

# SYMBOLISM, THEME AND MESSAGE IN A PERSIAN (SUFI), ENGLISH (ANGLICAN) AND BURMESE (BUDDHIST) POEMS WRITTEN THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES\*

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*The flying Zau Gyi Puppet and his antics.*

## Introduction

This article will explore the symbolism, theme and message that could be discerned from three poems from three different parts of the world which were composed in three different centuries. The poems were written by three different poets who in their own cultural and national milieus were poets of considerable renown. To the extent that these three poems can be considered 'religious' it also needs to be mentioned that the poets who composed them came from three different religious traditions: that of Islam (Sufism), Christianity (Anglicanism) and Buddhism (Theravada Buddhism). This article attempts to 'extrapolate' some of the perceived (as perceived by this author) common, contrasting, or comparable symbolisms, themes and messages from these poems. The author is of the view that in varying degrees all three poems reflect the religious tenets or philosophical principles of the faiths of the three poets.

The poems that are to be explored in this article are in order of chronology (1) The *Poem 3090* by Jalaluddin Rumi (of the 13<sup>th</sup> century) which this author has for the purpose of this article named as *Sweetness* which was originally composed in the Persian language<sup>1</sup> (2) The poem *Love III* by George Herbert (of the 17<sup>th</sup> century) originally written in English<sup>2</sup> and (3) The poem *Zawgyi and Shein-hsar-yar*<sup>3</sup> written by Zaw Gyi (U Thein Han) originally written in the Burmese language.

## Jalaluddin Rumi (1207- 1273) and *Sweetness* Poem

The first poem that would be discussed was written by Jalaluddin Rumi, a Sufi poet of Afghan<sup>4</sup> or Persian origin<sup>5</sup> who flourished in the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD<sup>6</sup>. It is generally known that Jalaluddin Rumi was a Sufi poet. For the purposes of the discussion in this section I would adopt the 'definition' or exposition of Sufism by Dr Alan Godlass of the University of Georgia (from the United States). Dr Godlass states that

**Sufism** or *tasawwuf*, as it is called in Arabic, is generally understood by scholars and Sufis to be the inner, mystical, or psycho-spiritual dimension of Islam. Today, however, many Muslims and non-Muslims believe that **Sufism** is outside the sphere of Islam. Nevertheless, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, one of the foremost scholars of Islam, in his article *The Interior Life in Islam* contends that **Sufism** is simply the name for the inner or esoteric dimension of Islam.<sup>7</sup>

Hence Rumi's poetry and background can – for the purpose of analyzing one particular poem among the thousands he had written –<sup>8</sup> be described as having derived from or inspired by the Islamic tradition (or religion) in general and Sufism in particular. In the same vein the poem by George Herbert can be described as having derived from and inspired by Christianity in general and Anglicanism<sup>9</sup> in particular. The poem by Zaw Gyi

(U Thein Han) can also be said to be based on Buddhism in general and Theravada Burmese Buddhist concepts in particular.

*Poem 3090 or Sweetness by Jalaluddin Rumi*

(Original poem in Persian/Farsi)

(Version by Coleman Barks from a translation by A.J. Arberry)

**Forget the world, and so command the world.**

Be a lamp, or a lifeboat, or a ladder.

Help someone's soul heal.

Walk out of your house like a shepherd.

Stay in the spiritual fire. Let it cook you.

Be a well-baked loaf and lord of the table.

Come and be served to your brothers.

You have been a source of pain.

Now you'll be the delight.

You have been an unsafe house. Now you'll  
be the One who sees into the Invisible.

I said this, and a Voice came to my ear,  
«If you become this, you will be That!»

Then Silence,  
and now more Silence.

A mouth is not for talking.  
A mouth is for tasting this *Sweetness*.

— Version by Coleman Barks  
from a translation by A.J. Arberry

*Like This*

Maypop, 1990

**Selected Symbols and Symbolism in *Sweetness***

*lamp:*

The 'symbol' or image of the 'lamp' will be discussed briefly in 'interreligious perspective'. It may be that the lamp symbol employed in this Sufi poetry can be found in the (chronologically) earlier religious traditions as well. «**Be ye lamp» unto yourselves**, be your own reliance, hold the truth to the truth within yourselves as to the only lamp<sup>10</sup> is the exhortation of Gautama Buddha to his disciples. In his poem Rumi has exhorted the reader not only to be a lamp unto himself or herself but also to be a lamp unto others as well. Still, it is a truism that only when one sees or attempts to see the truth first for one self can one be a 'lamp' to others. Just as the Sufi poet Rumi exhorts the reader to be a lamp to others, Buddhist scriptures point out the need to realize the truth for an insight into oneself so that one could eventually to be a 'lamp' on a more general basis. Rumi as a theologian was well-versed with

Christian doctrines and made occasional references to Jesus, Jacob and Mary in quite a few of his poems. Was Rumi exhorting his readers (to borrow a Biblical phrase) not to hide one's light underneath a bushel?

*like a shepherd:*

The 'association of ideas' or at least of words through the prism of inter-religious perspective is that of the famous phrase from the Bible «The Lord is my shepherd I shall not be in want».<sup>11</sup> In terms of interpretation of the word shepherd the message of the Biblical passage in the Psalms is reassurance where 'the Lord' itself is 'the shepherd'. In *Sweetness* Rumi exhorts the reader to 'leave' the 'house' like a shepherd. In the particular passage in the Bible the shepherd is the Lord Himself, symbolizing reassurance and comfort and refuge for the 'flock'. In Rumi's *Sweetness* poem the 'shepherd' becomes a figure of 'exploration' or perhaps even renunciation. One is of the view that when one considers the phrase «Walk out of your house like a shepherd» a possible message of renunciation—perhaps even with its Buddhist connotations—can be extrapolated.

*Walk Out of Your House:*

What is the significance of the word 'house' here? I am reminded of a Sufi story where the Mullah Nassrudin was looking for a key that he lost. He had been looking for the key out side the house in the yard and when some one asked him where he had lost the key Mullah Nassrudin replied that he had lost the key inside the house. In response to the query that why then he was looking for the key outside the house Nassrudin replied «Because there is more light here»<sup>12</sup>.

In the context of the story and according to one's interpretation can we consider 'the house' to be a confining entity or space where the 'key' to the 'riddle' of life cannot be easily found? Only when one comes out of the 'house' or in the context of the poem *Sweetness* if one tries to escape from the confines of the self to places where there is 'more light' can one's search for the 'key' be facilitated or expedited.<sup>13</sup>

When one tries to get out of the 'confines' or snares of the self one could be moving towards the 'light' or the key. One Catholic web site<sup>14</sup> equates or analogizes Nassrudin's actions as 'searching for happiness outside ourselves where it cannot be found' and therefore the search was 'a foolish or futile error'<sup>15</sup>. On the other hand can we argue that it is *also* an error to confine one's search only to the house ('ourselves'/self), being trapped as it were by the snares of the house (selves/self)? Notwithstanding his apparent incongruous, indeed nonsensical, even 'foolish' action of searching for the 'key' in the 'wrong place' was the story intended to reflect the subtle message that the key(s) can be found 'outside of the house'? Be that as it may what is subtle or enigmatic in the story of the probably apocryphal Mullah Nasruddin becomes more concrete and explicit in (the actual) Sufi poet Jalaluddin Ru-

mi's exhortation to '[w]alk out of your house like a shepherd'.

*well-baked loaf:*

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* defines the 'Eucharist' as

The name given to the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar its twofold aspect of sacrament and Sacrifice of Mass, and in which Jesus Christ is truly present under the bread and wine<sup>16</sup>

In the context of Rumi's poem though we should not equate or analogize the phrase 'well-baked loaf' with the 'Eucharist'. Still, as already indicated above Rumi as a theologian of the 13<sup>th</sup> century was well-versed with Christian theology and rites and he could have used or 'borrowed' these images ('bread'/loaf', 'well-baked bread'/loaf') from Christian theology to convey his own (Sufi) thoughts and messages. One should immediately add that such 'cross-fertilization' of images, and themes across (different) religions is neither new nor a practice which should be discouraged. An early 21<sup>st</sup> century web site espousing the tenets of Catholicism uses a Sufi story to convey its message.<sup>17</sup> In the same vein, it should come as no surprise that a 13<sup>th</sup> century Persian (or) Sufi poet used images, symbols or metaphors from those of 'Other' religions as Rumi apparently (explicitly) did in this poem or quite a few of his many other poems. Further – unless one is a (religious) purist and wishes to obscure or perhaps even obstruct the 'exchange of ideas' among 'traditions of knowledge' – an early 21<sup>st</sup> century commentator should be 'absolved' when trying to analogize, compare or contrast symbols, themes and messages across not two but three religious traditions as the author is attempting to do so in this article.

*lord of the table:*

W. Carl Ketcherside argues that

[t]he outstanding feature of early Christianity was its recognition that all one had was God's when the heart was given to God. Any house was the Lord's house when the Lord's people were there. The common expression was «the church which is in thy house.» The table of the Lord was the family table, and it was the table of the Lord simply because he was **Lord of the table**. No building was sacred because none was secular.<sup>18</sup>

From the above excerpt it would appear that Rumi might have been uttering or exhorting something sacrilegious when he urges the listener or reader to be 'lord of the table'. Yet Ketcherside himself may have provided a 'counter-argument' that this (interpretation) is not necessarily so when he, citing C.F.D. Moule, writes that «Christian worship is indeed service – hard work – but it is the responsive service of obedience and gratitude, not of flattery or of 'mutual benefit'». He further argues that «service to humanity, the relief of human suffering, the supplying of human need-this was the greatest expression of

worship».<sup>19</sup> For doesn't Rumi also urges the reader not only to «stay in the spiritual fire» but «to come and be served to your brothers»? And couldn't this 'serving' in the (Christian) as well as Sufi 'sense' and the non-denominational secular (humanistic) sense of the word be also interpreted to mean 'service to humanity, the relief of human suffering [and] the supplying of human need'?

