent as he was at the day of the covenant – his end (in ‘*adam*) is the return to his beginning (in ‘*adam*).²⁶⁷

For Rumi especially, the Covenant is much more than an acknowledgement and vow to submit to God, rather it is a promise to return to non-existence. In fact, much like the *Shahadah*, discussed further in our analysis of in Book Four, Rumi sees the Covenant expressing both negation and affirmation in one phrase.²⁶⁸ Thus, Zarrabi-Zadeh also finds that, whilst the *Mathnawi* speaks of ‘*adam* as a ‘higher ontological nonexistence...which is beyond being ... ‘*adam* is also employed by Rumi in the moral sense, indicating the annihilation of man’s ego and sensuality.²⁶⁹ In fact, this sense of return dominates the *Mathnawi*, starting with the opening Proem (*Nay-nāma* / ‘Reed’s Song’), where the reed (soul) severed from the reed bed (God) laments of its longing to be reunited with its origin. But more than this, ‘[b]y means of successive annihilations, there finally remains nothing of man’s self existence, and the wayfarer once more becomes an empty reed that is ready to be filled with the divine breath.’²⁷⁰

Just as the Primordial Covenant was a silent exchange between God and all pre-formed souls, so Rumi extols:

Here, in the way of complete silence,
man can become non-existent (*ma’dum*), lost
to himself, and in his silence, completely transformed
into praise and laud.²⁷¹

Given that this ‘praise and laud’ often manifests as *shath*, like the mystic’s crying ‘I am the fire’ in the preceding story, which are rife for misunderstanding, Rumi explains his own similes here:

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p.250. From ‘*Alastu bi-rabbikum*’ (also known as Covenant of *Alast*). See Quran 7. 171.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p.249.

²⁶⁸ See Book Five, B.2125-2126.

²⁶⁹ Zarrabi-Zadeh, ‘Jalal al-Din Rumi’s Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation’, pp.34-5. Although, ‘The first ‘*adam* is quite different from the ‘*adam* of *fana*.’ Bausani, ‘Theism and Pantheism in Rumi’, p.20.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p.50. This ‘painful, practical way ‘full of blood’ in Rumi’s teaching has caused some scholars to compare his masterpiece with Homer’s epic poem the *Odyssey*...or with Dante’s *Divina Commedia*.’ Ibid., p.40.

²⁷¹ Cited in Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, p.234.

These analogies drawn by imperfect men concerning the action of the Lord are (like) the emotion of love, (they are) not from irreverence.

The lover's pulse bounds up without reverence, he lays himself on the scale of the King's balance.

None is more irreverent than he in the world (outwardly); none is more reverent than he in secret (inwardly).

Know, O chosen one, that these two opposites also, "reverent" and "irreverent," are reconciled by means of relation.

He (the lover) is irreverent when you regard the outward aspect, for his claim of love is (involves) equality (with the Beloved);

(But) when you regard the inward aspect, where is the claim?

He and (his) claim are naughted in the presence of that Sultan. (B.3677-3682)

Describing his lines on Unity with God as examples of *shath*,²⁷² stemming from his personal experience of *fana* and *baqa*, Rumi also alludes to the ecstatic utterances of his predecessors (Bistami and Hallaj). Whilst the external sense of such sayings contradicts the idea of *tawhid*, the inner reality of the annihilated mystic is bearing witness to the Oneness of God. It is precisely the state of *fana* and *baqa* that absolves the mystic of any wrongdoing when he verges on excess. As Nicholson explains:

[t]he mystic absorbed in the Divine *huwiyyah* is not to be blamed for using the language of "deification" and cosmic consciousness...since his human faculties are extinct, he is no more than the mouthpiece through which God speaks.²⁷³

Moreover, *shathiyat* are necessary to disguise and guard the mystery of Truth from the uninitiated.²⁷⁴ It may be that Rumi is forewarning the journeying novice of an increasingly unified state inducing this experience in himself. Or, he could be positing the need to look at 'the inward aspect' as the marker for distinguishing between true and false Saints. Book Three, in particular, often denounces Pharaoh's equating of himself with God as a falsehood.

Even though intoxicated language has proven problematic in its ability to convey the true meaning of *fana* and *baqa*, outwardly suggesting identification with God, it is equally difficult to communicate the reality of the doctrine through everyday language. Analysing the phrase, '*Māta Zayd^{um}*', Rumi says:

²⁷² It was observed in Chapter One that Lewis does not view Rumi's verses as *shath*.

²⁷³ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, p.288.

²⁷⁴ See Book One, B.669, 700-702, 1760-176. For the idea of Divine Jealousy, see Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, p.123.

Māta Zayd^{um} (Zayd died): if Zayd is the agent (grammatical subject), (yet) he is not the agent, for he is defunct.
 He is the agent (only) in respect of the grammatical expression; otherwise, he is the one acted upon (the object of the action), and Death is his slayer.
 What agent (is he), since he has been so overpowered and all the qualities of an agent have been removed from him? (B.3683-3685)

Schimmel comments on Rumi's use of this grammatical symbol as a unique contribution to the stock images of *fana* used in Persian poetry.²⁷⁵ Certainly, the sense of independent agency contained in the expression is at odds with the truth of Zayd's state of annihilation. The semantics are misleading because, 'When the lover of God has died to self, all his actions proceed immediately from God, the only Real Agent.'²⁷⁶ By placing the subject (Zayd) before the object (God) the phrase even becomes redundant as an expression of physical death. Although the implication is that to say 'death came to Zayd' would be more accurate, Rumi does not offer an alternative expression. Chapter Three discusses Rumi's tirades on the inability of language and reason to convey and comprehend the mystery of God in more detail. But even at this stage, it is worth bearing in mind that for Rumi, Truth can only be understood intuitively, through the intoxication of *fana* and *baqa*.

At the heart of this passage, in Book Three, Rumi establishes *fana* and *baqa* as the fundamental principles of Sufism. The process symbolises a return to the original realm of 'adam and is a fulfilment of the Primordial Covenant between man and God. Once again Rumi clarifies that the nature of Unity involves the survival of personality and ecstatic utterances (*shath*) can only be understood correctly through observance of the mystic's state of *fana* and *baqa*. Rumi finds everyday language incapable of communicating the reality of *fana* and *baqa*, direct experience is needed. Moving beyond annihilation of the carnal self, this short section from Book Three starts to detail the annihilation of a sense of agency in one's actions and the illuminated intellect's sense of 'I'. This is contrasted with the Saint's *nafs-i mutma'innah*, with Rumi guiding the *salik* to look to this superior state of annihilation to distinguish between true and false Saints. Even though one can decipher Rumi's entire doctrine of *fana* and *baqa* from Book Three, or any individual Book, without reference to the others; Books One to Three have been shown to emphasise the practices required by the wayfarer at the beginning of his journey. Chapter Three now looks at Books Four to Six as Rumi's method of superior *fana*, needed to reach the mystical goal.

²⁷⁵See Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*.

²⁷⁶This state has been referred to as '*wasf-i u fani shud u dhat-ash baqa*'. See Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III-VI Commentary*, p.93.

CHAPTER THREE: *Winning the War (Books IV-VI)*

Book IV - 'The King and his boon-companion and the Courtier who acted as his intercessor' ²⁷⁷

Connecting to Book Three sequentially and according to chiasmus, Book Four continues to act as a turning point in the wayfarer's journey, contrasting asceticism with gnosis and emphasising superior annihilation. Once again, Rumi recounts the tale of a King, although in this story he is symbolic of God angered by his 'boon-companion.' The King is on the verge of beheading this man, when a courtier intercedes on his behalf. The King accepts the intercession and pardons the man, but the boon-companion resents the intercession, and resulting pardon. Through this story, Rumi elaborates on the idea of the Saint acting as God's instrument, and discusses the *Shahadah*²⁷⁸ as an expression of *fana* and *baqa*. Rumi reiterates that the knowledge of Adam, in his ultimate state of annihilation and subsistence, cannot be communicated through language, nor understood through reason. Only by renouncing all sense of agency, can the illuminated intellect transcend to a higher state of subsistence in the Divine heart, which is of course the central message and practice of the *Mathnawi*.

The intercessor is called '*Imádu 'l-Mulk*, "Pillar of the (Divine) Kingdom", which Nicholson deems to be a 'a fitting title...for the Perfect Man.'²⁷⁹ This courtier enjoys the same privilege of intercession as the Prophet Muhammed (B.2936) and acts as the hand of God. So, the King says:

"Thou didst not make this (intercession), for assuredly I made it, O thou whose qualities are buried in my qualities.

In this (matter) thou art the one employed to do the work, not the (prime) doer (of it), inasmuch as thou art borne by me and are not (thyself) the bearer.

Thou hast become (the instrument of my action, according to the text) *Thou didst not throw when thou threwest*: like the foam, thou hast abandoned thyself in the wave. (B.2945-2947)

Having annihilated all aspects of selfhood, the intercessor's attributes have been replaced by Divine Attributes and he now becomes the vehicle through which God's will is done.

