

Mary, figure of spiritual achievement in Rumi's teachings

Mary appears in several parts of the *Mathnawî* of Jalâl al-dîn Rûmî (ob. 1273) the great Persian speaking mystical poet of Konya in Seldjukide Empire. She is mentioned in every of the six volumes of *Mathnawî*, his huge didactic poem. However, it is in the third volume that her figure is more developed, and additionnaly in the second. The story of Mary appears as a major narrative of spiritual realisation, and moreover the last stages. Immediately comes to mind that in the patriarchal scenography of the Muslim world, a female character offers the image of full spiritual realisation, just as, in book three again, the homosexual lover of the King is also offering the representation of the perfect achieved Gnostic. These gendered presentations are not anecdotic. They play at the very core of what is happening in spiritual achievement and of what is really shown of God's presence. *Mathnawî* is a mystical work, a road journal and a literary work. The three of these aspects offer one of the strongest and most achieved examples mystical literature. On the level of literary achievement, Rûmî's literature is the most creative and richest work that has been written in Persian. As a mystical work it gives a huge synthesis of a systematic teaching of Sufism in a literary way, deconstructing through literature the construction of mystical speculative thought that is most of the time falling into dogmatic. As a road journal, Rûmî offers a mystical teaching that is already framed within an ongoing spiritual path. He warns the reader several times saying that who reads the *Mathnawî* enters a path from which he cannot get out without changes. Once again the didactic presentation of mystical thought is intertwined with a spiritual commitment that involves the reader in the path that is being shown to him. The reader cannot stand on the edge. He is captured by the flood of the path, in which *nolens volens* his reading includes him. It is once again a breaking of the dogmatism of spirituality that decay spirituality into mystical religion.

Many figures occur in the *Mathnawî*. Most of them are taken from religious sources. Some of them also come from events contemporary to Rûmî or from stories found in other books and historical events. One could ask why these figures and stories are found in the *Mathnawî*. It could be argued that Rûmî uses those stories to help explain spiritual matters. The instrumental interpretation of these figures being present in the text has some legitimacy. It cannot be immediately denied. But it offers an understanding of poetry, style and tropes that smells too much a classical scientific view of art that since Plato opposes art devoted to appearance to science that would be, on the contrary because there is art, the speech of truth, the neutral place where truth can occur in its simplicity and purity. If there is such an understanding in mystical dogmatic in Islam, there is also a strong tradition that goes back to Parmenides, which is still somehow present in Plato and revived in Nietzsche, that truth is an appearance, a phenomenon and that it delivers itself in a level of speech that is not exactly logos, but rather as it is used in Parmenides Poem, *mythos*, the speech that belongs to the Goddess who gives the teaching of truth. When Rûmî wants to write using didactic prose, he does it, like in *Fîhi mâ fih*. His choosing poetry to write cannot be just a didactic choice that would include illustrations of truths that could be exposed differently, let's say with the common concepts Sufism has inherited from philosophy and theology. There is a necessity of writing with stories and figures. This style cannot be separated not only from the way Rûmî teaches, but from the content and nature of his teachings. The figures are the body of this teaching. This is why the reader cannot enter in *Mathnawî* and get out of it without being contaminated, poisoned by the text. Rûmî's teaching is formal, embodied. There is not any more a clear separation of a form and a meaning since a meaning that wouldn't have a form wouldn't exist for the one to whom it is addressed. It is a question of transcendence and immanence. The transcendence is what is acting within

immanence, not what is opposed to it. It is playing within it in such a way that without this immanence there cannot be a transcendence and the immanence wouldn't have a meaning without the transcendence that happens within itself. Both things are dynamic, not dialectic, but permanently acting in one another. Immanence is always transcending and transcendence is always the immanence transcending immanence, so that it is a ongoing process of a thing's giving birth to itself.

Thus images are not anecdotic, neither are tropes. The path itself is tropic. Ad to the tropism of the path can only echo a tropism of the text. If the text is not tropic one cannot expect from the text to be the path. The text is not made to explain the path. It is not a description, or a speculative investigation about spirituality. It has no topic if by topic we understand a series of speculative questions that has to be dealt with to solve speculative problems, theological, religious or mystical, whatever. Like the Kuran, *Mathnawî* has no topics in this sense. Kuran qualifies itself as an explanation, an opening or a clearing (*bayân*) and it uses a language that is qualified being a clearing Arabic (*'arabiyyân mubînâ*). This clearing has no definite topic. Several times Kuran says that it gives an explanation of all things. All things is as indefinite as a whole. This encyclopedic ambition is too much embracing to be able to explain a specific topic. So is *Mathnawî*. It has no topic. But it has a subject. Rûmî states about Kuran and *Mathnawî* that its mere subject is "*nafs*" which means self, the self of myself, yourself, himself... This self that is compounded with pronouns, pronouns that cannot come to be known without being associated with a self, is the mere subject of the text. At the same time the text is pouring out of the self, says Rûmî. The text is the text of the self that it writes to know himself. The body of the text is the self, with all its figures, tropes and so on. It is not a text about the self. It is the self's text. It is the figure of the self addressed *nolens volens* to the self. So the tropes are not an illustration of an external didactic discourse that is supposed to give explanations about a psychological structure that can be called self. It is the embodied self, and there is no disembodied self, who reads the text it is writing. Reconsidering the text as the embodied self is the only way to escape from the dilemma between art and philosophy (or science), between appearance and being, and to give back to the text its real affectivity. The text is not a product. It is producing. It is the call that will be discussed later about Mary, the call that brings the dead back to life, another life, its textual, tropic life. To the radical devaluation of image that is the legacy of science and philosophy which gives only alternatives and reduces choice to a morality, Rûmî answers with a unified text that is precisely entirely image, because there is nothing but image addressed to the Gnostic who is merely an eye, a witnessing witnessed. To the alternative offered by language of speaking of unity in duality, betraying thus this unity spoken of, or remaining silent to keep unity from duality not allowing it to come to be witnessed, Rûmî gives the text that is both silent speaking as he says in *Mathnawî* : "*That unity is beyond description and condition: nothing comes into the arena of speech except duality. / Either, like the double seeing-man, drink in this duality, or close your mouth and be very silent; / Or (do both) in turns, now silence, now speech: beat the drum like him that sees double, and peace (be with you)! The friend is the support and refuge on the Way: when you consider well, the friend is the way.*" (VI, 2033-36).