*Come and be served to your brothers:*

The similarity of this phrase with Christian as well as secular, humanistic thought has already been briefly alluded to. For the purpose of this article this particular phrase have enhanced comparative significance for, in the poem *Love III* composed by the Anglican (English) poet George Herbert about 350 years later, a passage appears of 'Love' declaring to the (other) speaker:

'My dear, then I will serve'<sup>20</sup>

The 'serving' or 'service' Rumi exhorts his readers in *Sweetness* and the 'invitation' or perhaps the assertion of 'Love' in *Love III* that He 'w[ould] serve' will be comparatively discussed in more detail when this author analyzed what is said to be Herbert's «perhaps greatest poem».<sup>21</sup>

*Then Silence and now more Silence:*

In Buddhism 'The Buddha's Silence', 'The Great Silence' or 'Noble Silence' is fairly well known. For the purpose of making a brief comparative 'taste' of the nature of (different forms) of 'Silence' perhaps this excerpt dealing essentially with Zen Buddhism might suffice:

A non-Buddhist philosopher said to the Buddha «I do not ask for words; I do not ask for non-words». The Buddha just sat there. The philosopher said admiringly, «The World-honored One with his great mercy, has blown away the clouds of my illusion and enabled me to enter the Way». And after making bows he took his leave.<sup>22</sup>

*A mouth is for tasting this Sweetness:*

More than 350 years after<sup>23</sup> Rumi ends *Poem 3090* with 'tasting this *Sweetness*' George Herbert in his poem *Love III* ends his poem with the symbol or metaphor of 'taste' albeit this time it is in the context of the 'speaker' (in *Love III*) sitting and eating ('Love's meat') in response to 'Love' inviting the 'speaker' to 'taste [His] meat'. A more detailed discussion of the (possible) message or theme about the word 'taste' in these two poems will be discussed in later sections dealing with Herbert's poem.

**Message and Theme in Rumi's *Poem 3090 Sweetness***

The American poet Robert Frost was supposed to have said that «poetry begins with joy and ends with wisdom».

The first line of Rumi's poetry as translated by A.J. Arberry and given renditions by Coleman Barks should attract the discerning reader's attention. It is also a source for joy and insight. The exhortation by the speaker to «forget the world and therefore [thereby?] command the world» is not (in this author's view) a suggestion for either social irresponsibility or extreme self-introspection. The message or the theme in the first few paragraphs of the poem could perhaps be analogized – though not equated – with the Buddhist concept of 'renunciation' or 'Nikkhama'.

Before discussing further on the (possible) theme or message of the poem a brief 'jump' to the end of Rumi's poem will be made. This 'jump' is made to briefly analyze whether Rumi's poem (in the words of Robert Frost) 'ends in wisdom'. The author submits that Rumi's poem – like many other indeed virtually almost all of his poems – ends (perhaps) not only with wisdom but with an enigma (or enigmas). The 'message' or wisdom of the poem has to be achieved not by 'deconstructing' the poem or the 'enigma' of the poem as certain literary or philosophical schools of thought would suggest. Perhaps the wisdom is itself 'in' the enigma or the wisdom is *the* enigma or vice-versa.

The point of course could be made that the 'enigma' a la Rumi's enigmatic ending or message in *Sweetness* can be found in most poetry. I would aver that this is not always or even usually the case. To further 'delimit' this statement in the context of this paper, in the 'ending' of both Herbert's poem *Love III* and Zaw Gyi's poem 'Zaw Gyi and Shein-Hsar-Yar' the message (or) theme can be somewhat more 'easily' or readily 'teased out' especially if one is familiar with the background theological, metaphysical or religious beliefs of the two poets. In my view and in comparison with Rumi's *Sweetness* the message or theme that can be derived from the ending of both Herbert's and Zaw Gyi's poems are less elusive or more explicit. This would be so especially in the context of Herbert's *Love III*.

Coming back to the theme or message of 'renunciation' that I have tried to extrapolate from the early few stanzas of Rumi's poem I submit that the phrase to «walk out of your house like a shepherd» is also (roughly) suggestive of the concept of renunciation. In partly explaining the concept of 'self-renunciation' an article, quoting the Buddhist text *Sutta Nipata*, states that «the man who is possessed of much property, who has gold and food, and still enjoys his sweet things ... this is the cause of loss».<sup>24</sup> In the context of (deeper) Buddhist thought and also the possible message of Rumi's poem I am of the view that 'renunciation' is not merely renouncing 'gold and [much] food and enjoy[ment] of sweet things'. As stated in the above section the exhortation 'to walk out of the house' would not, in my view, merely means not to be attached to material goods such as 'gold and food and sweet things'. It is primarily an exhortation to try to escape from or to reduce one's 'bonds' to the snares of the

self (*Atta* in Buddhist terms). The simile or metaphor of the 'House' (in this context) not necessarily as a 'safe harbour' but as a 'fetter' to be abandoned is discernible in the first part of Rumi's poem. (Note also the story of the Mullah Nasruddin who was looking for the 'key' outside the house because there *was* more light there). It is the house, the enclosure, the clinging to the 'ego' or the 'self' that Rumi is urging his readers to abandon or at least 'reduce' one's attachment to it. Inasmuch as 'the self' or the (Buddhist) Pali term *Atta* has been used interchangeably it needs to be briefly reiterated that the author is not equating the Buddhist concept of *Anatta* wholly or even predominantly with the thought and message of the Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Still, the author does think that the first part of Rumi's poem can be analogized or expressed as his exhortation to try to escape from the confines of the self-or ego. It should be made clear that I do not claim that Rumi was espousing the doctrine of 'non-self' (*Anatta*)<sup>25</sup> as such in the context of this particular poem. Indeed the author has expressed similar views when I compared the theme of Emily Dickinson's poem 'Because I Could Not Stop for Death'<sup>26</sup> with that of Buddhist concepts of *Anicca* ('Impermanence') and *Anatta* ('Non-self'). In an article written in the Burmese language the author had previously expressed the view that though Dickinson's poem could be considered as having a deep insight into *Anicca* ('Impermanence') the author was not sure whether Dickinson's poem embodied, 'revealed' or was a reflection on the concept of *Anatta*.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps the author would make a similar statement regarding Rumi's message or theme in *Sweetness* vis-à-vis the concept of *Anatta*.

Rumi's exhortation to escape from the snares of the self is also accompanied by less enigmatic and social statements to serve the community, to be helpful to others and to act in a spirit of brotherly and sisterly cooperation. Yet the few phrases that followed it such as 'to stay in the spiritual fire' to be 'a well-baked bread' and the suggestion that 'now you will be the delight' and 'Now you will see into the Invisible'<sup>28</sup> makes it amply clear that Rumi's poem though not shorn of a social message is not merely or substantially a 'social poem'. The predominant theme and message of the poem are metaphysical and mystical and (for want of a better expression) suffused with Sufism.

Inasmuch as Herbert's *Love III* poem also contains the phrase 'serve' ('My dear then I will serve') and Rumi's *Sweetness* contains also the phrase «come and be served to your brothers» the two 'serve[s]' could briefly be compared in the context of the two poems.

Does the phrase 'serve/served' in these two poems written in different epochs have similar connotations? Here I am of the view that the exhortation «be served to your brothers» in Rumi's poem and «My dear then I will serve» in Herbert's can be contrasted rather than compared. The exhortation (if that is the appropriate word) «come and be served to your brothers» by Rumi is directed towards the reader, or hearer of the poem. It can be said

that this exhortation may be directed towards the speaker (or) the poet himself but – unlike in *Love III* – it is grammatically and symbolically in the ‘active’ voice with meaning being: you must (should) serve your brothers. In *Love III* it is not a suggestion or an exhortation to serve (others) but an ‘invitation’ to be served by ‘Love’. Needless to say, the ‘subject’ of ‘Love’ (the person spoken to by Love in the poem) despite his earlier demurrers seems to (immediately) accept ‘Love’s’ invitation to ‘serve’ him. In addition he ‘sit[s]’ (at/near the table?)<sup>29</sup> and ‘eat[s]’ : accepting Love’s invitation to ‘taste [His]meat’.

That brings us to the last two sentences of Rumi’s poem: «A mouth is not for talking. A mouth is for tasting this *Sweetness*». Again the message of ‘tasting’ the ‘*Sweetness*’ in Rumi’s poem and of the invitation to taste the ‘meat’ of ‘Love’ are striking in their coincidental use of the phrases in poems written about three-and-a-half-centuries apart. And again, one feels that the message in *Love III* ‘taste my meat’ is more straight-forward or more readily discernible than the message of ‘tasting the *Sweetness*’ in *Poem 3090* of Rumi. Even to a non-Christian *Love III* is a poignant, graceful, indeed beautiful poem. My view is that there is hardly any enigma or mysticism in *Love III* when it is juxtaposed and compared with that of Rumi’s *Sweetness*.