²⁷⁷ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III & IV*, pp.434-436.

²⁷⁸ Islamic declaration of faith: 'There is no God, except God.' Discussed in Chapter One.

²⁷⁹ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi Volume III-VI Commentary*, p.196.

Just as Rumi portrayed God as an archer and the *Sheikh* as His bow, earlier in Book Two, the mystical Union of the Saint is also brought to light here. Urging the *salik*, again, not to doubt the power of the friend of God (*Wali Allah*), Rumi stresses that he wields more influence than Heaven and Earth combined (B.2942). ‘Thou didst not throw when thou threwest’ were the words spoken by God to the Prophet Mohammed when he threw a handful of gravel at the enemy during the battle of Badr, revealing his perfected state of Unification.²⁸⁰ At this stage, man ‘no longer [acts] by himself but exclusively through God,’ and this Divine compulsion (*jabr mahmud*) is defined by Schimmel as: ‘praiseworthy necessitarianism, the freewill and predestination of the saints who, like pearls in oysters, live in the ocean of Divine Life and are moved by its motions.’²⁸¹ In this sense, Rumi contrasts the:

mystical annihilation of man’s will and its replacement with divine volition and the naïve theory of compulsion (*jabr*), which denies even man’s own inward consciousness and rejects his responsibility for his own conduct... [The former is] the secret of the secret of Necessitarianism...the utmost degree of freedom, which is perceived only when one has abandoned the superficial conception of predestination held by the literal-minded vulgar masses.²⁸²

In as much as God is *al-Jabaar* (The Compeller), the mystic also freely exchanges his will for the will of God, and it is this mutual exchange which sets man above the angels, for whom submission is entirely involuntary. Ismá’il Haqqí likens the process being described to the painting of a pre-sketched outline.²⁸³ However, the wayfarer should remember that recognising God as the only agent means attributing only virtuous acts to Him, the Prophets and Saints refuse to blame their shortcomings on predestination. In the same way that God’s transcendence and immanence are fully compatible in Islam, so too are the doctrines of free-will and predestination. Nicholson observes that this story, in fact, ‘brings out the full implication of the text *iyyāka nasta’inu* as understood by the Sufis.’²⁸⁴ The full verse found in *Sura Fatihah*, the opening Chapter of the Quran, reads: ‘You alone do we worship, and you alone do we ask for help.’ In the mystical sense, the verse attests to the annihilation of all duality, including a sense of ‘self’, and acknowledges God as the sole agent of benevolence. Finding the intercessor to be fully emptied of self, the King breaks all His anger and punishment, saying, ‘(But) nowise can I break (annul) thy supplication, because thy / supplication is assuredly my supplication’ (B.2941). Detailing the powerful

²⁸⁰ Quran 8. 17. Also see Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, pp.57-58.

²⁸¹ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, p.263.

²⁸² Zarrabi-Zadeh, ‘Jalal al-Din Rumi’s Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation’, p.61.

²⁸³ *Rúhu’l Mathnawí* (Constantinople, A.H. 1287) Turkish Commentary, cited in Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, p.58.

²⁸⁴ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III-IV Commentary*, p.196.

consequences of the illuminated intellect, Rumi is not only guiding the *salik* towards this superior level of annihilation; but also encouraging the wayfarer to seek the intercession of the Prophets and Saints, because '[w]hen the saint becomes *fān ī fi 'llāh*, his prayer is really God's prayer to Himself.'²⁸⁵

Emphasising the connection of *fana* and *baqa* with the *Shahadah*, made by his predecessors, Rumi has the King say:

Thou hast become 'not'; (now) take up thy abode beside
'except.' This is wonderful, thou art both a prisoner and a prince.
Thou didst not give what thou gavest: The King gave it. He
alone is. God best knoweth the right course."²⁸⁶ (B.2948-2949)

Just as the Primordial Covenant avows the doctrine of annihilation and subsistence, the *Shahadah* is also a clear expression of *fana* and *baqa*. Having negated himself in the 'not' of *There is no God*, man affirms *except God*, and lives through Him alone.²⁸⁷ Chittick asserts that, for Rumi:

When the *Shahadah* is applied to the human individual, it signifies that "There is no self but the Self" ... which involves the realization and actualization of annihilation and subsistence or negation and affirmation: Man's illusory self must be naughted so that his true Self may be affirmed and he may subsist within God... Man will not necessarily benefit from this merely theoretical knowledge unless he enters the Path with the aim of annihilating himself and attaining subsistence in God.²⁸⁸

It is deeply significant that Rumi explains the *Shahadah* in terms of negation (of ego) and affirmation (of God's agency), since the *Shahadah* is understood to encapsulate the essence of all Truth. Declaring that the *Mathnawi* communicates this Truth,²⁸⁹ the central message of Rumi's poem can be expressed simply as the doctrine of *fana* and *baqa*. Much more than just a theorem, however, it is the practical application of the *Shahadah* in one's life, which above all, Rumi insists on. As mentioned in Chapter One, Zarrabi-Zadeh also describes *fana* and *baqa* as not only the 'pivotal feature', but the 'central practice' of the poem. It is possible that Rumi would have practiced the repeated recitation of the *Shahadah* as a *dhikr*, and he may also be pointing to this as a specific practice to follow

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ This also correlates with the supplication in the opening Chapter of the Quran, *Sura Fatihah*, which asks to be guided to the right path.

²⁸⁷ For an interesting discussion on how negation/affirmation also relates to *sama* (mystical music), and the implications for the soul that dies in a state of *fana/baqa*, see A.R. Analouei, 'The Musician and the Intoxicated King', in *Rumi Teachings* (see Eshots, above), pp.159-162.

²⁸⁸ Chittick, *The Sufi path of Love*, pp.181-182.

²⁸⁹ The Preface to the *Mathnawi* is noted in the Introduction.

here. Testifying again to the Covenant, in this way, man reunites with the Beloved and returns to the realm of *Alast* ‘without any interference of selfhood’.²⁹⁰

Although the intercessor embodies many of the qualities of the *nafs-i mutma’innah*, the boon-companion personifies an even greater degree of transformation and comes closer to the Prophet’s complete state of perfection. The turning point of the story comes when the boon-companion is shown to resent the intercession that has been made, renouncing the intercessor entirely (B.2950-2958). In response to the gathered company’s confusion and demands to know why he is offended, the boon-companion replies:

... “Life is freely given for the king’s sake: why should he come as an intercessor between (us)?
At that moment mine was (the state described by words)
— ‘I am with God in a state wherein no chosen prophet is my peer.’²⁹¹
I desire no mercy but the blows of the king; I desire no refuge except that king.
I have naughted all besides the king for the reason that I have devoted myself to the king.
The king, if he behead me in his wrath, will bestow on me sixty other lives.
’Tis my business to hazard (and lose) my head and to be selfless; ’tis the business of my sovereign king to give (me) a (new) head.”
Honour to the head that is severed by the King’s hand! Shame on the head that betakes itself to another!
The night which the King in his wrath covered with pitch (pitchy darkness) holds in disdain a thousand days of festival.
Verily, the circumambulation performed by him who beholds the King is above wrath and grace and infidelity and religion. (B.2959-2967)

In wanting to be beheaded, a common motif that Rumi uses for *fana*, the boon-companion shows that he is effaced of all desire, including the need for clemency. The boon-companion has attained the truth of certainty (*Haqq ul-Yaqeen*), whilst the intercessor only sees with the eye of certainty (*Ayn ul-Yaqeen*). And so, the boon companion knows that the ‘blows of the king’ are, in fact, His mercy in the guise of wrath. Having understood this, true honour can only be found in the willingness to be sacrificed, whilst shame lies in the refusal. The boon-companion also realises that ever-lasting life (*baqa*) is the gift given to the mystic who dies to self. In addition, Nicholson advances that the bestowing of another ‘head’ and ‘sixty other lives’ can also be interpreted as the annihilation of reason through

²⁹⁰ Zarrabi-Zadeh, ‘Jalal al-Din Rumi’s Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation’, p.59.