Mary, as the other characters depicted on the basis of the Kuran, the Bible or other unknown sources such as what has been heard in conversations, is not a model. She is not caught in the structure that frames technique since Aristotle. *Mathnawî* is not a technical text in the sense that it would give a method of spiritual realization that should be followed. It is not technical. It is not programmatic and not normative. It is not a moral code. It escapes from the pattern of many mystical texts that are meant to giving a way, both instructing about how to get to realization and setting an institutional structure that is called a *tarîqat*, a brotherhood. Mystical texts often are

dogmatic in this sense that build the way, *tariq*, as a brotherhood, *tariqat*. The fall into dogmatism is there since it identifies the way, put it under a condition, a prerequisite that fails in bringing to an “end”, that is in fact a sort of a beginning, since it denies in institutionalizing the way the fact that this end cannot be but unconditioned. *Mathnawî* cannot be a method to this regard. If Mary is not a model a pattern to follow, it is also because the level of understanding that *Mathnawî* evolves in is not that of action. Would it be normative, it would impose an acting that follows a law. Thus it would be built on the level of law that it would make a prerequisite of spiritual achievement. This condition would by itself prevent from reaching the meanings that are depicted in the text. In other terms, law, *shari'at*, cannot be the condition of any spiritual achievement since this achievement needs to get rid of any conditioning, whether it be law or identity, and law is the way of building identity. The spiritual has nothing to do with having or having not the identity of being a Muslim. He is not qualified by any belonging. It is not even, of course, establishing a mystic method, on the level of the path, *tariqat*. It is rather depicting a process that is ongoing. It is the path itself, if by the path we hear that which is embodied by the traveler, and which is called the Beloved or companion as recalls Rûmî in the quotation mentioned above. As Rûmî says, “the path is the beloved (*yâr*)”. Since the Beloved has no limit and exceeds all the conditions since he is the source of those conditions, the way leads to freeing oneself from any conditioning. The entire *Mathnawî*, thus, is a description and not a program. It describes the traveler as this one who is the whole path. Hence, Mary is not a model, an example that should be followed. She is the traveler himself and the *Mathnawî* describes, as for all the other figures, the figure of the traveler as Mary. Thus *Mathnawî* is giving back to the self its own figures, painting the self with its own colours. He looks in the mirror of the *Mathnawî* and he sees Mary, Jesus, Muhammad, Iblîs, Pharaoh, and so on. All these are himself and *Mathnawî* is giving back these figures to their owner that is the traveler who is seeing himself while he has already achieved his spiritual path. Thus *Mathnawî* is speaking on the level of Gnosis that is the knowledge of truth, *haqiqat*. Mary must not be understood here as a historical character of holy books that speak of the past, but as the actual being of any Gnostic. And Rûmî insists several times on the fact that understanding the Kuran as a historical book is missing and betraying what is achieved through this book¹. Mary is the figure in him of a meaning that has to be achieved through this figure and cannot be achieved without it.

Mary offers precisely the occasion of clarifying this point in a passage of *Mathnawî*, II, 3602-3624.

The mother of Yahyá, before disburdening herself (of him), said in secret to Mary,

“I see (it) with certainty, within thee is a King who is possessed of firm purpose and is an Apostle endowed with knowledge (of God).

When I happened to meet thee, my burden (the unborn child) at once bowed in worship.

3605 This embryo bowed in worship to that embryo, so that pain arose in my body from its bowing.”

Mary said, “I also saw² within me a bowing performed by this babe in the womb.”

On raising a difficulty as to this story.

The stupids say, “Cancel this tale, because it is false and erroneous.

Mary in (her) pregnancy was not joined (met) by any one: she did not return from without the town.

Until that woman of sweet address was delivered outside of the town, she indeed came not into it.

3610 When she had given birth to him, she then took him up in her lap and carried him to her kinsfolk.

Where did the mother of Yahyá see her to speak these words to her about what had happened?”

The answer to the difficulty.

Let him (the objector) know that to one who receives ideas (from God) all that is absent in the world is present.

¹ See for instance *Mathnawî*, III, 1145-1152.

² I change some words of Nicholson’s translation so as to be closer to the original Persian text.