For a person familiar with the basic tenets of the Christian religion *Love III* is the ‘story’ of the sacrifice of Jesus the Christ and the Saviour giving His life to ‘atone’ for the sins of human kind. It is also the case that the invitation to ‘taste my meat’ is symbolically and on a weekly basis (re)enacted in communion, Church services and the Eucharist throughout the world. But to this ‘outsider’ of both the Christian and Islamic faiths the message of Rumi’s poem and especially as to its ending of ‘tasting this *Sweetness*’ I have to view and discern ‘through a glass darkly’. In contrast – for me – the message of Herbert’s *Love III* and of the ending of the speaker ‘sit[ting] and ea[ting]’ Love’s ‘meat’ is crystal clear (or) to use a Burmese saying ‘as clear as spaghetti strings’.

The phrases ‘tasting the *Sweetness*’ and ‘Silence’ also brings forth in this author imageries or association of ideas from the realm of Buddhism once again. The phrase «if you become this, you will be That» – perhaps a ‘version’ on the phrase «Thou art That» – which preceded – and is a prelude – to the phrase «tasting this *Sweetness*» could of course find parallels in Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism as well.<sup>30</sup> It needs to be mentioned though that in the context of Theravada Buddhism the yogi – one who practises Buddhist meditation – could (arguably) ‘taste’ (a crude phrase admittedly in the context of Buddhist meditation techniques) *Vimutti* or nirvana or glimpse through various *Jhana* (‘stages of meditation’) in *Vippassana* meditation, the *Sweetness* or ‘bliss’ of nirvana can only be ‘realized’ not tasted as such.<sup>31</sup>

Rumi’s *Poem 3090* contains a lot of imagery, metaphors or themes which, to this author, gives a fruitful ground for comparative religious perspectives at least in

terms of metaphors and perhaps also in terms of doctrines. In addition to being a superb mystical poet Rumi was also a learned Islamic theologian who had in a few of his poems explicitly used and employed Christian doctrines and teachings. That is why many of the metaphors and symbolism Rumi employed in his *Poem 3090* give rise to comparable themes from the Bible. In addition, the vastness of Rumi’s mind and his metaphors also give rise – for this author – comparison with some Buddhist terminology and concepts. In my view Rumi’s poem in terms of message and theme is the most enigmatic poem among the three that are surveyed in this article.

It is said that (and I am unable to give an exact source) when reading poetry one should not attempt (intellectually?) to fully ‘understand’ the poem. If one ‘understands’ or think one understood the poem the taste or *Sweetness* so to speak of the poem could be lost. Rumi’s poem *Sweetness* for this author, is filled with joy precisely due to the fact that it is not fully ‘understandable’.

### George Herbert (1593-1633) and *Love III* Poem

A scholar on George Herbert states that

Herbert’s English poetry has gone through various degrees of popularity; at present he is regarded by many as one of the most important poets of the seventeenth century, by some as one of the greatest master of the short poems in English. He seems to have had great influence on later English and American poets, including Emerson, Dickinson, and Frost.<sup>32</sup>

Born in 1593 in Wales, George Herbert was a younger child in an aristocratic family of seven sons and three daughters. In the last eight years of his life Herbert was an Anglican priest. In 1626 Herbert was made prebend of the church at Leighton Bromswold, in Huntingdonshire, near the religious community of Little Gidding. He died in 1633, leaving behind a manuscript book of English poems, called *The Temple; or Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*, none of which had been published before. On his deathbed he directed that they be given to his friend Nicholas Ferrar, the founder of Little Gidding, with instructions to publish them if he thought valuable, otherwise to destroy them.<sup>33</sup> The poem *Love III* is at the end (if not the very end of the book)<sup>34</sup> *The Temple* which contains his poems and which was published posthumously.

#### *Love III* by George Herbert<sup>35</sup>

LOVE (III)  
by George Herbert

Love bade me welcome, yet my soul drew back,  
Guiltie of dust and sinne.  
But quick-ey’d Love, observing me grow slack  
From my first entrance in,

Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning  
If I lack'd anything.

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:  
Love said, You shall be he.

I, the unkinde, the ungratefull Ah my deare,  
I cannot look on thee.

Love took my hand and smiling did reply,  
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth, Lord, but I have marr'd them; let my shame  
Go where it doth deserve.

And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?  
My dear, then I will serve.

You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat.  
So I did sit and eat.

The *Ch. Herbert*.  
*Love*  
Love had me not from yet my soul  
But quit but yd Love, observance  
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning  
If I lack'd any thing  
A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here  
Love said, you shall be he  
I, the unkinde, ungratefull Ah my deare  
I cannot look on thee  
Love took my hand, & smiling did reply,  
Whom made y' eyes but I?  
Truth, Lord, but I have marr'd them; let my shame  
Go where it doth deserve  
And know you not, says Love, who bore y' blame?  
My dear, then I will serve  
You must sit down, says Love, & taste my meat  
So I did sit and eat.

The Williams manuscript version of Love III.

The author first came across the poem at the end of *This Book of Starres* by James Boyd White in the year 2002. In more than 270 pages White discusses over seventy poems of George Herbert, some of them in considerable detail. Significantly, White barely discusses this poem saying «I leave *Love* (III) without comment, not because it does not warrant any but because it warrants so much.»<sup>36</sup> Earlier, White has stated about *Love III* poem's «eighteen miraculous lines».<sup>37</sup> White also affirms that *Love III*

was the poem that Simone Weil found as perpetually tran-

sforming of her life as the Lord's Prayer, and like that prayer, she used to repeat daily. One recent critic devoted two chapters of a book to its explication. For us, let it stand as marking the point where I stop telling the reader what a poem means, leaving it wholly to him or her.<sup>38</sup>

Before one embarks on a (brief) discourse about the poem which has (additionally) been described as having «incredible power»<sup>39</sup> one could with a large degree of confidence make the 'falsifiable' but almost certainly true postulate that George Herbert had not been familiar with, had not read or even heard about Rumi or Rumi's poetry<sup>40</sup> or indeed Sufi or other (non-Christian) thought or philosophy. A further presumption or indeed statement could be made that Rumi's knowledge and appreciation of Christianity is much more substantial than that of Herbert's knowledge of Islam or Sufism. This (strong) presumption in and of itself is by no means to be taken as a 'negative' against Herbert or in an analysis of Herbert's *Love III* and its 'power', theme and message. It is however appropriate to bear this in mind in inter-cultural, inter-religious analyses and comments on the three poems on a comparative and dialogical basis.

An 'Interlude': 'Meaning' and Connotations of 'Love' in *Love III* poem (and Christianity) and 'Loving-Kindness' (Metta) in Buddhism

The author recalls that Chan-Myait Sayadaw a Burmese Buddhist monk wrote in one of his books that some years back while he was teaching Buddhism in the United States he was asked by an American woman as to 'what is love?'. This interlude is not even to attempt a cursory answer to that 'simple' question but just to highlight that the concept of love – with its various contents and meanings – can be found in all major religions with different connotations. The concept of 'Love' in *Love III* and Christianity 'pivots' around the centrality of Christ's supreme sacrifice for the sins of mankind. Indeed (in this author's opinion) there could be permutations (so to speak) within Christianity itself as to the meaning, application and implications of the word 'love'. Compare (and contrast) the Biblical injunction 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'<sup>41</sup> with the love of Love in *Love III* poem or to be specific the supreme love – and sacrifice – of Jesus Christ for all mankind which constitute a fundamental premise or tenet of Christianity.

Buddhism has a comparable (but not identical) concept of 'love' which has been more specifically translated from the Pali word (*metta*) as 'loving-kindness'. As paraphrased from the *Metta Sutta*, *metta* or loving-kindness is not merely restricted to all of humanity but all beings (including animals). The relevant portion of the Buddhist *Metta Sutta* reads:

May all beings be at ease.  
Whatever living beings there may be;

Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,  
 The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,  
 The seen and the unseen,  
 Those living near and far away,  
 Those born and to-be-born,  
 May all beings be at ease!<sup>42</sup>

In fact the American Baptist missionary Dr Adoniram Judson (*Yu-da-than* is the Burmanized name that he gave himself) who in the second and third decade of the nineteenth century translated the Bible 'from their original tongues' into Burmese the Biblical phrases 'love' (as well as 'charity') was translated as '*metta*'. Hence Dr Judson and subsequent Burmese Christian teachers and writers have etymologically (though one should say not conceptually or theologically) employed the Pali Buddhist term '*metta*' to describe Biblical, Christian or perhaps most appropriately Christological love. Inasmuch as the Buddhist *metta* or loving-kindness is shorn of Christological connotations it needs to be stated and affirmed that the Buddhist *metta* and the Christian theological concept of 'Love' are conceptually and doctrinally not the same. This is mentioned not to critique, marginalize, downplay or 'boost' either religion. It is mentioned and stated here for the purpose of commenting, as an 'outsider' to the Christian faith, *Love III*, the most theologically specific of the three poems. Needless to say the poem *Love III* has Christological 'Love' as its explicit theme and message.