²⁹¹ Hadith of Prophet, “I have (in union) with God a ‘moment’ (mystical state) wherein none of the Cherubim or any prophet that has been sent can rival me.” Nicholson, however, refers to this as, ‘complete “deification”’, which is rather misleading. See Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, p.224.

the Divine intoxication of Love.²⁹² Notwithstanding the illuminated intellect's (intercessor's) connection to the Divine, it is not entirely purged of selfhood and may fall prey to spiritual pride, much like the Devil who fell from grace as the foremost angel (discussed further on in Book Five). In this sense, the story also relates to the discursive intellect of the *nafs-i ammarah*, which is responsible for duality and can be gleamed in Rumi's having the King address the intercessor distinctly in terms of 'thou' and 'I'. Whereas, in the boon-companion's speech, his 'I' is so fused with 'the King' that one can hardly distinguish his voice from God's. Although Rumi has stressed the need for intercession, having arrived at the Divine door, the boon-companion no longer requires this. Nicholson also suggests that:

Intercession symbolises duality. There can be no mystical "union" when consciousness of anything "other than God" intrudes... This verse describes the "Divine darkness" of *fana* or "the Dark Night of the Soul", which far transcends all worldly joys, since it is a manifestation of Grace (*lutf*) under the mask of Wrath (*qahr*).²⁹³

Just as we have discussed, it is possible that the intercessor is not wholly purged of a sense of agency, which is what opens the door to *shirk* (polytheism/equality with God), the cardinal sin in Islam. Rumi equates the existence of two 'I's with unbelief and idolatry, emphasising that even a believer can find himself saying "I exist and God exists," contradicting the *Shahadah*.²⁹⁴ Zarrabi-Zadeh articulates this as the 'ontological aspect' of *fana*, which concerns 'man's individuality, his ego, or sense of 'I'...[which] is the cause of all spiritual ruin [and] continues to be the main obstacle in the way of man's return' to Unity.²⁹⁵ For this reason, Chittick surmises that:

Only when man's ego is truly obliterated and annihilated may he properly say "I." But then *he* is not saying it, for his attributes have been replaced by God's Attributes. At this stage of subsistence in God man truly "carries the Trust" and becomes God's vicegerent on earth, the full and conscious manifestation of His Being... In truth "There is no I but I." But here it is no longer man's "I," it is God's "I."²⁹⁶

In the manner of Bistami and Hallaj, Rumi insists that only this superior annihilation can guarantee the eradication of duality, including the oppositions of 'wrath and grace and

²⁹² Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III-VI Commentary*, p.118.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.197.

²⁹⁴ In *Fihī ma fihī*, Rumi says: 'With God, two I's cannot find room. You say "I" and He says "I." either you die before Him, or let Him die before you; then duality will not remain. But, it is impossible for Him to die, either subjectively or objectively, since He is the Living God, *the Undying* (XXV 58). He possesses such Gentleness that were it possible, He would die for you so that duality might vanish. But since it is impossible for Him to die, you die, so that He may manifest Himself to you and duality may vanish.' Cited in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, p.191.

²⁹⁵ Zarrabi-Zadeh, 'Jalal al-Din Rumi's Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation', p.47. See also, Book One B.3056-76.

²⁹⁶ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, p.191.

infidelity and religion'. These distinctions 'vanish in contemplation of the Essence',²⁹⁷ as no self exists to be punished, rewarded, unfaithful or faithful, only God remains.

The boon-companion has attained the vision of gnosis, the ultimate mystical goal of *Ridwan* (Beatific vision), and it is fitting that Rumi ends the story by relating this directly to the original state of Adam (B.2967-2973). As discussed earlier, it was in his complete state of selflessness that Adam was appointed as God's vicegerent. But, more than this:

Adam, created in the image of God and reflecting all the Names and Attributes of His Maker, is the Perfect Man, the ideal type of humanity, in whom the Divine consciousness is actualised; his knowledge (limited only by individualisation, *ta'ayyun*) is identical with God's knowledge; he sees all things as they are in their essential nature.²⁹⁸

It was Adam's superior mystical knowledge which resulted in the angels bowing down in homage to him, in contrast to Satan's faulty partial intellect, which assured his damnation.²⁹⁹ Rumi explains that this knowledge was not, however, given in the form of ordinary language. Indeed, 'Not one word (capable of) expressing it has (ever) come into / the world, for it is hidden, hidden, hidden' (B.2968). Indeed, as soon as the Names 'assumed the veil of letters and breath' (B.2972) they 'lost their ineffable splendour.'³⁰⁰ Linking back to the section in Book Three, Rumi explains that language, though useful at the beginning, is insufficient at this stage of the wayfarer's journey. So, Rumi says, 'Although from one point of view speech is a revealer, yet from / ten points of view it is a curtain and concealer' (B.2973).

Alongside Book Three, Book Four acts as a turning point in the wayfarer's journey, guiding him to a more superior state of annihilation and subsistence. The intercessor's eye of certainty is contrasted with the boon-companion's truth of certainty and complete subsistence in Divine Love. Whilst Rumi guides the *salik* to seek the power of the Saint's intercession, as it is through him that God's will is done, we see that man must also move beyond the need for intercession altogether. Clarifying that the *Shahadah* is an expression of annihilation and subsistence, and reiteration of the Primordial Covenant, Rumi cements the doctrine as the central message and practice of the *Mathnawi*. Moreover, true mystical

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, p.96.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p.82. For Iblis' argument regarding his superiority to Adam, see Quran 38. 77.

³⁰⁰ Ismail Anqirawi considered the writing of them in ink to be corruptive. Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III-VI Commentary*, p.197.

perfection requires the annihilation of all sense of an independent ‘I’ separate from God, to fully attest to God’s *tawhid*. At this stage, man returns to his original state of Unity, and is endowed (like Adam) with the mystical knowledge that cannot be expressed in ordinary language, nor understood through reason. Spiritual pride and any hint of duality must be eliminated to become like the Prophet. As we shall see, Rumi continues to develop this theme in Books Five and Six also.

Book V - ‘The Story of Ayáz’³⁰¹

Continuing to develop the theoretical discussions of Book Four, ‘The Story of Ayáz’ in Book Five also looks back to Book Two, juxtaposing the partial intellect (*nafs-i ammarah*) with the Saint’s state of mystical Union (*nafs-i mutma’innah*). Rumi emphasises the clairvoyant knowledge of the Saint, who is intoxicated through *fana* and *baqa*. In this story, the King commands his courtiers to break a pearl (worldly desire), which they refuse to do, exemplifying the discursive intellect of Satan. Ayaz, on the other hand, obeys the King’s command without question. As the cognitive aspect of the *nafs* relates directly to the carnal self, detailed at the beginning of the *Mathnawi*, the poem starts to come full circle. Rumi invites the *salik* to annihilate reason altogether, alongside many other more sophisticated attributes of self, in order to arrive at the mystical apex.

One after another, we see the courtiers arguing that they cannot destroy such a valuable pearl, but Ayaz’s mystical knowledge allows him to understand the reality of the trial being made. He does not imitate the actions of the company, who are ‘beguiled’ by the superficial honours bestowed on them, which are ‘really a delusion and sign of [God’s] displeasure.’³⁰² Furthermore, in the strongest of terms, Rumi explains that the ‘imitator’ is not really a Muslim, and rarely passes these tests of faith, since he lacks the capacity to detect Truth masquerading as falsehood. In addition, we discover that:

The ascetic feels anxiety concerning his latter end: (he considers) what will be his plight on the Day of Reckoning;

³⁰¹ The beloved slave of Sultan Mahmúd of Ghazna, who would secretly wear a pair of old shoes and a tattered dress to humble himself. Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume V & VI*, pp.242-253. Some of these verses were discussed in Book One. As mentioned before, Rumi digresses constantly, returning to various tales intermittently, often over the course of several books. This story begins half-way through Book Five and ends in Book Six. The verses here are taken mostly from the end of Book Five, where Ayáz, like the boon-companion in Book Four, clearly symbolises the Perfect Man (Husam Chelebi).

³⁰² Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III-VI Commentary*, p.302.

(But) the Gnostics, having become conscious of the beginning, are free from anxiety and (care for) the ultimate conditions.

(Formerly) the gnostic had the same fear and hope (as the ascetic), (but) his knowledge of the past devoured both those (feelings).

He perceived that in the past he had sown pulse: he knows what the produce will be.

He is a gnostic and has been delivered from fear and dread: the sword of God has cut lamentation asunder.

(Formerly) he had from God (feelings of) fear and hope: the fear has passed away and the hope has come into clear view. (B.4065-4070)

Having annihilated to such a degree and already returned to the realm of *'adam*, Ayaz is assured of his victory,³⁰³ and so he does not question the King's command. Rumi links this to the state of the magicians, who cried "'Tis no harm" when they were about to be punished by Pharaoh.³⁰⁴ Complete submission to the will of God is predicated on foreknowledge, but attaining to this superior mystical state requires more than just breaking the shell, to get to the kernel;³⁰⁵ one must drink in its voice 'hidden in the ear of ecstasy' (B.2145). So, Rumi instructs the *salik* to be like: 'a place unsown' or 'a white paper / untouched by writing', 'That thou mayst be ennobled by *Nún wa 'l-Qalam*,³⁰⁶ and that / the Gracious One may sow seed within thee' (B.1963-1964). The Pen (*Qalam*) appears to be a reference to Universal Reason, which can only be imprinted on man when he has returned to the Origin of non-existence.³⁰⁷ Zarrabi-Zadeh proposes that aligning with this Universal Reason is to regain knowledge of the ontological names, as they were known by Adam, recovering 'the ability to see by the light of God.' In fact, Rumi often refers to the Prophet's Hadith, 'Beware of the clairvoyance of the true believer, for verily he sees by the light of God.'³⁰⁸ To this end, through the story of Ayaz, Rumi, once again, warns against disbelief in the power of the Saints. Crucially, the Gnostic's level of *fana* and *baqa* relinquishes fear, dread and hope, which are still attributes of the ascetic. Fear and hope are also characteristics of the carnal self of Pharaoh, who 'in bondage to body and soul' says, 'I am a Lord,' being unaware of the essential natures of both these names ['I' and 'Lord']' (B.4128-4129). The magicians, on the other hand, say: 'The gallows (*dár*)

³⁰³ There is some suggestion that he already knew he would be asked to do this as he had stones with him, see B.4056-4058 and Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume V & VI*, p.243. For details of the reward promised, see B.4181-4188.