*To Mary, the mother of Yahyá would appear present, though she was far from her (bodily) sight.
 One may see a friend (even) with eyes shut, when one has made the skin (the bodily envelope) a lattice (to let in spiritual ideas).
 3615 And if she saw her neither from without nor from within, take the (essential) meaning of the story, O imbecile!
 Not like him who had heard (some) fables, and like sh stuck to the (literal) shape of them*,
 So that he would say, "How should Kalila, having no language, hear words from Dimna who had no power of expression?
 And (even) if they knew each other's accents, how should man understand it (their talk), (since it was) without any articulation?
 How did Dimna become a messenger between the lion and the ox, and cajole them both with his palaver*?
 3620 How did the noble ox become the vizier of the lion? How was the elephant terrified by the reflection of the moon?
 This Kalila and Dimna is entirely fiction, or else how has the stork a quarrel with the crow?"
 O brother, the story is like a measure: the real meaning in it resembles grain (in the measure).
 The man of intelligence will take the grain of meaning: he will not pay any regard to the measure, (even) if it is removed (altogether).
 Listen to what passes between the rose and the nightingale, though in that case there is no overt speech.*

The story that tells Rûmî is entitled: "*How Yahyá**, on whom be peace, in his mother's womb bowed in worship to the Messiah (Jesus), on whom be peace." The real goal of the story is not what tells the title. Mary, here is the occasion given to address the problem of reading *Mathnawî*, which is the nature of the narratives and the figures that weave the cloth of the book, that is of the path. It also gives the standard of reading Holy Scriptures with a spiritual insight, since Rûmî says in other places that *Mathnawî* is the Kuran. Let's remind that the stupid who are objecting are a fictional objector to the story designated with the plural. And this fictional objector is himself accusing Rûmî to build a fiction with his story of the encountering between Jesus in the womb of Mary and Yahyâ in the womb of his mother. The stupid don't object to the mutual bowing of the embryos but to the meeting of the two mothers. The characters of the narrative are caught within the objection raised by Rûmî and his counter-objection, so that they are part of both objection and counter-objection. The structure reinforces the exteriority of the stupid. They are plural and they are caught within the bodily sight which is the characteristic of the man who has not passed from the level of animal to the level of simply starting to walk towards his humanhood. His exteriority to the story, and he is in the periphery of the story itself within the whole narrative from which he cannot escape anyway, and his designating the story as a fiction is in fact the way he puts himself outside of the story and prevents himself to see what the protagonists and the writer of the story are seeing. His presuming knowing the difference between illusion and reality is the sign of his own being a fiction. The story reverses the order of illusion and reality. The one who denounces fiction is rejected back to his being fictional. It is easy to decipher that the stupid is the one who is dominated by his imperative self, *nafs-e ammâre*, of which he is unaware though he feels there is something like this since he uses the category of differentiating illusion from reality. However he cannot recognize this fiction within himself and sees it outside. His denouncing of illusion is the fiction he is writing in which he is the main character, while the writer of the story, namely Rûmî, is including him within the whole narrative in which he plays a necessary part. The inclusion of the objection of the imperative self within the narrative is the way the writer recognizes this dimension of the self as the necessary counterpart of the presentation of what is certainty. Mary and Yahyâ's mother are those who have sight, though they have it on a different level. Rûmî qualifies Yahya's mother's knowledge as certitude (*yaqîn*). Moreover, the text gives the further precision: *yaqîn didam*, I had the certainty through seeing. Mary is saying later that she saw within herself the bowing of her child. It is not

useful here to go further in discussing the levels of both Mary and Yahyâ's mother and their link to their respective child, the Messiah who is recognized as a king and possessed of firm purpose and Yahyâ who is the living one. Each of them gives a bowing to the other and each of the mothers is pregnant of their own spiritual level. The link between the mothers and the children is hidden to the eyes of the stupid who doesn't see it. The children are hidden but their presence as being hidden is visible just as the relation between the two mothers is visible. But this link depends on the invisible link between the two children. Seeing this invisible is the condition of bearing witness to the visible and not the contrary. The stupid cannot see the visible thing since he has no access to the invisible, which is the meaning of the visible encounter between the two mothers. The reversion of the relation between the invisible and the visible in the story echoes to the inversion of the relation between the fiction and the reality that opposes the objector to his counter-objector. The structure of the narrative intends to create this inversion within the mind of the reader, that is Hüsâmeddîn. If the recognition of the invisible link that exists between the mother and the child and between the children is what makes visible the events told in the story, the invisible link between the disciple and his master is the condition to be the place of creation of the story. In other terms the links that are described in the story are the links that should exist between the reader and the writer and between the reader and his carrying his own child so that the story becomes real. Otherwise, he is rejected back to the objection one way or another, either he objects openly to it or he hears it as a tale. Mary appears not to be a model, an example that should be followed and the purpose of the stories is not to give examples since these examples fall under the objection of the stupid. Examples are like laws, they impose to be obeyed to because of their form which gives them the necessary authority that can be recognized. Like laws they are always put on the ground of externality and duality. The laws offer two choices, being obedient or disobedient. Disobedience take advantage of a denial of their form, which is in this case objecting to the reality of the story and driving it back to fiction. Rûmî's aim is not to give back the story a formal basis that could restore its authority. This is impossible. He is showing through Mary how the story becomes powerful for the one who has reached the level of certainty through vision. Being the true reader of the story is being able to see what occurs in the story, to see the story as if it happens in front of the reader, being a witness of his own present. The presence of Yahyâ's mother in front of Mary is the presence of Hüsâmeddîn who is carrying his own being the living one bowing to the king who possesses the firm purpose, that is his own direction and orientation, to Rûmî/Mary, nearly an anagram, who is carrying his already born kingship while not yet visible to his disciple. Mary, thus is the exemplification of what means writing the *Mathnawî*. She is the one who is recognized by Yahyâ's mother as her own writer. The one who sees first in the story, who recognizes what is happening is precisely Yahyâ's mother. Mary's recognition comes second. The disciple names his master so that his master recognizes who he is. However the master is the one who writes the whole story. He is the one who is present within Mary and for which she is preparing herself. In this sense, Mary is the image of the reader if he can see, since Mary is precisely this one who sees what is in her womb and who is offered to a witnessing by another mother, someone like her who has sight. This reproduction of witnessing on several levels with its specific timing is precisely the position of the reader, or rather the listener of the story who is witnessing the presence of the story in himself, or to be clearer his being Mary and Jesus, as well as his being Yahyâ's mother and Yahyâ bowing in front of the Jesus who he is. Like Rûmî says in *Mathnawî*, IV: (2140-2143) "His form has passed away and he has become a mirror: naught is there but the form (image) of the face of another. If you spit (at it), you spit at your own face; and if you strike at the mirror, you strike at yourself; And if you see an ugly face (in that mirror), 'tis you; and if you see Jesus