#### *Love III and Outsider Looking In: An 'Apologia'*

In his 1966 book entitled *Social Dimensions of Law and Justice* the late jurist Julius Stone devotes a whole Chapter to *The Dependence of Law: Soviet Marxist Theory*.<sup>43</sup> Under the sub-heading 'Special Scholarly problems of approaching Soviet Marxist doctrine' and writing in the mid-1960s as a bourgeois social scientist and jurist and as a scholar who took a very critical or negative view of Marxist legal theory Stone states that «[i]t may indeed be that real understanding of some *social phenomena*, the genuine 'feel' of the thing, can only be gained from the inside; and that to the outsider the doors of cognition are forever barred». <sup>44</sup> Nevertheless Stone warns that «the demands for maximum objectivity cannot be gainsaid, nor the dangers to vision of both distorting glasses and blinkers». Stone also avers that 'where a scholar can bring to his subject the relatively clear vision of the outsider, it seems a pity to forego this clarity by accepting the vision handicaps of 'insiders'. Perhaps as an acknowledgment of the limitation of his standpoint and/or an rejection of the 'Other' – to use a post-modernist phrase which in the mid-1960s was not that in vogue (if it has at all 'materialized') – Stone acknowledges that «the way to make sense of ensuing disputes and polemics [regarding 'Soviet Marxist theory'] to which the Western inquirer is not himself committed, [is to] view [them] as an outsider». <sup>45</sup>

Following Stone's line of reasoning it could all the more be said that in analyzing and commenting on reli-

gious, theological, metaphysical doctrines (instead of social or political ones) the doors of cognition could be so tightly closed and might well-nigh be impenetrable. Should this admission 'bars' me from commenting on *Love III* as an 'outsider'?

I submit that in analyzing these poems written from the different religious milieus and chronologically and roughly three and a half centuries apart a certain slant as to the 'outsider' looking in and 'insider looking out' is inevitable and that such perspectives, stances or positions («the other voices that inhabit the garden» in T S Eliot's words) should not be discouraged. At least from a poetic and philosophical standpoint these poems may have much to say (if not always and necessarily to each other) and that 'traditions of knowledge' and cognition of knowledge itself would *not* diminish as a result of outside and inside dialogical 'conversations' within and across these poems. And I give this 'apologia' in defense or in support of my view that the theme and message of *Love III* can only be fully 'internalized' if one looks at it from the Christian or Christological perspective; in comparison with Rumi's expansive (perhaps) even all embracing *Sweetness* the message of *Love III*, (in a sense) constrains rather than invites<sup>46</sup> and is internally self-validating<sup>47</sup> and not 'porous' across 'metaphysical divides'<sup>48</sup> as Rumi's poem.

Two examples can be given to further illustrate or highlight the arguments made above. James Boyd White in discussing 'The Meaning of the Sacrifice' (and not in relation to *Love III*) quotes the Corinthians «We preach Christ crucified» said the apostle Paul; rightly adding that this is «unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness».<sup>49</sup> Several sentences later White candidly as well as disarmingly writes that «[w]hat is problematic in Christianity thus becomes problematic in poetry too». <sup>50</sup> I am some how 'solaced' or encouraged by the fact that some of my stated and implied philosophical 'demurrers' or 'equivocations' of *Love III* is also expressed by White himself at least in regards to Herbert's earlier poems.

When I gave the presentation at the Rangoon conference in December 2003 a participant from Ann Arbor, the United States asked me whether I accept the 'postulate' that in studies of the 'Other' be it a social or political phenomena as in Julius Stone's comments on 'Soviet Marxist theory'<sup>51</sup> or those of religion 'some doors of cognition are forever barred'. I said that I do not (at least in full) accept the argument of the eternal or essential 'closing' of the 'doors of cognition' in such cross-cultural or for that matter cross-religious studies.

Even though I am unable to provide precise sources I recall reading some where that some 'natives' prefer the foreigner anthropologist to that of the local one<sup>52</sup> for they seem to believe that the 'foreigner' could perhaps 'understand' them more than the more 'knowledgeable' 'locals' who may share the same nationality and perhaps the same general culture but not the specific sub-culture. The participant also (independently) volunteered her view to the

effect that Herbert's poems are more 'confining' than those of Rumi.<sup>53</sup>

*Some (Similar) Symbols or Themes in Rumi's, Herbert's and Zaw Gyi's Poems?*

A brief conceptual analysis of 'tasting the Sweetness' in *Sweetness* and the invitation to 'taste [the] meat' of 'Love' in *Love III* could be attempted here. In his exhortation to 'walk out of the house like a shepherd' Rumi could be considered to be urging the reader to try to escape from the confines of the 'self'. In contrast or at least in comparison the 'self' (the speaker) in *Love III* feels unworthy to receive the attention not to say the 'Love' of 'Love' ('ah my dear I cannot look on thee'). Yet within a few lines the speaker has unconditionally accepted Love's invitation to taste His 'meat' and 'did sit and eat'. In other words the unworthy 'self' in the poem *Love III* seems to have 'surrendered' to Love's ministrations (so to speak). In this act of 'surrender' to 'Love' the speaker in *Love III* have, from the speaker's and devout Christian readers' perspective achieved 'salvation' or 'redemption'. The surrender of the (speaker's) self to 'Love' completes the 'journey' of the speaker from doubt of one's self and unworthiness to receive 'Love's' Love to (re)affirmation of the (Christological) Love of 'Love'. To 'borrow' a metaphor from Rumi's poem the acceptance of Love in *Love III* is the *Sweetness* which redeems the self (or) the speaker.

I am of the view that if there is a 'redemptive' message (in the non-Christian or non-Christological sense of the words) in *Sweetness* it is not as explicit or doctrinally specific as in *Love III*. Rumi's theme in *Sweetness* does involve the 'surrender' (in a different sort of way than that of *Love III*) of self but the surrender is not for 'salvation' or 'redemption' - in the Christological sense. The 'surrender' (of the self or the ego) in the theme of Rumi's poem is (socially) for the service of others and (metaphysically and theologically) not as specific or theologically 'bounded' as that of Herbert's *Love III*.

The 'escape' from the 'confines' - indeed the overflowing rambunctious ego<sup>54</sup> - or the self is also the theme of Zaw Gyi's poem '*Zaw Gyi and Shein-hsar-yar*'. If this (perhaps) 'constructed' 'common theme' of the three poems is -in their different connotations- the escape from the 'bondage' or the 'confines' of the self or the ego then the antidote to the escape from the self as suggested by or derivable from the poems are different. As regards the antidote of 'escaping' from the predicament of the ego or the self I am of the opinion that there is less dissimilarity in the theme or message of Rumi's and Zaw Gyi's poems than between either of them and that of Herbert's. The (fortuitous) use of similar or same metaphors ('leaving/entering house', 'serve/be served, table/sit, 'taste'/eat, *Sweetness*/'Love') in the two poems facilitate a juxtaposed analysis of the great poems of Rumi and Herbert. Thematically though non-doctrinally the message of 'non-self' (*Anatta*) in Zaw Gyi's poems might highlight the comparability perhaps even rough 'compatibility' of the (deriva-

ble) 'message(s)' of the poems of Rumi and Zaw Gyi.

**Zaw Gyi<sup>55</sup> (1907-1990) and Zaw Gyi and Shein-hsar-yar poem**

**Zaw Gyi (and yet another observation of 'Outsider's' and 'Insider's' Perspectives)**

*Hsayar* ('Teacher') Zaw Gyi is one of the foremost Burmese poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is also generally recognized as a 'philosophical poet' though Zaw Gyi himself seemed to have 'demurred' from or 'questioned' this description. In a tribute (written in English) after the death of Zaw Gyi in September 1990 U Thet Tun (among others, former Burmese Ambassador to France) wrote that when he stated that Zaw Gyi was a 'philosophical poet' *Hsayar* Zaw Gyi asked him (U Thet Tun) whether the description or designation of a philosophical poet is contradictory or is an anomaly.<sup>56</sup> Zaw Gyi seems to infer that a (good) poem needs to be philosophical. But as I have pointed out in my article written in Burmese about *Hsayar* Zaw Gyi's poem discussed here only (very) good poems are philosophical poems.<sup>57</sup> And the profound (Theravada Buddhist) philosophy embodied in the short poem of Zaw Gyi '*Zaw Gyi and Shein-hsar-yar*' is such that it deserves to be discussed in conjunction with the selected poems of poets like Rumi and Herbert whose fame have spread and lasted throughout the centuries. Other Burmese scholars have provided snippets of the life and work of Zaw Gyi and they need not be reproduced here.<sup>58</sup> For the purpose of analyzing Zaw Gyi's poems, at times in juxtaposition or in conjunction with that of Rumi and Herbert it could be briefly mentioned that Zaw Gyi was 77 years old when he 'penned' the poem.<sup>59</sup> Obviously the Burmese poet Zaw Gyi who 'flourished' in the twentieth century lived in a different, for that matter much later, time or epoch than that of Jalaluddin Rumi who lived and died in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and George Herbert who was born at the tail-end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and died in the first third of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Rumi died at the age of sixty-six<sup>60</sup> and Herbert when he was thirty-nine<sup>61</sup> and hence none of them lived as long as Zaw Gyi who died at the age of eighty-three.