³⁰⁴ B.4119-4136

³⁰⁵ A standard motif for *fana* and *baqa* used throughout the *Mathnawi*.

³⁰⁶ 'By the Pen', Quran 68.

³⁰⁷ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi Volume V & VI*, p.118.

³⁰⁸ Though he still does not 'know' the essence of God. Zarrabi-Zadeh, 'Jalal al-Din Rumi's Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation', p.62.

on which we are killed is the *Buráq* on / which we ride (to Heaven);³⁰⁹ the abode (*dar*) possessed by thee is /delusion and heedlessness' (B.4134). Annihilated of *all* desire, the Saint is guaranteed salvation, which is continually spoken of in the Quran as freedom from grief and fear. Zarrabi-Zadeh concludes that, when attachment to worldly pleasures is lost, man 'is emotionally released from the world' and no longer swayed by grief and fear. Instead, his love for the Beloved brings 'abundant pleasure and joy'.³¹⁰ At this juncture on the Path, the sway of emotion is itself annihilated, and man subsists in the promise of Paradise (B.4181-4188). Since the eschatological implications for his soul have been made clear, in effect, Hell has already been naughted and the Gnostic lives in a kind of Paradise. At this mystical apex, the Perfect Man has no fear of death, and will happily go to the gallows, like Hallaj.

Responding to the courtiers' accusations that he has acted like an 'infidel', Ayaz confirms that the Divine command is more precious than any pearl. It is the courtiers who have been led astray, and taken to polytheism by turning their faces towards the stone, rather than the King (B.4075-4079). Whereas Ayaz has broken the "pearl" of his 'bodily and animal nature, with the "stones" of piety and self-discipline",³¹¹ the courtiers exhibit the greed and lust of the *nafs-i ammarah*.³¹² Lacking the '(spiritual) pearl', i.e. Ayaz's knowledge and certainty, they do not comprehend the impermanence of form, akin to the Jewish King in Book One. So, Ayaz calls them to annihilate their attachment to worldly forms and 'lose thy / reason in Him who bestows the colour' (B.4080-4082). Rumi explains that false logic and reason fuels carnal desire, it was 'in their ignorance and / blindness [that the courtiers] had broken the pearl of the King's command (B.4073).' This deceitful intelligence is precisely what Satan demonstrated when he refused God's command to bow down before Adam (B.1920-1925). Not only did Satan question God's authority and demonstrate a lack of faith and trust, self-consciously believing himself to be superior, he 'fell from grace because in his pride of intellect he scorned the essential knowledge given to Adam.'³¹³ To this end, spiritual pride is the obstacle that the ascetic must overcome and is considered more dangerous than carnal lust.³¹⁴ Through this story, Rumi stresses the need to annihilate not just worldly desire, but the specific Satanic attributes of anger, jealousy and arrogance;

³⁰⁹ Heavenly steed, that transported the Prophet to Heaven (discussed further on).

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.60.

³¹¹ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III-VI Commentary*, p.302.

³¹² At times, they are cognisant of God (*nafs-i lawwamah*), but their remembrance is 'partial', not constant like Ayaz's.

³¹³ For more on Iblis' unparalleled status prior to this event, see *The Mathnawi Volume I & II Commentary*, p.82.

³¹⁴ Bausani, 'Theism and Pantheism in Rumi', pp.15-16.

which are obliterated through annihilation of the discursive intellect, the root of all evil. Rumi refers to this as the ‘intelligent soul’, whose sole purpose is to justify the actions of the lower *nafs*. The particular *fana* required here, relates to the ‘cognitive aspect’ of the *nafs*, which is directly related to the beguiling trickery of Satan and ‘whose major feature has always been deluding man by means of satanic justification and deceit.’³¹⁵ As Zarrabi-Zadeh explains:

Aside from being obedient to the *nafs*, this partial intellect suffers from the inherent limitation and inability to attain true knowledge to lead man to perfection, so if it is regarded as the real cognitive faculty, it brings about man’s imperfection and ignorance. The partial intellect works with data collected via the senses as well as memory, and seeks to understand and interpret this data through discursive and rational reasoning, both of which, data and methodology, are defective and restricting.³¹⁶

The fallibility of man’s ability to reason relates directly to self-consciousness, and the courtiers typify the rationalism of theologians and philosophers whom Rumi derides throughout the *Mathnawi*. Indeed, Rumi attacks ‘not only philosophy and rational theology but also all sciences not based on mystical intuition.’³¹⁷ This partial intellect is specifically equated with the theologian, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi,³¹⁸ with Rumi arguing that:

If the intellect could discern the (true) way in this question,
Fakhr-i Rází 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*).

These intellects in their quest (of the real “I”) fall into the
abyss of incarnation (*hulúl*) and *ittihád*.³¹⁹ (B.4144-4147)

The problem with such theologians, as Rumi sees it, is that they rely on the cognitive faculty to understand that which is, ‘neither knowledge nor knowable, and being beyond the faculty of apprehension, knowledge is by its very nature incapable of grasping it.’³²⁰ True knowledge of Reality (*Haqq*) is predicated on annihilation ‘of the faculties by which we apprehend the human and phenomenal.’³²¹ It is significant that Rumi considers the

³¹⁵ Zarrabi-Zadeh, ‘Jalal al-Din Rumi's Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation’, p.46.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Plato, Avicenna, the jurists and founders of Islamic law (*fiqh*) are amongst those he critiques, as falling prey to the intelligent soul. Ibid., pp.50-51.

³¹⁸ Fakhr al-Din (died 1209) was a celebrated theologian and philosopher, from Khorasan, whom Rumi particularly disliked.

³¹⁹ ‘Incarnation’ and ‘Oneness with God’. ‘In some places Rumi contrasts *hulul*, which he invariably regards as heretical, with his own monistic doctrine (*ittihad-i nur*) [oneness with Light].’ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III-VI Commentary*, p.304.

³²⁰ Zarrabi-Zadeh, ‘Jalal al-Din Rumi's Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation’, p.58.

³²¹ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II*, p.169.

consequence of such reasoning to be ‘[t]he heretical doctrine that the creature becomes one with the Creator’.³²² As discussed earlier, the real nature of Unification is an ‘ultrarational truth’, not comprehended by reason, but ‘tasted’ by the non-existent self. Having ‘passed away (from self) in union (with God)’, Ayaz, therefore, is ‘not afflicted with *hulūl* and *ittihād*’ (B.4148-4150). In *Fihi ma fihi*, Rumi explains that:

Every science acquired by study and effort in this world is the “science of bodies” [*‘ilm-i abdān*]. But the science acquired after death is the “science of religions” [*‘ilm-i adyān*]. Knowing the science of “I am God” is the science of bodies, but becoming “I am God” is the science of religions. To see the light of a lamp or a fire is the science of bodies, but to be consumed by the fire of the light or the lamp is the science of religions. Whatever is vision is the science of religions, whatever is knowledge is the science of bodies.³²³

The *Mathnawi* acts as a constant reminder to the wayfarer to gain knowledge of this ‘science of religions’, which can only be achieved through the practical experience of *fana* and *baqa*. Aptly cementing the idea that Reality cannot be understood through phenomenal form, Rumi says: ‘When the discourse reached the description of this (exalted) / state, at once the pen broke and the paper tore’ (B.4195).

In the ultimate reaches of annihilation and subsistence, Ayaz is in a state of ‘bewilderment’, akin to the Prophet’s state on entering the presence of God (examined further in Book Six below). It should be remembered, however, that within this intoxicated state, ‘the perfect intellect is [still] conscious of its own limitation and inability.’³²⁴ Ayaz exemplifies this when he intercedes on behalf of the courtiers, asking God to forgive them for their errors in judgement,³²⁵ proclaiming:

Who am I that I should say ‘Forgive,’ O thou who art the
sovereign and quintessence of the command *Be*?³²⁶
Who am I that I should exist beside thee, O thou whose skirt
all ‘I’s’ have clutched? (B.4151-2)

Unlike the intercessor in the previous story, Ayaz is fully cognisant of the fact that God is making the intercession through him (B.4160, B.4176). As God’s instrument, his plea for

³²² Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume V & VI*, p.248. See also p.222, where Rumi describes the head having less value than the tail (penis), rendered into Latin by Nicholson.

³²³ Cited in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, p.2.

³²⁴ Zarrabi-Zadeh, ‘Jalal al-Din Rumi’s Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation’, p.58.