and Mary, 'tis you". The text is the mirror in which the reader sees himself. The writer describes nothing that is not in himself. What the reader sees in what he reads is nothing but what the writer offers him to witness of his own understanding. Mary is here the form through which the reader knows him as the seeing one. But he is also the witness of this Jesus who is himself. He is both Mary and Jesus. He is Mary if he can bear witness to what is offered to his sight. As Mary he is this one who has certainty through seeing. As Jesus, he is this king who gives life to the dead who is buried in the womb" of his mother and yet living in this womb, Yahyâ, as says Rûmî in *Mathnawî I*: (1910) "That the breath of Jesus may revive thee and make thee fair and blessed as itself.". All those different characters in the story is what is seen by the one who is experiencing spiritual realization in this specific level. Mary appears here to be both the witnessed character and the listener who is witnessing himself as Mary. This division that allows to see Mary is the way through which unity of the being is realized.

The first book of *Mathnawî* stresses on the fact that something was bestowed to Mary and that this bestowal is the result of God's call. Rûmî describes how this call occurs and what it produces with many details. The call of God is what produces resurrection. The dead soul is resurrected through this call. The bestowal is the resurrection of the soul. But what is resurrected is not the soul and the body as they were buried, but a soul with other qualities. To avoid any ambiguousness, the use of the word resurrection carries with it a lot of impressions and representations that all belong to the world of the stupid who sees resurrection according to his level, purely physical. The death of the soul, here, and its metaphorical representation through the resurrection of the body, providing that the whole structure of being is metaphorical, doesn't mean the death of the Inness of the individual but rather the death of his own understanding of his Inness according to his level. He is dying to his level of comprehension that doesn't allow him to see his Inness as it is. Other qualities of his Inness are not new qualities but the unveiling of the truth of his qualities that his being prisoner of his imaginary representations that occur from his illusionary Inness prevented him to witness. The witnessing of Jesus by Mary and its recognition by Yahyâ's mother that is repeating the couple between Muhammad and Abû Bakr names exactly this process. It is not surprising that, after Mary had shaped the way unveiling works for the people of spirituality, she appears again to describe the process of death and resurrection. Rûmî's description takes use of the famous *hadîth al-nawâfil* that speaks of the coming nearer to God of the servant through the supererogatory deeds³.

1930 Hark! for the saints are the Isrâfîls of the (present) time: from them to the dead comes life and freshness.

At their voice the dead souls in the body's grave start up in their winding-sheets.

He (that is thus awakened) says, "This voice is separate from (all other) voices: to quicken (the dead) is the work of the voice of God.

We (had) died and were entirely decayed: the call of God came: we all arose."

The call of God, (whether it be) veiled or unveiled, bestows that which He bestowed on Mary from His bosom.

1935 O ye who are rotten with death (in your hearts) underneath the skin, return from non-existence at the voice of the Friend!

³ "My servant draws near to Me through nothing I love more than that which I have made obligatory for him. My servant never ceases drawing near to Me through supererogatory Works until I love him. Then, when I love him, I am his hearing through which he hears, his sight through which he sees, his hand through which he grasps, and his foot through which he walks", Bukhârî, *Riqâq* 38.

Absolutely, indeed, that voice is from the King (God), though it be from the larynx of God's servant.

He (God) has said to him (the saint), "I am thy tongue and eye; I am thy senses and I am thy good pleasure and thy wrath.

Go, for thou art (he of whom God saith), 'By Me he hears and by Me he sees': thou art the (Divine) consciousness (itself): what is the occasion (propriety) of (saying), 'Thou art the possessor of the (Divine) consciousness'?

Since thou hast become, through bewilderment, 'He that belongs to God,' I am thine, for 'God shall belong to him.'