I recall reading that when *Hsayar* Zaw Gyi was requested to give his favourite list of five books written (or translated into the English language) he had included *The Book of Job* as one of his 'favourite books'. As a learned person who, among others, had translated aspects of Plato's work into Burmese<sup>62</sup> it is evident that Zaw Gyi was impressed with the literary power, rhetorical flourishes and philosophical messages of at least one 'Book' of the Bible. Still, it needs to be mentioned here that the 'reading' of the Bible by the 17<sup>th</sup> century pious Anglican priest George Herbert and 20<sup>th</sup> century devout Buddhist Zaw Gyi would be different. Zaw Gyi's reading of the Bible one



submits would be (mainly) that of an outsider «of the Christian or more specifically the Anglican faith». Since it is from a different perspective so to speak it is (almost) *ipso facto* a 'different sort of reading'. In other words the readings or appreciation of Herbert of the Bible which he had described as «[t]his book of starres [which] lights to eternal blisse»<sup>63</sup> is mainly from that of *a priori* acceptance or faith as 'revealed truth'. And I submit that as an 'outsider' to the Christian faith the reading by Zaw Gyi of the Bible would predominantly from the view point or perspective of aesthetics and non-religious philosophy.<sup>64</sup> After this comparative biographical information about Zaw Gyi and further observations of insiders' and outsider's perspective I will now proceed to Zaw Gyi's 'Zaw Gyi'<sup>65</sup> and *Shein-hsar-yar* poem.

၂၁၃။ ဇော်ဂျီနှင့် ရှိန်းဆာယာ

ရုပ်သေးစင်ပေါ်  
ဇော်ဂျီနှင့် တောင်ဝှေး။  
အခုန်အပျံနှင့်  
သူ့ဟန်ကို သည်ဖေကြည့်  
မောမိတယ်လေး။  
ရှိန်းဆာယာ ပိုမောက်  
တိုယ်ပျောက်သည့် တန်ခိုး။  
ရှိန်းဆာယာ သည်ဖေကြောက်  
စိတ်ပျောက်မှာ စိုး။ ။

#### Zaw Gyi and Hsein-hsar-yar Poem

By Zaw Gyi (Original poem in Burmese)  
Translation by Myint Zan

on the puppet stage  
the *Zawgyi* with his magic wand  
jumping and flying about:  
watching his antics  
the watcher feels anxious<sup>66</sup>

with overflowing, rambunctious,<sup>67</sup> *shein-hsar-yar*  
[the *Zawgyi*] have the power  
to make his body disappear  
what is feared is that  
the *Shein-hsar-yar* would  
also made the *Zawgyi*'s mind  
as well to disappear

#### Meanings, Symbolism, Theme and Message in Zaw Gyi and Shein-hsar-yar Poem

As the above poem is a translation from the Burmese the author recognizes that especially for the non-Burmese speaking foreigner the translated poem may not make immediate sense. Moreover, there are some rarely used (part) Burmese words which need explanation in more detail than in footnotes. Apart from these words, others also need more elaboration and I will attempt to discuss them in context here. In the section in which Rumi's poem *Sweetness* is analyzed it was done so in separate sub-sections under the titles 'Symbolism' and 'Theme'. Here, instead of such delineations into sub-sections, the (literal or general) definitions and brief expositions of certain Burmese words and concepts as well as the symbolisms and themes of those words and concepts will be discussed conjointly.

The title of the poem itself contains some words which to even highly educated and quite sophisticated Burmese are (almost) foreign. This is especially so with the second word (or) phrase in the title of the poem *Shein-hsar-yar* but first a brief exposition of the Burmese word and concept *Zaw Gyi* in the title of the poem will be attempted.

#### Zaw Gyi

As stated earlier, the word *Zaw Gyi* in this section denotes not the poet whose pen name is Zaw Gyi but the *Zaw Gyi* puppet (on the puppet stage). In addition the possible meanings, implications and applications of the concept (or to use a more fashionable phrase) 'construct' of *Zaw Gyi* will also be briefly explored. The dictionary meaning of *Zaw Gyi* is brief such as that of 'alchemist of the forest' or even more generically 'wizard' but the exposition both humorous and mischievous but right on mark is the 'definition' given by Ma Theingi in a *Myanmar Times* (an English language newspaper) article which is reproduced on the internet:

the powerful and mischievous alchemist of the forest, is a much-loved figure in Myanmar folklore. Dressed in red, he flies through the heavens and burrows through the earth, holding aloft his magic wand. With a touch of this wand he can change ... fruits into comely maidens for his personal... ahem... pleasure, then conveniently change them into fruits again. Eat your heart out, Superman.<sup>68</sup>

Hence in Burmese folklore concept the *Zaw Gyi* is the 'denizen' of the forest who can do wondrous, 'magnificent' things like flying in the air by using his 'magic wand'.<sup>69</sup> And not only that, he can with the use of '*shein-hsar-yar*' makes his body 'disappear' in 'thin air' as the first few lines of this short poem indicates. A brief historical 'excursion' would appear to indicate that the *Zaw Gyi* concept existed or could be discerned in ancient Burma during the Pagan (Bagan) period before the arrival of Buddhism in Pagan in 11<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>70</sup> With the use of

Aggiya or 'alchemy' there were some people in ancient times and (perhaps to a lesser extent) these days who believed or believe that 'eternal life' (not in the Christian sense) could be achieved by alchemical methods and by becoming a *Zaw Gyi*.<sup>71</sup> This pre-Buddhist concept of *Zaw Gyi* was (and is) in essence contrary to Buddhist doctrines which have as its three 'signata' *Anicca*<sup>72</sup> *Dukkha*<sup>73</sup> and *Anatta*<sup>74</sup>.

By 'aiming' to achieve such power and the 'perpetuation' of the ego or the self the (mythical, 'constructed') *Zaw Gyi* is indeed acting contrary to the Buddhist concepts especially that of *Anicca* and *Anatta*. The poet *Zaw Gyi* in its first few lines seems to be indicating that the striving for and enjoyment of power as well as – indeed at least according to Ma Theingi's 'definition' above-carnal pleasures by the 'real' (conceptual) or puppet *Zaw Gyi* is caused by the *Zaw Gyi*'s rambunctious 'grasping' ego. From the Buddhist perspective these are all 'unhelpful' *Akusala*<sup>75</sup> states. Thus the 'power-displaying' antics of the (puppet, conceptual) *Zaw Gyi* 'blinds' the *Zaw Gyi* from seeing the truths of Buddhism: that of *Anicca*, *Dukkha* and *Anatta* and hence the speaker or the poet's anxiety that the *Zaw Gyi*'s 'body-disappearing' antics might result in the puppet or the *Zaw Gyi* losing his mind as well.

Still, the *Zaw Gyi* concept as briefly explained above lingers on in aspects of Burmese cultural milieu. Even if the underlying occultist philosophy embodied in the (metaphysical) *concept* of *Zaw Gyi* is not as extant or in vogue or believed in literally (perhaps) by the majority of the Buddhists in Burma today – in comparison with (say) pre-Buddhist Burma or even say a time of hundred years ago –<sup>76</sup> the *Zaw Gyi puppet* is still a much loved figure for young and old Burmese 'children'. That was why the poet *Zaw Gyi* himself have taken the term *Zaw Gyi* as his pseudonym. Yet (needless to say) the poet *Zaw Gyi* was aware that he was not the 'real' *Zaw Gyi* as indicated in this short doggerel or poem that *Zaw Gyi* composed in February 1936:

wants to give [you] the *Pyadashin*<sup>77</sup>  
right now:  
since I am not the pure *Zaw Gyi*  
I really am frustrated<sup>78</sup>

In historical comparison and restricting to the subject of the *Zaw Gyi* puppet (rather than the *Zaw Gyi* concept) one wonders whether during the time the Persian poet Jalaluddin Rumi 'flourished' from the early to late 13<sup>th</sup> century in Persia, the *Zaw Gyi* puppet was shown in puppet plays during the Pagan period. By the time the English poet George Herbert flourished in the late 16<sup>th</sup> to early 17<sup>th</sup> century it is more likely that the *Zaw Gyi* puppet have become a familiar figure among some of the 'puppet-watching' Burmese populace. In any case at the very latest at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Burma the *Zaw*

*Gyi* had become a 'stage figure' in the history of Burmese drama. Dr Htin Aung writes that in a play 'of the great Burmese dramatist U Kyin U whose literary career lasted from about 1819 to 1850' the concept of *Zaw Gyi* was explained 'with sympathy and understanding'.<sup>79</sup> Hence the (pre-Buddhist) concept of *Zaw Gyi* which have been discernible in (pre-Buddhist) Burma prior to the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD had been 'symbolized', at the very latest, in plays and puppet theatres by the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century if not much earlier.