³²⁵ They regret their forgetfulness and are ashamed, showing a move from the blameworthy *nafs-i ammarah* (B.4101-4104) to the *nafs-i lawwamah* (self-reproach) (B.4083, B.4190-4191). Ayaz pleads that since fear has awakened them (B.4100), they should be forgiven. For how this correlates with God’s names, see Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III-VI Commentary*, p.303.

³²⁶ ‘*Kun fayakūn*’ (‘Be, and it is’), Quran 36. 77–83.

forgiveness is both a form of humility (B.4163) and an ecstatic utterance (*shath*), for which he should not be blamed. Ayaz explains:

Since Thou hast intoxicated me, do not inflict a penalty: the law does not see fit to inflict a penalty on the intoxicated.

Inflict (it) only at the time when I become sober; for indeed I shall never become sober (again).

Whoso has drunk of Thy cup, O Gracious One, is for ever delivered from self-consciousness and from the infliction of penalties.

Their intoxication consists in a state of unconsciousness of self (*faná*), (in which they are) abiding for ever: he that passes away from self in love for Thee will not arise. (B.4202-4205)

Although Ayaz's state of *fana* and *baqa* has delivered him from the fear of punishment, he does exhibit a positive fear, which only the Prophets and Saints possess.³²⁷ More importantly, Rumi contrasts the courtiers' heedlessness (B.4105-4109) with the intoxication of the Gnostic (B.4198-4201). Nicholson notes that the jurists do not consider the former type of intoxication an excuse for sin, but 'The case of a "God-intoxicated" man is quite different.'³²⁸ Echoing the discussion on intoxicated language, observed in Book Three, Rumi emphasises the innocence of the Saint. The non-existent Saint does not formulate his words through mental reasoning, he is merely a mouthpiece for God.³²⁹ Questioning his own use of the poetic form, Rumi himself then, '*loses [his] head, beard, and pen.*' But, he reconciles the dilemma with reference to his own intoxicated state (B.4213-4214) and the fact that, '[God] can make the poet, notwithstanding his utter "naughtedness" and self-abasement, the mouthpiece of innumerable spiritual mysteries.' It is significant that, in his commentary, Nicholson translates B.4205 more precisely as: 'their intoxication is (described by the words) 'abiding for ever in a state of faná',³³⁰ revealing more clearly Rumi's definition of ecstasy as annihilation and subsistence.

Rumi ends the story, and Book Five, with a final call to annihilate the carnal soul and partial intellect, in order to attain to mystical knowledge and freedom:

³²⁷ 'None fears God but those of His servants that are possessed of knowledge', Quran 35. 25. See Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III-VI Commentary*, p.304.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.303.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.163.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.305-306. The mystical dance is also considered an expression of God. See P. Morewedge, 'A philosophical interpretation of Rumi's mystical poetry', in *Rumi: In the light of Eastern and Western scholarship* (see Schimmel, above). Schimmel adds that: 'everyone else has drunk a mere cupful of the wine of *anā Allah* [I am God] and *anā 'l-haqq* [I am the Truth] respectively, while [Rumi] has quaffed this wine by the bottle and the vat. See Schimmel, 'The Koran, the Prophets, and the Saints', in *Rumi: In the light of Eastern and Western scholarship* (see Schimmel, above), p.259.

The Water of Life is the goal of those to whom life is dear:
by water the garden is (made) verdant and smiling.

(But) those who quaff the cup of death are living through His
love: they have torn their hearts away from life and the Water of Life.

Every soul derives freshness from the Water of Life, but Thou
Art the Water (Source) of the Water of Life.

Thou didst bestow on me a (spiritual) death and resurrection
continually, that I might experience the conquering power of
that bounty (of Thine).

This (bodily) dying became (as unformidable) to me as
Sleeping, from my confidence that Thou, O god, wouldst raise
Me from the dead.

If the Seven Seas become a mirage at every moment, Thou
Wilt take it (the water) by the ear and bring it (back), O Water
(Source) of the water.

Reason is trembling with fear of death, but Love is bold: how
Should the stone be afraid of rain as the clod (is)? (B.4219-4226)

Moreover, Rumi proffers the *Mathnawi* itself as the Way of attainment, its verses are
'devil-burning stars' which the wayfarer should familiarise himself with from dusk till
dawn (B.4230), in order to transcend to the ultimate height of annihilation and subsistence.

In Book Five of the *Mathnawi*, Rumi details the *fana* and *baqa* of the Saint, who exists in
complete alignment with Universal Reason and becomes a clairvoyant, assured of salvation
and immortality. Annihilated of all desire, the Gnostic's state is the opposite of the carnal
self under the Satanic influence of the intelligent soul. And, it is the annihilation of the
discursive intellect, which Rumi emphasises, in order to achieve the intoxicated state of
superior *fana*. The following passage from Book Six considers just how far the gnostic can
travel, but also links directly back to Book One's instruction to transform not just the self,
but also the world also.

Book VI - 'Die before ye die'

This short passage, in the final book of the *Mathnawi*, reflects on the Prophet's Hadith: 'O
friend die before thy death if thou desirest life; for by so dying Idris became a dweller in
Paradise before (the rest of) us.'³³¹ In Book Six, the wayfarer reaches the mystical goal, but
also returns to the starting point of Book One, bringing together all six Books. Describing
fana and *baqa* as the critical, final steps on the wayfarer's journey, Rumi presents the

³³¹ Prophet Idris, 'He was taken alive to Paradise.' Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume V & VI*, p.298.

example of Abu Bakr's self-effacement, and the Prophet Muhammad's arrival at the mystical apex.³³² Once again, *fana fi-Pir* and *fana fi-Rasul* are presented as the means through which the *salik* can also become the Ultimate Man. In as much as Book Six acts as a final call to *fana* and *baqa*, this does not signify the end of the process. Not only is there no end to the stages of man's refinement, the end of the poem symbolises that this is just the beginning as Rumi now transfers the practical application of the *Mathnawi* to the reader.

Although the opening verses appear to be addressing the illuminated ascetic, they also apply to the unenlightened self at the very beginning of the Path, suffering the pain of separation from God. Rumi begins:

You have suffered much agony, but you are (still) in the veil,
because (dying to self) was the fundamental principle, and you
have not fulfilled it.

Your agony is not finished till you die: you cannot reach the
roof without completing the ladder.

When two rungs out of a hundred are wanting, the striver
will be forbidden to (set foot on) the roof. (B.723-725)

Fana and *baqa* are the last 'two rungs' of the ladder to complete, if one wishes to arrive at God's door and become the *nafs-i mutma'innah*. Having shown that self-annihilation informs every stage of the *salik*'s journey, Book Six also describes *fana* and *baqa* as the final steps to be taken on the Path, making it clear that the doctrine is the 'fundamental principle' not just of Sufism, but of the *Mathnawi*. Rumi is adamant that the suffering caused by *any* type of *nafs* can only be remedied through self-annihilation, saying:

O Amír, you will not experience the wreck of this ship (of
self-existence) till you put in the last *mann*.³³³

Know that this last *mann* is fundamental, for it is (like) the
(piercing) star that rises at night: it wrecks the ship of evil
suggestion and error.

The ship of (self) consciousness, when it is utterly wrecked,
becomes (like) the sun in the blue (vault of heaven).

Inasmuch as you have not died, your agony has been pro-
longed: be extinguished in the dawn, O candle of Tiráz.³³⁴

Know that the Sun of the world is hidden till our stars have
become hidden.

Wield the mace against yourself: shatter egoism to pieces, for
the bodily eye is (as) cotton wool in the ear.

You *are* wielding the mace against yourself, O base man: this

³³² Chief companion and father-in-law of the Prophet, First Caliph of Islam. Known for his self-effacement and merciful nature.

³³³ A weight of less than half a stone to a stone and a half. Ibid.

³³⁴ Meaning "O beautiful one". Ibid.

egoism is the reflexion of yourself in (the mirror of) my actions.
 You have seen the reflexion of yourself in (the mirror of) my
 form and have risen in fury to fight with yourself,
 Like the lion who went down into the well; (for) he fancied
 that the reflexion of himself was his enemy.³³⁵ (B.727-735)

Nicholson observes that Rumi uses the same metaphor in Book Four, likening *fana* to the ‘last bale put into an overladen ship, causing it to founder, and [*baqa*] to the morning star of Truth which rises at the end of the night of error and delusion.’³³⁶ Akin to the previous story, the two chief obstacles to mystical perception, reason and carnality, are depicted as an interrelated pair, in need of annihilation. It is vital to ‘close the eye of sense and intellect, [to] be endowed with spiritual vision.’³³⁷ Having previously described the *Mathnawi* as a ‘(piercing) star’, Rumi lays emphasis here at the end of the poem on the practical application of the verses, which constitute the final effort to be made by the wayfarer.