Mary appears there to be the place of resurrection. Eventually, Rûmî gives here a qualification to the saints (*awliyâ*), a word he uses very rarely in Mathnawî. As in other places, he gives them angelic qualities, which are required to be an actor. Angels are forces within the individual though they can sometimes be visualized. The saint has a power to act, and this power is a force that is shaped to act only under God's command. This is why these forces are designated as angelic forces. What a saint does as a command of God is from two aspects through angelic forces: first because angels are forces, second because he acts in this way only through the command of God. This is why the one who is resurrected by the voice of the saint says that it is the voice of God that resurrected him. The saint acts as an angel sent by God and acting only under the command of God. So what the resurrected hears there is the commander and not the angel or the saint acting with this quality. Mary is described along with the first description given above as the one who receives. She is part of the whole description of the process through which the disciple is resurrected, which means that he stands up from the place where he was lying. The text describes the grave as being the body of the person. It doesn't mean necessarily the physical body that everyone opposes to the soul, on the basis of the common division of body and soul. The body is not a bodily thing in the sense that it would have a bodily substance opposed to another substance that would be external to it. Rûmî says it several times. You can put a thing in the fire, its form will change but its essence will remain though you cannot identify this essence through its qualities and form. Essence is not what can be described through categories. The body, seen as bodily, is a construction of imagination, just like the soul and their opposition. Body is a way we project with our imagination a specific signification that is its essence. In Mathnawî III when dealing with the story of Mary encountering Gabriel, Rûmî says (3780-3788):

"There is no bane worse than ignorance: thou art with thy Friend and dost not know how to make love.

Thou art deeming thy Friend a stranger: upon a joy thou hast bestowed the name of a grief."

Such a date-palm, which is our Friend's favour—since we are robbers, His date-palm is our gallows.

Such a musky (fragrant) object, which is the tress of our Prince—since we are demented, this (tress) is our chain.

3785 Such a (Divine) grace is flowing like a Nile—since we are Pharaohs, it is becoming like blood.

The blood is saying, "I am water. Beware, do not spill (me)! I am (really) Joseph, (but) you make me the wolf, O contentious man."

Don't you see that a long-suffering friend becomes like a snake when you have grown hostile to him?

His flesh and fat (real nature) is unchanged: ('tis) only in appearance (that) he has become so evil."

The text is clear enough to show that the body is thought to be an enemy because it is seen like this. In other words, the body is how we see it. It can be seen as evil. It can be seen as Mary. And it is the way it is presented in Rûmî's *Fîhi mâ fîh*: "The body is like Mary and everyone of

us has a Jesus within. Until the pangs manifest our Jesus is not born. If the pangs never come, our Jesus rejoins his origin by the same secret path through which he came, leaving us empty, without the birth of our true self⁴. The text shows how operates the inversion of sight. The one who possesses a clear view sees the things as they are, according to Muhammad's prayer. It depends only of what we are as shows the text. If we are Mary, endowed with certainty through vision we can see those things as they are, the date-palm as a God's favour, the musky object as the tress of the Prince, the Nile as the Grace? But since we are thieves, stupid and Pharaohs we see these things opposite to what they are. In other terms, it is what we are that makes the same thing appear in a way or another, because as Rûmî says we are only an eye.

The body in which remains the resurrected until his resurrection is Mary here, though Rûmî speaks under the cover of allusions. It gives another dimension to this body. The structure thus puts together three elements, to which a fourth is added though it is internal to it: the dead, the body, the saint. Mary is the body, the dead is the one who is in her womb, Jesus, and the saint is the one who makes Jesus stand up out of Mary. Mary is the place where the resurrected waits for his resurrection, and this resurrection is provoked by the voice of the saint. Resurrection is through hearing thus. The voice of the saint tells the listener something that has such an efficiency that it wakes him up. If we link this point to the first depiction of Mary above, we can easily understand that the saint who is speaking here is none other than Rûmî himself, whose story is what he makes appear within his disciple Hüsâmeddîn. Once again, Mary appears to be a main key to understand how Rûmî presents his voice and what power he attributes to it. His text is the speech through which his disciple finds his resurrection.

The long story of Mary's encountering with Gabriel in *Mathnawî* III (3700-3788) offers a long discussion of the meeting between the master and his disciple. It depicts the crucial moment of the first encounter that leads to the appearing of Jesus. In other terms, the encounter between Mary and Gabriel qualified as the life-giver, is the encounter between the future disciple and the master, it is also already the encounter between Jesus and Mary, since Jesus is precisely the life-giver. Mary is caught in her own self-understanding, which is essentially bodily, physical. She lives in the physical realm that is based on transcendence, separation, duality. Body is what distinguishes an individual from another. The visible transcendence is based on immanence, but this immanence is hidden within transcendence so that it cannot be witnessed without a teaching. When Mary sees Gabriel, while even Joseph, as Rûmî states, would have cut his hand like the women in front of his beauty in Egypt, she seeks refuge in a separate place. She doesn't even see the beauty of Gabriel because of her being completely drawn into the transcendence of bodies. She thinks herself as a body and Gabriel as another body who is a danger for the integrity of her identity which her body of which the meaning is being transcendent. So she runs from a transcendence to another transcendence that is thought to be the keeper of transcendence, the highest stage of transcendence. Briefly said, she takes refuge in the law against Gabriel. It means that the first veil to spiritual training, to resurrection is precisely law. Since she is identified to the body, Mary designates not the body as everyone sees it through his own imagination, but the body as it should be seen if it is properly understood through mystical knowledge. In other terms, Mary is the reality of the body that is veiled to everyone who considers it through imagination and despising it. Again, we can see how the Kuranic character works within Rûmî's text. Mary is both the body in its truth that is unveiled to the reader who is initiated by his master, the writer,

⁴ *Fîhî mâ fîhî*, ed. 'Îsâ 'Alî al-'Akûb, Beyrouth, 2001, p. 54 ; *Discourses of Rumi*, transl. A. Arberry, discourse 5, p. 38.

and the unveiling process itself. If Mary is seen as a symbol, she is created through imagination as a separate substance from the reader. If she is seen as a historical character, she is also seen as a separate substance that no longer exists, and that annihilates even her historical reality. She must be seen as the reality of the reader as it is unveiled to him in the mirror that is the text. Mary appears then to be both the truth of the reader's self that he is witnessing in a text that is speaking to him in a real sohbet (discussion and company) and the pattern on which spiritual education is shaped and acts really within the reader if he can see the text as the text-book of his own giving birth to the Jesus of his being who is breathed in him by the writer, Rûmî himself.