One more comparative 'etymological' statement could be made regarding the exposition of or a brief discourse on *Zaw Gyi*. In my initial seminar given at the Emalus Campus of the University of the South Pacific in Port Vila, Vanuatu I have employed the term 'wizard' to 'explain' the concept or construct of *Zaw Gyi*. I did not intend to equate or even conceptually (concretely) or strongly analogize the concept of *Zaw Gyi* with the 'wizard' found in non-Oriental cultures. Indeed the picture of *Zaw Gyi* which I was able to download from the internet has the word 'wizard' (in Roman letters) beside it. A participant who attended the seminar enquired whether the English word 'imp' is also appropriate to describe the *Zaw Gyi* since he argued the 'imp' also, like the *Zaw Gyi*, dwells in the forest. I am unable to answer that query but when I presented my paper at the Yangon conference a linguist and Burma expert (of foreign origin) pointed out that '*Zaw Gyi* is *Zaw Gyi* is *Zaw Gyi*' and that I should not use the word 'wizard' at all to describe the *Zaw Gyi*. My response to that statement or suggestion would be that especially when I am making a presentation to non-Burmese specialists (at least in the context of the seminar that I presented in Vanuatu in the South Pacific though less so in the Rangoon conference where some may be even most –though not all- of the foreign participants would be familiar with at least the nomenclature *Zaw Gyi*) certain English words have to be used in one's attempt to build 'bridges or vehicles of communication'. Even though there is an (almost) inherent 'danger' of misconstruction or misinterpretation, English words like 'suffering' have been used (or have to be used) to explain the Buddhist concept of *Dukkha* and 'non-self' for the concept of *Anatta*. Similarly the author submits that the usage though not a 'strong analogy' of the word 'wizard' to 'explain' *Zaw Gyi* should be viewed with some tolerance and indulgence.<sup>80</sup>

Most Burmese would be familiar with the term or even the generic concept behind the term *Zaw Gyi*. But even to scholars who are Burmese by national origin and who are not specialists in this particular aspect of Burmese occultism or esotericism the term '*shein-hsar-yar*' may be a totally strange – indeed 'foreign' concept.<sup>81</sup> In the next sub-section a brief 'foray' will be attempted on the meaning and significance of the term '*shein-hsar-yar*' for the purpose of eliciting the message of the *Zaw Gyi* and *Shein-hsar-yar* poem.

*Shein-hsar-yar*

*Shein-hsar-yar* is defined in *Myanmar Abidan*<sup>82</sup> as (re-translating from the Burmese) «the ability to hide and disappear one's body».<sup>83</sup> It also indicates that (the first part of the word) is of Sanskrit origin and also (perhaps the latter part) has Pali language elements.<sup>84</sup> Some time in the year 2002 I sent an e mail to Professor F.K. Lehman (U Chit Hlaing), a linguist and anthropologist and a Burma expert at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign enquiring about the etymological origin, meaning and significance of the term. *Hsayar* ('teacher') U Chit Hlaing sent me a reply to the effect that the first part of the term '*Shein*' is derived from the Sanskrit word '*Shri*' which in effect means 'magical power'. Professor Lehman further stated that the second part of the term '*hsar-yar*' means 'shadowy'.<sup>85</sup> Hence a rough (though not entirely inaccurate) exposition of the word could be 'shadowy ('dark') forces of power' which in effect 'enabled' or 'empowered' the *Zaw* to 'hide' (or perhaps more accurately) 'disappear' his body (from the view or vision of the onlookers).

The theme of the poem becomes clearer after one begins to realise the 'enabling' or causal 'force' concerning the imagery of the *Zaw Gyi*'s antics is the 'rambunctious', overflowing *Shein-har-yar* ('the dark or illusory forces of power'). Even though the *Zaw Gyi* 'exercises' and 'displays' power<sup>86</sup> and he<sup>87</sup> can make his body disappear he does not know what or 'where' he himself 'is' as denoted by the onlooker's anxiety that the *Zaw Gyi* might 'lose his mind'. Ignorance of *Anatta* 'fuelled' his rambunctious ego and led him into a phantasmagoria of seeking and displaying power.

Karen Armstrong gives this parable from the Buddhist texts which might have some connotations with the *Zaw Gyi*'s predicament and ultimately illusory or empty pursuit and enjoyment of power and domination:

[The Buddha] preached the *Dhamma* to thirty rowdy young men in hot pursuit of a local courtesan, who had decamped with their money. Which is better for you the Buddha asked 'To look for a woman or to find yourselves?' The incident was a graphic allegory of humanity's pointless stampede after pleasure, which can only frustrate and impoverish.<sup>88</sup>

In the same vein the *Zaw Gyi* with his overflowing *Iddhi* or *Shein-hsar-yar* can hide himself from others, can make his body disappear but in the most crucial sense he cannot 'find' or 'discover' the essential truth of *Anatta* or non-self. In fact the *Zaw Gyi* (as the onlooker or the poet fears) is about to lose – if he had not already lost – his mind. And this 'losing' of the *Zaw Gyi*'s mind is caused by the very power that makes his body disappear.

*Magic Wand*

In my translation of the poem, I have translated the Burmese word '*taung-hway*' as 'magic wand'. Earlier, I have stated the view 'supported' by a Burmese scholar-

linguist that there could be some etymological comparability perhaps even a 'weak' similarity between the Burmese occult/esoteric concept of *Zaw Gyi* and the mainly Occidental (occult) concept of 'wizard'. One piece of (anthropological) 'evidence' that could be proffered here in support of 'comparability' – though not 'compatibility' – between the wizard and the *Zaw Gyi* concept across cultures is that both the *Zaw Gyi* and also the wizard have 'magic wands' in their possession which they use as 'tools' to achieve *Iddhi* (Sanskrit word) or '*Theikdi*' (Burmanized Sanskrit word) (in the context of the *Zaw Gyi*) or the achievement of supernatural or occult powers in the general context of the wizard. In addition, just as there was (or using the historic present tense) is (supposed to be) a «Philosopher's Stone [concept] in European alchemy» which readily empowers the possessor of the 'Philosopher Stone' (be it a 'wizard' or some other entity) to fulfil his wishes, there was (or is) a *Pyaddashin Lone* which – in addition to the 'wand' the *Zaw Gyi* possesses – constitute the 'weaponry' or tool for the *Zaw Gyi* to achieve such miraculous feats such 'as flying in the air' or 'making the body disappear'. This brief sub-section does not directly deal with either the message or theme of the poem. Rather it is a brief anthropological aside or comment about the symbolism not of the poem itself but an image in the poem concerning the *Zaw Gyi*'s and wizard's 'wand'.

*Puppet/Puppet Stage*

It is about the antics of the puppet *Zaw Gyi* that the poet *Zaw Gyi* penned his poem. The puppet *Zaw Gyi*'s antics prompted the poet to convey the message of *Anatta* to the (discerning) reader – and one should add – who grows up in and is much more than perfunctorily familiar with the Buddhist doctrine of *Anatta*- in a soft but effective manner. One could state that the poet *Zaw Gyi* does not (technically) portray the actions and conveyed his thoughts, nay his anxiousness, about the 'real' or 'conceptual' *Zaw Gyi* but the representation of the *Zaw Gyi* through the puppet on the puppet stage. Yet as have already indicated above the 'real' (conceptual) *Zaw Gyi* is a person/entity who does not know the Buddhist *Dhamma* (or doctrine), who acts contrary to the Buddhist *Dhamma*. Through the effective use of the imagery of the *Zaw Gyi* both as a metaphor and a simile the poet attempts to bring the *Zaw Gyi* 'back to earth' from his 'flying' and 'disappearing' antics. Concomitantly, the poet also debunks the whole occultist – and from the Buddhist perspective 'unskilful' and 'wrong'- philosophy behind the *Zaw Gyi* concept. Going further, one could say that the poet *Zaw Gyi*'s portrayal of the *Zaw Gyi* puppet is also a portrayal of real human beings who continually grasp after money, fame and power in ignorance of the *Dhamma* of *Anatta*.

In fact at this stage and before further discussion of the simile and metaphor of the 'puppet' and 'puppet stage' one could quote another scholar and his reaction to and views of the poem. Maung Thar Noe states that

after reading the poem only once I had goose bumps and I was greatly moved ... I re-read the poem two, three times and I looked at myself. I looked at the people around me. [the poem was distributed by the poet Zaw Gyi to his disciples and other writers who had gathered in 1984 to give homage to him and another elder writer]. I looked at *Hsayar* Zaw Gyi himself. I thought to myself did he intend the poem for me? Among my colleagues to whom does *Hsayar* 'direct' his poem? Perhaps he penned this poem for himself [to remind himself of the *Anatta* message of his poem].<sup>89</sup>

It could be briefly observed here that what Maung Thar Noe wrote about Zaw Gyi probably penning the poem 'for himself' is not inappropriate. For even though *Hsayar* Zaw Gyi is lovable person and with wide knowledge as a 'wordling' (*Puthuzna* in Pali) he would still have human frailties and with this poem he might be reminding himself to attempt to free oneself from the 'hindrances' which prevent people from seeing the *Dhamma* or perhaps even to help oneself attain 'liberation' '*vimutti*'.<sup>90</sup> Since (the poet) Zaw Gyi is not the 'real' *Zaw Gyi* there is no possibility of the poet acquiring the magical *shein-hsar-yar*. In comparison with other (humans) who 'grasp', 'strive' and pine<sup>91</sup> for and enjoy the shadowy (indeed) dark pursuit of power (the poet) *Zaw Gyi*'s ego might be less 'rambunctious'. Through the practice of the Buddhist doctrine of *Anatta*- he might be able to reduce the hindrances that could cloud his cognition and practice of the *Dhamma*. Hence through the effective imagery of the *Zaw Gyi* on the puppet stage *Zaw Gyi*'s poem is in part and in a certain sense not only 'other-directed' but also self-directed.

One other point or 'extension' that comes to mind is the imagery of the puppet and puppet stage which can be analogized with the happenings, vagaries, happenstances and vicissitudes of human life. In both Burmese and English literature – as I am sure in other literatures as well – the symbol, theme or message that humans have to 'play' or enact their role or 'script' on the 'stage of life' as the 'puppet master' or 'the script writer' of human life mandates is well-known. In the words of Shakespeare: «All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players: They have their exits and their entrances».<sup>92</sup> In the context of the *Zaw Gyi* and *Shein-hsar-yar* poem and though not directly related to its (perceived) message or theme who or 'what' is the 'script writer' of the enormously varied and variegated – and very different roles – that human beings play on the stage of life?