We also return to the wider implications, detailed in Book One, of *fana* and *baqa* being the means of destroying all evil, and as an altruistic endeavour. Rumi depicts man ‘wielding the mace’ against others, believing them to be the enemy, when in fact, they are only a reflection of his own self. The moral of the story is that:

all so-called “evil” is an illusion arising from the diversity of Divine attributes reflected in human nature...only our egoism prevents us from seeing the “soul of goodness” everywhere. So far as evil exists in us, its source is the unreal “self” by which we are separated from God. Purge the heart of “self”, and evil disappears.³³⁸

The hellish nature of the *nafs* distorts man’s vision and is ‘the root of [all] sin and error.’ Thus, Zarrabi-Zadeh concludes that, ‘As long as the *nafs* guides man and controls his conduct... his actions are entirely evil.’ The eradication of evil, therefore, means refusing to follow the commands of the *nafs*, especially, ‘what is motivated by worldly pleasures and lust’.³³⁹ The gnostic is a true lion who sees with the vision of God and wages the war of the Greater *Jihad* against himself. However, this only occurs when reason has been annihilated and the self is absorbed by Divine Truth, as only God has the power to destroy Hell. At this stage:

³³⁵ See Book One, B.900-1389, where a Hare (Universal Reason) is contrasted with a Lion (*nafs-i ammarah*). The Lion jumps into the bottom of a well to destroy what he believes to be another lion (enemy), when it is only his own reflection, thus destroying himself. Also see Safavi, *The Structure of Rūmī’s Mathnawī*, pp.113-133.

³³⁶ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III-VI Commentary*, p.325.

³³⁷ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, p.46.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.100.

³³⁹ Zarrabi-Zadeh, ‘Jalal al-Din Rumi’s Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation’, pp.45-49.

The little devil of a soul becomes a faithful Muslim, Satan himself turns into a Gabriel once love has performed its wonderful alchemy. Then man sees *faqr*, spiritual poverty and denudation from every created quality, as a red ruby, comparable to Dante's *balascio* at the end of the Divine Comedy. Annihilated in the light and fire of this ruby he is led into the very heart of love. And returning once more, he sees the world changed, filled with meaning, and no longer as the dunghill which it appears to be in the eyes of the ascetic.³⁴⁰

Bringing to a climax the idea of spiritual transformation in this section, Rumi focuses especially on the Prophet and his companions as the prime examples of *fana* and *baqa*:

Hence Mustafá (Mohammed) said, "O seeker of the mysteries,
(if) you wish to see a dead man living-

Walking on the earth, like living men; (yet he is) dead and his
spirit is gone to heaven;

(One) whose spirit hath a dwelling-place on high at this
moment, (so that) if he die, his spirit is not translated.

Because it has been translated before death: this (mystery) is
understood (only) by dying, not by (using one's) reason;

Translation it is, (but) not like the translation of the spirits of
the vulgar: it resembles a removal (during life) from one place
to another-

If any one wish to see a dead man walking thus visibly on
the earth,

Let him behold Abú Bakr, the devout, (who) through being
a true witness (*siddíq*) became the Prince of the Resurrected.

In this (earthly) life look at the *Siddíq* (Abu Bakr), that you
may believe more firmly in the Resurrection." (B.742-749)

Once again, Rumi urges the practical undertaking of the process, to know the mysteries of annihilation and subsistence, which cannot be comprehended through reason. Rumi urges the wayfarer to follow the example of Abu Bakr, who acquired knowledge of this mystery by dying to self and subsisting solely through God. Moreover, as a *Siddíq*, Abu Bakr is known for his ability to transform others, and was entrusted with the leadership of Islam after the Prophet's death. The idea of *fana fi-Sheikh / Pir* and the power of Saints is thus brought to a head in Book Six. Of course, Rumi is swift to add that it is the Prophet himself who is the greatest example of *fana* and *baqa*:

Mohammed, then was a hundred (spiritual) resurrections
here and now, for he was dissolved (naughted) in dying to
temporal loosing and binding.

Ahmad (Mohammed) is the twice-born in this world:³⁴¹ he was

³⁴⁰ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, p. xiii. Book Six also reiterates the idea of affirmation/negation and the need for opposites (B.736-7), described in Book One.

³⁴¹ *i.e.* physically born, and then spiritually re-born. A reference to Quran 40. 2, "Our Lord! Twice hast Thou made us die and twice hast Thou made us live." This also relates to the saying of Jesus, 'Except a man be born twice, he shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.' Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, pp.11-12. Nicholson also describes the connection to *fana fi sheikh* here.

manifestly a hundred resurrections.

They asked him concerning the Resurrection, saying, “O (thou who art the) Resurrection, how long is the way to the Resurrection?”

And often he would say with mute eloquence, “Does any one ask (me who am the Resurrection) concerning the Resurrection?”

Hence the Messenger of good tidings said, (speaking) symbolically, “Die before you die, O nobles,

Even as I have died before death and brought from Yonder this fame and renown.” (B.750-755)

The Prophet’s response to being questioned about the Resurrection means, “do not presume to question me about the lesser (temporal) resurrection...but concern yourself with the greater (spiritual) resurrection...of which I am the very essence.”³⁴² That the Prophet is the equivalent of ‘a hundred spiritual resurrections’ is extremely significant, as it signifies his endless state of *fana* and *baqa*, which led to him being distinguished on earth (as he was in Heaven), and which makes him the Ultimate Man. Only by following in the footsteps of the Prophet, dying to self and being born again, can one know fully understand the physical Resurrection (B.756-758).³⁴³ To this end, Rumi can be seen guiding the wayfarer to *fana fi-Rasul*. As Nicholson deduces, ‘By “dying before death” in imitation of the Prophet and becoming one with him in spirit and truth, Sufis here and now experience “the greater Resurrection” ...and attain to eternal life in God.’³⁴⁴ Bausani admits that the importance given to the Prophet by Rumi is something that interpreters of the *Mathnawi* have often failed to understand. Indeed:

Rumi sees a powerful means against falling into magics and pantheism in the faith in [the] Prophet: the personality of the Prophet becomes in this way like a symbol of the personality of God, and a remedy against any subtle temptation of pride and envy...a powerful barrier against confusion of values and *vahdat-l-vujud*.³⁴⁵

The partial intellect is destroyed through allegiance to the Prophet, however, it is worth remembering that whilst man can strive to be like the Prophet, he does not become the Prophet, who is set above the rest of creation. In fact, the veneration of the Prophet in the Sufi tradition is so immense that he is described as the fulfilment of God’s purpose and the reason for creation itself.

³⁴² Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III-VI Commentary*, p.326. See also p.163 for the Hadith and how this was expressed non-verbally.

³⁴³ The same can be said about the migration of the Prophet, which is also symbolic of migrating from self to God. Thanks go to Sheikh Mohammed Abaas for this point.

³⁴⁴ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III-VI Commentary*, p.163.

³⁴⁵ Bausani, ‘Theism and Pantheism in Rumi’, pp.16, 20.

As Chittick has observed, the Prophet's *Mi'raj* to the Heavens is especially symbolic of the ascending levels of *fana* and *baqa*, culminating in the Beatific vision.³⁴⁶ In the *Mathnawi*, Rumi stresses that the angel Gabriel was not permitted to travel with the Prophet beyond the seventh sphere, who continued the journey alone into the presence of God. Zarrabi-Zadeh considers that:

For Rumi, the inability of Gabriel to ascend to the height of God's intimacy symbolises the inability of the intellect to bring man to the summit of mystical fulfilment, indicating that man should not tarry in the state of angelhood but must advance forth in his mystical progression riding the steed of love: 'Without the *Buraq* of love and the labour of Gabriel how will you like Muhammed attain all the stages?'³⁴⁷

As we have seen, the second half of the *Mathnawi* concerns superior annihilation and the need to annihilate even the illuminated intellect, which can only carry the wayfarer so far and is unable to accompany him to the final goal. In this context, the last '*mann*' is the annihilation of the angelic soul, in order to ascend to Love itself. Zarrabi-Zadeh explains that Rumi contrasts the inability of Gabriel's illuminated intellect 'to appreciate love or follow its way,'³⁴⁸ with the pure love of the Prophet (envied by the angels for this very reason). This is reminiscent of the difference between the intercessor and the boon-companion in Book Four. Echoing Hallaj, Rumi underlines that Love lies at the heart of complete annihilation. Of course, Rumi does not disrespect the state of angelhood and does not condemn this intellect quite so vehemently as he does the partial intellect.³⁴⁹ In fact, our analysis has shown the first half of the *Mathnawi* encouraging a state of illumination, as it 'must not be discarded too soon',³⁵⁰ whilst the second half calls the wayfarer to travel beyond this state when he is ready to do so. Ultimately though, one must aim to be more enlightened than the courtiers who questioned God's command to break the pearl (Book Five), just as the angels questioned God's creation of Adam.³⁵¹ As such:

The intellect which was once man's teacher and instructor, should now become a pupil who follows Love's guidance through the practice of superior annihilation, being as a child just entering school...purified from 'human defilement', his soul still has angelic contamination, which should be effaced in order to attain total nothingness and absolute surrender to the Beloved.³⁵²

³⁴⁶ See Chapter One. The Prophet rode to Heaven on the *Buraq* with Gabriel and was shown the seven heavens and hells, met all the Prophets, led them in prayer, then entered the presence of God.