Mary thus is revealing how the physical realm functions and is shaped within its relation with law (*shari'at*). She is giving a lesson about how the law is principally a veiling that protects the spiritual truth. She takes refuge through the law in God, a God that is shaped by law. And this taking refuge in God through the law is a way of placing God in transcendence in such a way that her existence and integrity as a body can be protected from immanence of its spiritual meaning. In other terms, the law helps establishing the borders through which God's unity can be manifested as a multiplicity of unities and protect this multiplicity from any attempt to annihilate their transcendence, because without this transcendence there can be no keeping of the unities in their multiple divisions. However, Mary opens also the way to the spiritual path. She protects herself from an attempt that would annihilate the integrity of her self, i.e. of God's unity as manifested in its singularity through her singularity that imposes to her this duty to protect this manifestation through law. This is the first step through which a path can be open since there is no training if the basis of it, the existence and recognition of a single individual person, is not affirmed. The second basis of this path consists in the fact that she protects herself against falling in love and having sexual intercourse with someone who is not lawful for her. This doesn't mean that, as many would think immediately, respecting law is the condition to enter the spiritual path. Because it would imply that path would be in continuity with law and hence spiritual achievement would be under the condition of law, while it is unconditioned. The text itself dismisses this interpretation since Gabriel is obliged to enter a long discussion to prove that he is the opposite of what she sees through the eyes of law. The verses quoted above (3781-8) can be surprising because Gabriel, the holy spirit that corresponds to this spiritual level, of Jesus, opposes the sight of the evil-doer (robber, Pharaoh...) to his own sight, let's say the sight of the Gnostic. Where does Mary stand here, her who is taking refuge in law against the Holy Spirit? Let's remember that she precisely doesn't see the Holy Spirit. She sees a man whom she supposes is a sinner who wants to rape her and for whom she has a physical inclination. Seeing through law is this in fact. Mary is the way we act towards God when we act as law prescribes us to act. She is, in this stage, our blindness that is established and shaped by law. Where does Mary stand? She sees herself and Gabriel through law, which means that she sees herself and Gabriel as sinners. And this is precisely what requires law. But seeing the world like this, the trees of which the palm-tree is the meaning, the river of which the Nile is the meaning..., is separating the world from God, not seeing that this world that appears bad to the lawful seeing is in its all God's manifestation and has no separate being from God. In other terms, law is what divides and prevents from reaching unity. This is why path cannot be in continuation with law. Gabriel doesn't tell her that she is right to take refuge in God's law. On the contrary, he shows how ridiculous it is. Entering the path requires that Mary recognizes her source, the one who is making herself pregnant of herself. She has to renounce her integrity in the terms that this integrity means that she is self-sufficient and a separate substance that is achieved. Being Mary means to enter the process of transcending ourselves in ourselves by witnessing the ongoing excess or overflowing above the limits of what we see as this limited thing being a being that

belongs to us. The excessive beauty of Gabriel that appears to herself is the only way that the borders of her being that are raised by the law can be overcome, destroyed so that she can get to her self pregnancy. In other terms, Gabriel is the Messiah of her being as much as Jesus is her being the Messiah.

Mathnawî III (3204-3212) shows that there is no possibility for the disciple to obtain what he needs if he doesn't ask for it. The wish comes from the disciple not from the master even if finally it is the master who wishes in the disciple.

Mathnawî II depicts Mary as the model of the seeker of knowledge who is going to his dwelling place like Mary went to palm-tree because of the pains of the childhood.

Mathnawi, II :

I said, "O heart, seek the Universal Mirror, go to the Sea: the business will not succeed (be successfully accomplished) by means of the river."

In this quest thy slave (at last) arrived at thy dwelling-place, (as) the pains (of childbirth) drew Mary to the palm-tree.

When thine eye became an eye for my heart, my blind heart went and became drowned in vision.

100 I saw that thou art the Universal Mirror unto everlasting: I saw my own image in thine eye.

I said, "At last I have found myself: in his eyes I have found the shining Way."

The Universal Soul came into contact with the partial (individual) soul, and the (latter) soul received from it a pearl and put it into its bosom.

Through that touch on its bosom the (individual) soul became pregnant, like Mary, with a heart-beguiling Messiah,

1185 Not the Messiah who is (a traveller) on land and water, (but) the Messiah who is beyond (the limitation of) measuring (space).

So when the soul has been impregnated by the Soul of soul, by such a soul the world is impregnated.

Then the world gives birth to another world, and displays to this congregated people a place of congregation (for the realities which are raised to life).

Though I should speak and recount till the Resurrection, I lack the power to describe this (spiritual) resurrection.

These sayings (of mine), indeed, are really an "O Lord" (a prayer addressed to God); the words are the lure for the breath of a sweet-lipped One.

1190 How, then, should he (that seeks the answer) fail (to pray)? How should he be silent, inasmuch as "Here am I" is (always) coming in response to his "O Lord"?

It is a "Here am I" that you cannot hear, but can taste (feel and enjoy) from head to foot.