According to Buddhist thought it is the *Karma* (Sanskrit) or *Kamma* (Pali) of the creatures including humans themselves which are the 'script writers' or many, many billions of scripts, so to speak. *Kamma* or volitional actions of all creatures in the past lives and the present lives determined (or will determine) the current and future existences and their course and direction of their lives. As I understand it, the Buddhist *Karma* or *Kamma* doctrine in its purified form is neither fatalistic, or pre-determin-

istic as some (mainly) Western scholars – some of them not even specialists in the field of comparative religion – have suggested.<sup>93</sup> The doctrine of *Kamma* rejects the belief or postulate that all things in life happen solely due to what has occurred in the past lives which is classified in Pali as *Poke-bay-ka-haytu-vadda*. Similarly it also rejects the notion that every happenstances of human life such as whether a person is rich or poor, ugly or handsome, healthy or otherwise is due to the will of a Creator which is known as *Ei-thi-ri-ya-nimmita-vada*. Finally *Kamma* doctrine also does not subscribe to the belief that the happenstances of human life happened without any (moral) cause or reason; that it is utter chaos and things happened without any moral reason which is classified in Pali as *ah-ha-ri-ka-apa-rika-vadda*.<sup>94</sup> It is the volitional actions of the subjects or individuals so to speak from their past lives as well as the present that determines their current and future direction or destiny (in the generic rather than the theological sense of the word). Hence, according to Buddhist doctrine, it is the individual himself or herself who determines his or her own future through volitional actions.

In comparison can we say that the 'puppet master' or the writer of the script that 'determines' human lives is God or Creator according to some sects of Christianity? For, according to Calvinistic concept of 'pre-destination' God has already pre-determined who to save and who to consign to (eternal) damnation and even the fact that whether a person believes in God or not has already been pre-determined by Him. Still, in most Christian beliefs Man has 'free will' and that the good and the evil that happens to men (and women) are not the result of the 'will of God' but of his (men's) or her (women's) free will. Therefore, in a certain generic sense there is comparability (I do not say full compatibility though there may be 'traces' of it) between aspects of Buddhist and Christian metaphysics and ethics. One example of this is that the Biblical statement «As you sow, so you will reap» has been analogized with that of Buddhist *Kamma*.<sup>95</sup>

I am (again) aware that in this sub-section and especially in the brief and perfunctory discussion of *Kamma* and (what I consider to be) the Christian concept of free will I may have 'veered off' or – to quote from my Burmese Muslim senior colleague's chiding electronic mail stating me in effect to lay off (perhaps not even to read far less write about) Sufi poetry<sup>96</sup> – «go off on a tangent» in my discussions. I would 'justify' these 'spill-overs' in that they are not unprecedented nor unexpected. As the feminist legal scholar Margaret Davies writes at the end of her book *Asking the Law Question* :

There is no end ... to the theoretical questions which can be debated, though ... these questions are themselves ends ... everything which has been written also leads outside the book to the world: it is not simply inside, despite the illusion of containment created by having words inside the covers.<sup>97</sup>

*'body-disappear'/'mind-disappear' Anatta and yet another observation of 'outside'/'inside' dichotomy/duality*

The poet has used the metaphor or simile of the puppet to draw attention of the 'grasping' rambunctious nature of the ego or the self. It is also an allegorical prosody<sup>98</sup> about the futility of such a 'quest' after various forms of worldly power. The poet does state (in effect) that the *Zaw Gyi* puppet's ability or power to make his body disappear through the application and excess<sup>99</sup> of *Shein-hsaryar* is impressive. At the same time the poet is also anxious in that the *Zaw Gyi* might as well 'lose' his mind just as his body disappears. In the context of the poem there is no need to delve into the 'body-mind' dichotomy in Buddhism, in other religions and also the modern scientific and philosophical hypotheses<sup>100</sup> regarding the sameness, dichotomy, fusion or interdependence of body and mind. Like other religions, disciplines and hypotheses Buddhism too have a developed body of postulates or beliefs on this subject<sup>101</sup> including the theory of 'dependent origination'.<sup>102</sup>

Here, the power to make the body 'disappear' is allegorized as a crass form of materialism (in the non-philosophical sense) and practise of occult. The statement regarding the poet's anxiety if not angst of the *Zaw Gyi*'s body disappearing act should be seen in the context of the message. It should not be analyzed under the dichotomy of the mind-body relationship even under the rubric of Buddhist metaphysical thought not to say other 'scientific' and philosophical speculations and hypotheses.

One final thought on the Buddhist message of *Anatta* (or non-self) of the poem needs to be mentioned. First, an 'outsider's'<sup>103</sup> (so to speak in that the author was not a born Buddhist and was a former Catholic nun) exposition in plain English in a popular book on religion perhaps deserve a fairly extensive reproduction here. Karen Armstrong writes:

*A dhamma* was an imperative to action, and the doctrine of *anatta* was not an abstract philosophical proposition but required Buddhists to behave as though the ego did not exist. The ethical effects of this are far-reaching. Not only does the idea of 'self' leads to unskilful thoughts of 'me' and 'mine' and inspire our selfish cravings; egotism can arguably be described as the source of all evil: an excessive attachment to the self can lead to envy or hatred of all rivals, conceit, megalomania, pride, cruelty, and when the self feels threatened, to violence and destruction of others. Western people regard the doctrine of *anatta* as nihilistic and at their best all the great world religions formed during the Axial age seek to curb the voracious frightened ego<sup>104</sup> that does so much harm. The Buddha, however was more radical. His teaching of *anatta* did not seek to annihilate the self. He simply denied that the self had ever existed. It was a mistake to think of it as a constant reality. Any such misconception was a symptom of that ignorance which kept us bound to the cycle of suffering.<sup>105</sup>

And again:

The Buddha tried to make his *bhikkhus* see that they did not have a 'self' that needed to be defended, inflated, flattered, cajoled and enhanced at the expense of others. Once a monk had become practiced in the discipline of mindfulness, he would see how ephemeral what we call the 'self' really was ... An outside hearing the doctrine for the first time, might panic, thinking: «I am going to be annihilated and destroyed; I will no longer exist» ... When people lived as though the ego did not exist, they found that they were happier. They experienced the same kind of enlargement of being as came from a practice of the 'immeasurables' which were designed to dethrone the self from the center of our private universe and put other beings in its place. Egotism is constricting; when we see things only from a selfish point of view, our vision is limited. To live beyond the reach of greed, hatred, and the fears that come with an acute anxiety about our status and survival is liberating. *Anatta* may sound bleak when proposed as an abstract idea, but when it was lived out it transformed people's lives. By *living as though*<sup>106</sup> they had no self, people found that they had conquered their egotism and felt a great deal better. By understanding *Anatta* with the direct knowledge of a yogin, they found that they had crossed over into a richer, fuller existence. *Anatta* must, therefore, tell us something about the human condition, even though we cannot prove empirically that the self does not exist.<sup>107</sup>

It goes without saying that from both within and outside the Buddhist tradition there is (to employ a 'Freudian' term though not necessarily in the Freudian sense) 'resistance' to this doctrine of *Anatta*. The late Burmese scholar U Aye Maung (1914-2002)<sup>108</sup> in one of his articles written in the Burmese language states that:

It does not need to be specifically mentioned that the *Anatta* doctrine is totally contrary to the religion and beliefs of Westerners. But the *Anatta* doctrine does synchronise with the convictions of some western intellectuals. Among them are philosophers, scientists, psychologists and writers such as Bertrand Russell, Thomas Huxley, William James and, H.G.Wells. Some come to accept the doctrine of *Anatta* through the study of Pali literature like Dr Rhys Davids. Some like the philosopher David Hume<sup>109</sup> have come to the concept by their own analytical reasoning. It is learnt that in the writings of the famous German erudite scholar Goethe the concept of *Anatta* can also be discerned though Goethe like David Hume does not know anything about Buddhism.

Still, some intellectuals even after a thorough study of Buddhism and even though they respect the Buddha as a peerless person of learning and morality do not want to accept the doctrine of *Anatta*. Among such persons were the Pali literature expert Mrs Rhys Davids<sup>110</sup> who absolutely accepted Theravada Buddhism but later had a different view about *Anatta* and repeatedly and critically wrote that the concept of *Anatta* was not part of Buddhist doctrine. In fact among Westerners who claim themselves to be Buddhists there would be quite a few who do not accept the doctrine of *Anatta*. Even Christmas Humphries the Chairman of the British Buddhist Association in London has written in his books that the doctrine of *Anatta* could not have been taught by the Buddha.<sup>111</sup>

Hence it is understandable that many non-Buddhists and Buddhists as well are 'cool' to the doctrine of *Anatta* so to speak. A foreign scholar in electronic mail correspondence wrote me that

I get confused about [the Buddhist doctrine of non-self], however, whether the nonself is really nothing at all, or what is left when the driving demanding ego is defused (assuming that is possible). I raised this question with my friend Luis Gomez, a student of Buddhism I think mainly in Japan, and said: there are times when I become so involved in an activity – teaching, reading, even walking – that I lose any sense of time, of myself as a source of wish; the only thing is the experience and the action. Is that «self-fulfillment» as it seems to me, or selflessness, in the Buddhist sense; he said, the latter. Do you agree?