³⁴⁷ Zarrabi-Zadeh, 'Jalal al-Din Rumi's Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation', p.56.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.57.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume I & II Commentary*, p.46.

³⁵¹ 'And when said your Lord to the angels, "Indeed, I (am) going to place in the earth a vicegerent, they said, "Will You place in it (one) who will spread corruption in it and will shed [the] blood[s], while we, [we] glorify (You) with Your praises and we sanctify [to] He said, "Indeed, [I] know what not you know." Quran 2. 30. *Ibid.*, pp.57-58.

³⁵² *Ibid.*

Since God is ‘comprehended of no reason’, to reach the mystical apex essentially requires a state of bewilderment, where even the awareness of annihilation no longer remains (*fana al-fana*).

Spiritual transformation is likened, in this passage, to the process of evolution (B.738-741), recalling Rumi’s infamous lines in Book Three:

I died to the inorganic state and became endowed with growth, and (then) I died to (vegetable growth) and attained to the animal.

I died from animality and became Adam (man): why, then, should I fear? When have I become less by dying?

At the next remove I shall die to man, that I may soar and lift up my head amongst the angels;

And I must escape even from (the state of) the angel: *everything is perishing except His face*.

Once more I shall be sacrificed and die to the angel: I shall become that which enters not into the imagination.

Then I shall become non-existence: non-existence saith to me, (in tones loud) as an organ, *Verily unto Him shall we return*.³⁵³ (B.3901-3906)

Nicholson considers these verses to be the grand climax of the *Mathnawi*, in which everything is consumed until it returns back to the Origin, and becomes *fānī fi’llāh*.³⁵⁴

These successive annihilations and progressions are a type of *Mi’raj*, with the six stages of man corresponding loosely to the six Books of the *Mathnawi*. As such, Book Six emphasises annihilation of the angelic nature, to fully return to the realm of ‘adam; with the Quranic verses quoted clearly being interpreted as injunctions to attain to this level of *fana* and *baqa*. Additionally, Chittick argues that ‘inanimate things- which have descended through the same stages, from the Attributes to the world of dust- also find their *mi’rāj* through man. For man ingests them and integrates them into himself, and ultimately they are transformed into spirit.’³⁵⁵ In the same way that Book One portrayed the *fana* and *baqa* of creation as a constant dialogue continuing into eternity, so too does this section from Book Six. As discussed in Chapter One, Hakim contends that the idea of progressive immortality is unique to Rumi’s Sufism. Zarrabi-Zadeh also refers to the perpetual creation and destruction of the Universe, adducing that for Rumi, ‘The creative word of *kun* (‘Be!’) ...is heard in every moment since the beginning of time, in the form of *creatio continua*.’³⁵⁶

³⁵³ Quran 2. 151.

³⁵⁴ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III-VI Commentary*, p.99.

³⁵⁵ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, p.76.

³⁵⁶ Zarrabi-Zadeh, ‘Jalal al-Din Rumi’s Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation’, pp.36-37. ‘Every day He is engaged in some new affair’, Quran 55. 29. Bausani adds that, ‘the entire Quran bears perhaps even stronger

This *creatio continua* correlates with Schimmel's use of the term *creation ex nihilo*, to describe the repeated annihilations and rebirths constantly taking place in every moment of created existence. The end of the *Mathnawi* especially confirms that:

Rumi's central motif is the idea of *stirb und werde*, the permanent interplay of *fana*, 'annihilation' and *baqa*, 'eternal life' in God. The whole creation follows the law of dialectical movement...an uprising movement which continues not only throughout the life of sensual experience, but also in the otherworld: death is brought forth from life, life from death, as the Koran repeatedly attests (cf. Sura 3/27).³⁵⁷

In this sense, there is no end to the experience of *fana* and *baqa*. Bausani clarifies that although the *Unio Mystica* remains a mystery, 'it is not final annihilation...Death and effacement of the Ego is for Rumi only a preparatory degree to a more splendid rebirth and revival of which he can give only dim and vague hints.'³⁵⁸

Mirroring Book One again, Book Six advances *fana* and *baqa* as an altruistic, rather than an individualistic, endeavour. Rumi offers the following advice to the *salik*:

(All), whether men or women, in the whole world are continually in the death-agony and are dying.³⁵⁹

Regard their words as the (final) injunctions which a father gives that moment to his son,

That thereby consideration and pity may grow (in thy heart), so that the root of hatred and jealousy and enmity may be cut off.

Look on thy kinsman with that intention, so that thy heart may burn (with pity) for his death-agony.

"Everything that is coming will come": deem it (to have come) here and now, deem thy friend to be in the death-agony and in the act of losing (his life). (B.761-767)

Having annihilated his own self and realised the impermanent nature of the world, the gnostic can now break the fetters of perhaps the strongest form of bondage possible, enmity towards one's fellow man. Nicholson paraphrases these verses as follows:

"die to self, escape from the illusion of time, and then you will regard not only your neighbours but human beings in general as suffering the agony of death here and now, and your heart will be filled with compassion for them, no matter what evil they may speak of you."³⁶⁰

witness of a personalistic and activistic idea of God than other Scriptures.' Bausani, 'Theism and Pantheism in Rumi', p.19. The names of God also suggest this.

³⁵⁷ Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, p.320.

³⁵⁸ Bausani, 'Theism and Pantheism in Rumi', p.16.

³⁵⁹ In Book One, Rumi also appears to be saying: 'You are dying and returning every moment, every moment being renewed and life arriving anew, but in the body it seems continuous. The continuity comes from its swiftness; the swift motion caused by the action of Allah appears as duration. Even if you are learned and seek this mystery, ask Husam al-Din, who is a sublime book.' S. G. Safavi, *The Structure of Rūmī's Mathnawi*, p.119.

³⁶⁰ Nicholson, *The Mathnawi, Volume III-VI Commentary*, p.326.

Awareness of the greater Reality allows man to disregard the bitterness even of his adversaries, annihilating hatred and jealousy in the process. More importantly, like the Prophet, the gnostic is filled with compassion and himself becomes a mercy to mankind. Just as God's mercy is greater than His wrath, the annihilated mystic reflects the same attribute. He also encourages others to truth and patience,³⁶¹ like the child consumed by the fire of Love in Book One, who takes pity on his mother and others, the gnostic becomes a guide for others. So, we see that Rumi's allegiance to the Intoxicated School of Sufism is fully compatible with the wider humanitarian concerns of the Sober School. However, the *Mathnawi* emphasises the need for self-annihilation before one attempts to conquer the world, as Rumi says in Book Five alluding to Pharaoh: 'Beware, do not make (too much) haste: first become naught / and when you sink (into non-existence) rise from the radiant East! (B.4137). It is through *fana* and *baqa* that the Gnostic, 'is united with all creatures in their primitive mode of nonexistence, and his fathomless heart becomes the container of not only the *imago Dei* but also immeasurable images of all things in the divine presence.'³⁶²

The above section, from Book Six, reveals that the end of the *Mathnawi* serves as a final injunction to *fana* and *baqa*, but also returns us to the beginning of the process. Returning to the message in Book One, Rumi calls for the annihilation of the carnal self, in order to destroy evil itself. *Fana* and *baqa* are detailed as the 'fundamental principle' and the critical last steps that the *salik* must take, if he wishes to attain to mystical Union. Even the illuminated ascetic must transcend beyond his state of angelhood, by annihilating the last vestiges of reason, if he wants the gnosis of Abu Bakr and the Prophet. Rumi specifically indicates *fana fi-Pir* and *fana fi-Rasul* at this juncture, and the Prophet is presented as the Ultimate Man, characterised by the state of *Fana al-fana*. The Prophet's *Mi'raj* illustrates the various degrees of annihilation and subsistence, also mirrored in the evolutionary process. Mirroring Book One, the doctrine of *fana* and *baqa* is related here to God's continuous destruction and rebuilding of creation, with some suggestion that this active process continues well into eternity. Through the vision of gnosis, self-annihilation and subsistence in God also becomes an altruistic endeavour, capable of perfecting humanity. So, Rumi ends the passage with a call to cast out the idol of self and break the chain of incapacity, specifying a prayer for the reader to recite (B.766-774) to begin this practical

³⁶¹ As commanded in Quran 103.

³⁶² Zarrabi-Zadeh, 'Jalal al-Din Rumi's Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation', p.63.

undertaking. In no uncertain terms, Rumi stresses spiritual death and rebirth as a matter of urgency, issuing a particularly stark warning:

For years this death has been beating the drum, (but only when it is) too late is your ear moved (to listen).

In his agony he (the heedless man) cries from his (inmost) soul, "Alas, I am dying!" Has Death made you aware of himself (only) now?

Death's throat is exhausted with shouting: his drum is split with the astounding blows (with which it has been beaten).

(But) you enmeshed yourself in trivialities: (only) now have you apprehended the mystery of dying. (B.773-776)

Having examined Rumi's doctrine of *fana* and *baqa* in various passages and stories from each of the six Books of the *Mathnawi*, the following Conclusion now brings together the findings of thesis and proposes further research on emerging issues.