Matnawi III :

Explaining that whatsoever God most High bestowed and created— the heavens and the earths and the substances and the accidents— He created all (this) at the demand of need, and that one must make one's self in need of a thing, so that He may bestow it; for “... Or He who answers the sorely distressed when he calls unto Him?” Sore distress is the evidence of worthiness (to receive the Divine bounty).

'Twas Mary's want and pain that made such a babe (as Jesus) begin to speak (in the cradle).

3205 Part of her spoke on her behalf without her: every part of thee hath speech in secret.

Thy hands and feet become witnesses (against thee), O slave: how long wilt thou set hand and foot (strenuously apply thyself) to denial?

And if thou art not worthy of (hearing) the exposition and the speech, the rational soul of the speaker saw thee (to be unworthy) and went to sleep (refrained from action).

Whatsoever grew has grown for the sake of the needy, in order that a seeker may find the thing he sought.

If God most High has created the heavens, He has created them for the purpose of removing needs.

3210 Wherever a pain is, the cure goes thither; wherever a poverty is, the provision goes thither.

Wherever a difficult question is, the answer goes thither; wherever a ship is, the water goes thither.

Do not seek the water, (but) get thirst, so that the water may gush forth from above and below.

The appearance of the Holy Spirit (Gabriel) in the shape of a man to Mary when she was undressed and washing herself, and how she took refuge with God.

3700 Before the slipping away of your possessions, say to the form (of created things), like Mary, “(I take) refuge from thee with the Merciful (God).”

Mary in her chamber saw a form that gave increase of life— a life-increasing, heart-ravishing one.

That trusted Spirit rose up before her from the face of the earth, like the moon and the sun.

Beauty unveiled rose up from the earth (in) such (splendour) as the sun rises from the East.

A trembling came over Mary's limbs, for she was undressed and was afraid of evil.

3705 ('Twas) such a form that if Joseph had beheld it plainly, he would have cut his hand in amazement, like the (Egyptian) women.

It blossomed from the earth like a rose before her—like a phantasy which lifts its head from the heart.

Mary became selfless (beside herself), and in her selflessness she said, “I will leap into the Divine protection,”

Because that pure-bosomed one had made a habit of betaking herself in flight to the Unseen.

Since she deemed the world a kingdom without permanence, she prudently made a fortress of that (Divine) Presence,

3710 In order that in the hour of death she should have a stronghold which the Enemy would find no way to attack.

She saw no better fortress than the protection of God: she chose her abiding place near to that castle.

When she beheld those amorous reason-destroying glances whereby hearts were ever being pierced (as) by arrows—

King and army are enthralled by Him, the sovereigns of wit (intelligence) are made witless by Him;

Hundreds of thousands of kings are held in servitude by Him; hundreds of thousands of full-moons He hath given over to (love's) wasting fever;

3715 Zuhra hath not the courage to breathe (a word); Universal Reason, when it sees Him, humbles itself.

...

3765 If the fingers be always closed or entirely (invariably) open, he (their owner) is like an afflicted person.

His work and action is regulated by these two qualities: these two conditions are (as) important for him as the bird's wings (to the bird).

When Mary was all at once dismayed, like those fishes on land,

[How the Holy Spirit said to Mary, "I am sent to thee by God: be not agitated and do not hide from me, for this is the (Divine) command."]

The Exemplar of (Divine) Bounty cried out to her, "I am the trusted (messenger) of the Lord: be not afraid of me.

Do not turn thy head away from the exalted (favourites) of (Divine) Majesty, do not withdraw thyself from such goodly confidants."

3770 He was saying this, and (meanwhile) from his lips a wick (ray) of pure light was going up to Simák (Arcturus) step by step (uninterruptedly).

"Thou art fleeing from my existence into non-existence (the Unseen World): in non-existence I am a King and standard-bearer.

Verily, my home and dwelling-place is in non-existence: solely my (outward) form is before the Lady (Mary).

O Mary, look (well), for I am a difficult form (to apprehend): I am both a new moon and a phantasy in the heart.

When a phantasy comes into thy heart and settles (there), it is (still) with thee wheresoever thou fleest—

3775 Except an unsubstantial and vain phantasy which is one that sinks (and disappears) like the false dawn.

I am of the light of the Lord, like the true dawn, for no night prowls around my day.

Hark, do not cry Lá hawl against me, O daughter of 'Imrán, for I have descended hither from Lá hawl.

Lá hawl was my origin and sustenance—the light of that Lá hawl which was prior to the spoken word.

Thou art taking refuge from me with God: I am in eternity the image of (Him who is) the (only) refuge.

3780 I am the refuge that was oft (the source of) thy deliverance. Thou takest refuge (from me), and I myself am that refuge.

There is no bane worse than ignorance: thou art with thy Friend and dost not

know how to make love.

Thou art deeming thy Friend a stranger: upon a joy thou hast bestowed the name of a grief.”

Such a date-palm, which is our Friend's favour—since we are robbers, His date-palm is our gallows.

Such a musky (fragrant) object, which is the tress of our Prince—since we are demented, this (tress) is our chain.

3785 Such a (Divine) grace is flowing like a Nile—since we are Pharaohs, it is becoming like blood.

The blood is saying, “I am water. Beware, do not spill (me)! I am (really) Joseph, (but) you make me the wolf, O contentious man.”

Don't you see that a long-suffering friend becomes like a snake when you have grown hostile to him?

His flesh and fat (real nature) is unchanged: (’tis) only in appearance (that) he has become so evil.

Mathnawi, IV :

2140 His form has passed away and he has become a mirror: naught is there but the form (image) of the face of another.

If you spit (at it), you spit at your own face; and if you strike at the mirror, you strike at yourself;

And if you see an ugly face (in that mirror), ’tis you; and if you see Jesus and Mary, ’tis you.

He is neither this nor that: he is simple (pure and free from attributes of self): he has placed your image before you.

When the discourse reached this point, it closed its lips; when the pen reached this point, it broke to pieces.

3495 For it may be that the lock of this heart will be opened and that a place will be (granted) to this ugly one at the banquet of the beautiful.

Through thee the deformed may become endowed with beauty, or an Iblis may again become one of the Cherubim;

Or, by the august influence of Mary's hand, the withered bough may acquire the fragrance of musk and freshness and fruit.”

Mathnawi, V :

285 He who was quivering from ravenous hunger beheld, like Mary, the fruit of Paradise.

The fruit of Paradise sped to his body: his Hell-like belly gained repose.

The essence of the Faith is a mighty blessing and exceedingly delicious food, O thou who art content with naught of the Faith but the profession!

1190 Like Mary: she had (heartfelt) pain, but no seed: an artful One made green that (withered) palm-tree (for her sake).

Because that noble Lady was loyal (to God), God gave unto her a hundred desires without desire on her part.

The company who have been loyal are given superiority over all (other) sorts (of men).

Seas and mountains are made subject to them; the four elements also are the slaves of that class.

This (miraculous power) is only a favour (conferred on them) for a sign, to the end that the disbelievers may see it plainly.

3855 How would an inorganic thing disappear (by change) into a plant? How would vegetive things sacrifice themselves to become (endowed with) spirit? How would the spirit sacrifice itself for the sake of that Breath by the waft whereof a Mary was made pregnant?

Each one (of them) would be (as) stiff and immovable as ice: how should they be flying and seeking like locusts?

Every mote is in love with that Perfection and hastening upward like a sapling. Their haste is (saying implicitly) "Glory to God!" They are purifying the body for the sake of the spirit.

Mathnawi, VI :

1290 A dry-lipped bough is changed into a flourishing palm-tree by the burning (anguish) of a Mary.

O (you who are like the) old woman, how long will you strive with the (Divine) destiny? Seek the cash now: let by-gones be.

Since your face hath no hope of (acquiring) beauty, you may either put rouge (on it) or, if you wish, ink.

How excellent is the Messiah's table of food without stint! How excellent is Mary's fruit (that was produced) without an orchard!

Miracles (proceeding) from the spirit of the perfect (saint) affect the soul of the seeker as life (bestowed on the dead).

The miracle is (like) the sea, and the deficient (heedless) man is (like) the landbird (which perishes in the sea); (but) the water-bird is safe from destruction there.

1310 It (the miracle) bestows infirmity on any one that is uninitiated, but it bestows power on the spirit of an intimate.

1805 There is no pregnancy without (past) rapture and amorous sport: how should the orchard produce (fruit) without a Spring?

The pregnant (trees) and the children on their laps are evidence of dalliance with the Spring.

Every tree (engaged) in suckling its children is impregnated, like Mary, by a King unseen.

Although in (boiling) water the heat of fire is concealed (from view), a hundred thousand bubbles froth upon it,

And though the fire works very secretly, the froth indicates (its presence) with

ten fingers.

1810 In like manner (all) the parts of those intoxicated with union are pregnant with the (ideal) forms of (ecstatic) feelings and words.

Their mouths remain gaping (in amazement) at the beauty of (that) ecstasy, (while) their eyes are absent (withdrawn) from the forms of this world.

Those (spiritual) progenies are not (produced) by means of these four (elements); consequently they are not seen by these eyes.

Those progenies are born of (Divine) illumination; consequently they are covered (from sight) by a pure veil.

We said "born," but in reality they are not born, and this expression is only (used) in order to guide (the understanding).

1815 Hark, be silent that the King of Say may speak: do not play the nightingale with a Rose of this kind.

A Rustam may (sometimes) have been concealed in a woman's body, as (was the case with) a Mary; (but) only seldom.

1885 Similarly, women are (sometimes) concealed in men's bodies, and they (such men) are (virtually) female because of (their) faintness of heart.

In that world, if any one has not found in his manhood the capacity (for spiritual combat), his feminality takes (visible) shape.

4545 Clad in (fresh) robes and trailing their skirts, drunken and dancing and jubilant and scattering perfume;

Every part (of them) impregnated by royal Spring, their bodies as caskets filled with pearly fruit;

(Like) Maries, having no husband, yet big with a Messiah; silent ones, wordless and devoid of articulate expression,

(Saying implicitly), "Our Moon hath shone brightly (upon us) without speech: every tongue hath derived its speech from our beauty."

The speech of Jesus is (derived) from the (spiritual) beauty of Mary; the speech of Adam is a ray (reflexion) of the (Divine) Breath.

4550 (This thanksgiving of the orchard is a lesson to you) in order that from (your) thanksgiving, O men of trust, increase (of spiritual glory) may accrue;

(and if ye give thanks) then other plants are (springing up) amidst the herbage.

Here the reverse (of the well-known Tradition) is (applicable), (for) he that is content (with a modicum of thanksgiving) shall be abased; (and similarly), in this case, he that covets (excess of thanksgiving) shall be exalted.

Do not go so much into the sack of thy fleshly soul, do not be (so) forgetful of thy purchasers (redeemers).