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to elucidate the core significance of the doctrine of *fana* and *baqa*, as Rumi's heuristic method, in the *Mathnawi*; and to assess the relationship of this finding to the overall structure and design of the poem.

Chapter One explained the main reasons and emerging issues prompting this thesis. It has long been held that the *Mathnawi* covers all the states and stations of Sufism. Observing the complexity and lack of consensus among Sufis regarding these states and stations, the doctrine of *fana* and *baqa*, considered to be among the highest, was outlined. This allowed us to establish the central significance of the doctrine in Sufism, and to reveal the interrelatedness of the terms with the more commonly researched doctrines of Ecstasy, Love, and Unity. Exploring the differences between the Sober and Intoxicated schools' interpretations of annihilation and subsistence also discovered the problem of viewing them as two distinct formulations. Alongside the influence of Bistami and Hallaj on Rumi's understanding of the doctrine, we examined the corpus of early Sufi manuals. It was shown that the various formulations therein depicted ascending degrees of *fana* and *baqa*, stressing the need to annihilate specific attributes at each stage. However, the many variations of the models presented by early Sufi masters was noted, and suggested limitations to any kind of comparative study. It was discovered that the complexity of the doctrine of *fana* and *baqa* has been poorly understood, and this thesis proposed to address this. It was necessary to clarify the theistic implications of mystical union, achieved through *fana* and *baqa*, as early Orientalists mistakenly described Rumi as a pantheist/monist, interpreting his theology in the light of Ibn' Arabi's doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*. However, we found that both mystics held firmly to the idea of *tawhid* and neither believed in Unity as the complete identification of creation with God, or vice versa.

Given the above complexities, a review of Rumi scholarship examined how *fana* and *baqa*, as presented in the *Mathnawi*, has previously been discussed in Western scholarship. A general movement from reductive to more nuanced readings over time was observed. The lack of discussion, limitations and shortcomings of early Orientalist studies, decrying the lack of any system to the *Mathnawi* was highlighted. Although later works began to act as correctives, emphasising the relationship of the doctrine to the fundamental principles of

Islam, no attention was paid to the development of the doctrine over the course of the poem. More recently, the significance of the doctrine to Rumi's overall message has been identified, alongside his emphasis on its practical application. But, only isolated verses have been examined to decipher Rumi's thoughts on annihilation and subsistence, and these are considered to be quite distinct from the systems presented in Sufi manuals, unrelated to the formal design of the poem. Although Chittick sees Rumi depicting three stages of self-transformation, and Lewis stresses the heuristic method of the *Mathnawi*, there is a dearth of detail as to the specific nature of these aspects and exactly how they are presented in the poem. A recent paper by Zarrabi-Zadeh proved an exception to this, cementing *fana* and *baqa* as the central practice of the *Mathnawi*, insisting on the practical, rather than the theoretical concerns of the work. Zarrabi-Zadeh evaluates the various aspects of *fana* in the poem and proposes that Rumi portrays a two-stage movement, with the first half of the poem related to inferior annihilation and the second half to superior annihilation. Nevertheless, Zarrabi-Zadeh only analyses isolated verses on *fana* and *baqa*, so does not uncover the wealth of specific 'instructions' that can be found on reading stories and passages in their entirety. Of great interest to this paper was Safavi's innovative suggestion of a structure to the *Mathnawi* based on ring-composition. The research, based on Rumi's injunction to value the whole (not just the part), is still in its infancy; but preliminary findings suggest that all the individual structural elements of the poem convey the process of spiritual transformation, and revolve around three types of self (*nafs*). The structural theory was noted as being limited in scope as a 'distant reading' of the poem and not being connected directly to *fana* and *baqa*. The controversial and incomplete nature of the research was also borne in mind. All the knowledge gaps identified above informed the need for a more thorough and detailed examination of the doctrine of annihilation and subsistence in the *Mathnawi*.

The key contributions of this thesis began with the mixed methodological approach adopted. Firstly; the sequential close reading of a story or section drawn from each of the six Books (taken to be illustrative of each Book) allowed us to build a more comprehensive and coherent picture of the doctrine's development, and to thread together Rumi's thoughts on *fana* and *baqa*. This also allowed us to pay attention to hermeneutics, context and to connect the doctrine to other aspects of Sufism. Secondly; building on the structural models and frameworks for reading the *Mathnawi*, literary criticism was combined with synoptic reading, merging the part with the whole.

The critical evaluation of select stories and passages from the *Mathnawi* clarified the interdependent nature of *fana* and *baqa*, which has been poorly understood in the West. The analyses upheld the influence of Rumi's predecessors, but showed that he has woven these together to create his own unique doctrine and method of *fana* and *baqa*. This thesis discovered a surprising affinity between Rumi's theory, generally associated with the Intoxicated School, and Junayd's Sober School definition of *fana* and *baqa*. It was particularly useful to observe Rumi's calls for altruism, after the attainment of selflessness. We observed the idea of repeated and successive annihilations informing Rumi's active process of spiritual transformation. We found that major Sufi doctrines (for example, free-will and predestination, existence, Love, Unity, ecstasy and Intoxication) were explained by Rumi in terms of *fana* and *baqa*, thus creating an interdependent web of meaning. It was garnered that Rumi intended the *Mathnawi* to prompt the reader into the practical undertaking of the process for himself, and was written as a pragmatic work to be used by the Sufi novice as a method to follow, showing his concern not just with theoretical ideals but also with practice. It was made clear that, for Rumi, the Way of annihilation and subsistence is inseparable from the fundamental principles of Islam, the Quran and Hadith. Rumi's particular emphasis on the Prophet, his companions and Saints, not only offered them up as examples to follow, but underlined the importance of achieving *fana* through a spiritual guide. It was also realised that the idea of *fana* and *baqa* extends beyond man to the whole of creation and the universe itself.

Each story/section described specific attributes in need of annihilation and offered particular practices for the wayfarer to follow. Book One was shown to be the first step in the wayfarer's journey, setting out the basic theory of *fana* and *baqa*, much like a Sufi training manual. Emphasis was placed on annihilating the carnal self and becoming the illuminated intellect. Book Two explained the theory of *fana fi-Sheikh* and addressed the vulnerability of the *salik* at this stage, continuing the call to transform the carnal self and become enlightened. Book Three marked the beginning of a turning point in the poem, as the wayfarer is transformed into the illuminated intellect through meeting the guide. Rumi then started to also call for the annihilation of the illuminated self, in order to subsist through Divine Love itself. The removal of the cognitive aspect of self ('I') was required at this juncture. Book Four contrasted asceticism with gnosis and called for the same annihilation of Book Three, but asked to go even further. Book Five looked back to annihilation of the carnal self, whilst aiming for subsistence in the Divine consciousness

and the vision of gnosis. Finally, Book Six returned to the self-effacement of the lowest form of carnal self, coupled with the example of Prophet as the ultimate personification of *fana* and *baqa*; and culminated by reflecting on all the steps taken. It was, therefore, shown that Rumi delineates a very definite heuristic method and system of *fana* and *baqa* over the course of the six Books, and that the *Mathnawi* can be used as a practical step by step guide to attain to the to the mystical goal of Union.

The findings of this thesis relate directly to, and build on, Safavi's theory regarding the *Mathnawi*'s synoptic structure, showing that in terms of *fana* and *baqa*: the six Books are paired sequentially (One and Two, Three and Four, Five and Six), but also have a chiasmic relationship (One and Six, Two and Five, Three and Four). At the same time, each individual Book also stands alone as a complete work, in so far as all stages of the process are covered therein. But, there is emphasis on inferior annihilation in first three Books, while the last three Books call for superior annihilation (with Books Three and Four acting as a turning point). The application of Safavi's propositions shows that his theory holds and that there is a need for synoptic reading to fully appreciate Rumi's heuristic method. As Safavi rightly notes, 'The *Mathnawi* is not just about spiritual training, it is spiritual training.'³⁶³

In respect of the critical analysis of six separate stories/sections from each Book of the *Mathnawi*, with a view to examining the doctrine and method of *fana* and *baqa*, and by relating the findings to the theory of synoptic structure; this thesis has made an original contribution to Rumi scholarship. Not only has the thesis contributed to our understanding of the doctrine and provided a more comprehensive evaluation of Rumi's thought, it acts as a corrective to certain neglected aspects in Western scholarship. It is recommended that these findings be borne in mind for any future research on Rumi and the *Mathnawi*, and that further analysis of each Book be made, in order to uncover the entirety of Rumi's doctrine and method of *fana* and *baqa*. A comparison of how annihilation and subsistence has been discussed in Eastern commentaries on the poem would no doubt also be a fruitful endeavour. Further investigation into the relationship of *fana* and *baqa* to the carefully crafted literary and structural forms of the *Mathnawi* would also prove beneficial and enhance our understanding of this epic poem.

³⁶³ See Safavi, *The Structure of Rūmī's Mathnawī*.

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