I do see how there is a part of the person that is seeking control or reward or defense, and that a healthy spiritual life would reduce or eliminate that. But there is more to the person than that, including the capacity to wait, to see, to care, to act, and I don't see how it would be good to try to eliminate that. So maybe I just don't get it, or I am an irredeemable Christian.<sup>112</sup>

I think I have addressed some of the issues raised here (partly with generous 'sprinklings' of quotes from the book by Karen Armstrong). I would just add that «the capacity to wait, to see, to care and to act' is also not affected by the doctrine of *Anatta* (or 'non-self') in Buddhism in that it does not, should not prevent us from 'waiting, seeing, caring and acting». Indeed Buddhism does encourage ('exhort' if you will) all persons to develop those virtuous acts not only towards humans but also all beings. In the words of another (legal) scholar from the 'outside' of the Buddhist tradition: «Buddhism is profoundly egalitarian as a philosophy and its egalitarianism extends to all forms of existence».<sup>113</sup>

Comparing the themes of the poem of Hebert and Zaw Gyi can the central message of *Love III* (the supreme sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sins of all human kind) and that of 'Zaw Gyi and *Shein-hsar-yar*' (the doctrine of *Anatta*) make sense only to those from the *inside* of each faith? Would the 'outsider' 'find' that even if 'some doors of cognition' are not 'forever barred' the acceptance of 'Love' and that of the concept of '*Anatta*' are, for them, metaphysically and conceptually 'out of bounds' so to speak?

As an indirect answer or 'aside' to this question I would say that the poems of both Herbert and Zaw Gyi are culturally specific and especially the poem by Zaw Gyi the more so. Though the shortest of the three poems one needs some familiarity – and among others – with Burmese folklore, occult concepts such as *Shein-hsar-yar*. That is why I have devoted the most 'space' and 'words' to the poem by Zaw Gyi. For a less indirect answer to the question I would argue that theological specificity and cultural specificity may not be the same. And also that devout (and perhaps even 'nominal') Christians would find

it conceptually, metaphysically not that difficult to accept that Christ as the Saviour died for 'our' sins. But as the above discussion shows even devout Buddhists misconstrue, misconceive or misunderstood the doctrine of *Anatta*. Perhaps *Anatta* is not a concept that could be grasped intellectually or for that matter by 'faith' or by 'grace'. Perhaps one have to go through *Vipassana* meditation<sup>114</sup> to even have a glimpse of this ephemeral concept of 'non-Self'.<sup>115</sup> In this regard and turning briefly to another faith one of the author's correspondents openly states that 'if one has not said prayers in the Islamic way and if you have not done the meditation in this religion, any English translation won't give you the real inner meaning'<sup>116</sup> of the poems of Rumi or those of other Sufi poets. Hence – at least from the 'inner perspective' or what claims to be the inner perspective of each of these three religious poems – the 'inner meaning' or the 'inner meanings' are 'closed' to the outsider. Notwithstanding such 'closures', with my limited and limiting vision and ability I have persevered.

### Conclusion

It is perhaps not inappropriate even at this late or last stage of my article to narrate how I first came across these three poems. This should help me answer some of the questions and comments that were put to me after my oral presentations on the subject of this article first in English to an international and Burmese audience at *The Traditions of Knowledge in Southeast Asia Conference* on 17 December 2003 in Rangoon and to an exclusively Burmese audience in the Burmese language in Mandalay on 8 January 2004.

I first came across the *Zaw Gyi* and *Shein-hsar-yar* poem in late 1994 when I first had the chance to read it through Maung Thar Noe's article.<sup>117</sup> As I already read the 'interpretation', the meaning of the poem was not that obscure to me in that I saw it at least 'through a glass darkly'. Had I found the poem without its interpretation and commentary there could have been, on my part, a delayed interpretation or slower realization of the essential theme of the poem. At the least I would have been (temporarily) 'stuck' with the phrase '*shein-hsar-yar*'. In that sense Maung Thar Noe's interpretation helps me extend my thoughts further on this poem. I do not know whether there is a published English translation or for that matter that in other languages of one of *Hsayar* Zaw Gyi's shortest poems which nevertheless is pregnant with meaning and significance for the sophisticated (or) discerning reader from the 'inside'. I am aware that partly due to my limitations and partly – should I be immodest enough to suggest? – due to the inherent difficulty of the subject and the intricacies of cultural symbols and terms, my translation could well be unsatisfactory, 'literal' or 'awkward'.

I first read the 'translation' and rendition of *Poem 3090* which I have given the title *Sweetness* when a colleague

at the School of Law at University of the South Pacific in Vanuatu lent me the booklet *Like This: 43 Odes* by Rumi sometime in early 2002. Poem Number 3090 was translated by A.J. Arberry and the rendition was done by Coleman Barks who though (apparently) not proficient in Farsi (or) Persian<sup>118</sup> – the language in which Rumi wrote – have authored quite a few books on Rumi's poetry<sup>119</sup>. I am aware that parts of the 'feel' as well as the 'contents' of the poem could be lost in the translation and the rendition. Nevertheless even if that is the case I believe that the beauty and the poignancy of the poem still comes through. I submit that they do so not only because Coleman Barks is an excellent translator who may have occasionally taken 'liberties' in the translations<sup>120</sup> and renditions but perhaps primarily because Rumi was a colossus of a poet who could communicate across cultural and religious divides or boundaries throughout the ages. And I am aware and humbly acknowledge that A.J. Arberry and Coleman Barks have been able to do a better job than myself in translating or making renditions of Rumi's poem 3090 than I have been with that of Zaw Gyi's. But as the Burmese saying goes 'the elephant has its own measurements [and paces] and the ant also has his' and I appreciate this opportunity to give a translation and commentary on one of Zaw Gyi's poems with those of two other poets who flourished in past centuries.

I discovered *Love III* by George Herbert several months after I discovered Rumi's *Poem 3090* through James Boyd White's book *This Book of Starres* – a signed copy of which he had sent me for which I again express my gratitude.

In terms of 'affect' on me of the three poems I should reiterate that both in terms of being intellectually challenged and in terms of being emotionally affected the translation and rendition of Rumi's poem affected me the most. As I have stated, the fact that I read Maung Thar Noe's 'interpretation' and explanation of Zaw Gyi's poem makes it less challenging since some of the 'thinking' regarding the poem was done 'for me'. A participant<sup>121</sup> at the Yangon conference asked me, in effect, what aim I have had and what was the methodology in my analysis and discussion of the three poems. The aim is to do a cross-cultural analysis of three religious poems and to share some of my feelings and thoughts concerning them and the methodology<sup>122</sup> if there is any can perhaps be discerned in this paper. Even though I do not always 'delineate' them as such I have attempted to discuss conjointly the symbolism, theme(s) and message(s) of the poem with perhaps at times a 'defensive' (or is it assertive?) emphasis on the 'outside' and 'inside' dichotomy or duality – as the case may be – in analyzing them.<sup>123</sup>

Another participant at the Mandalay presentation<sup>124</sup> where I spoke in Burmese asked me how I 'happened' to link or how the idea to discuss them together occurred to me. He further enquired whether I have to do a lot of thinking and 'researching' before I decided to link these three poems or whether the putting together of these three

poems came 'spontaneously' to me. I told him that it was neither, though it probably was more spontaneous rather than deliberate or 'systematic' research that led me to talk and write about them.

As stated earlier the similes, metaphors, images and even actions of the speaker (and the spoken to which can be deemed, among others, to be the readers of the poems) in the poems of Rumi and Herbert are quite similar. These similarities facilitate a comparison of the two poems mainly in terms of poetic symbolism rather than in terms of metaphysical or even general philosophical implications.<sup>125</sup> In that sense, due to its cultural specificity, the poem of Zaw Gyi may seem to be the 'odd poem' but I do vaguely discern a comparability perhaps even inchoate similarity between Zaw Gyi's poem and that of Rumi.

I have already stated that in my opinion all three poems can generally be said to embody the theme of the escape from the snares of the 'self' or the ego. I do realize that this particular theme can be more readily extrapolated from a study of Rumi's and Zaw Gyi's poems respectively rather than that of Herbert. For Herbert's poem it is in part about unworthiness of the 'self' or the speaker to 'receive' Love's Love (so to speak) and his final transformation and acceptance of Love<sup>126</sup> virtually at the end of the poem. In addition to discussing the 'surrender' of the 'self' or the exhortation to escape from the fetters of the ego, the three poems also talk about either 'transformation' (as in *Love III*) or the need for transformation (as in the onlooker's anxiety about the *Zaw Gyi* in *Zaw Gyi* and *Shein-hsaryar* and the need for the *Zaw Gyi* to 'transform' himself in order for him not to lose his mind) or the effects and *Sweetness* of transformation (from the «journey to walk out of the house» to «If you become this you will be That» to «tasting the *Sweetness*» in Rumi's poem 3090).

Another reason I want to write about the three poems is the lovability and some of the endearing qualities (from what I have read and heard about them) about the poets themselves. Rumi's humanity and his 'involvement in the community's life' is described by Coleman Barks thus:

[Rumi's] oldest son, Sultan Velad, saved 147 of Rumi's personal letters.... In one letter he begs a man to put off collecting money owed to another man for fifteen days. He asks a wealthy nobleman to help out a student with a small loan. Someone's relatives have moved into the hut of a devout old woman, he asks if the situation can be remedied. Sudden lines of poetry are scattered throughout the letters. Rumi was a practical worker in the world as well as an ecstatic.<sup>127</sup>

In a similar vein, James Boyd White writes affectionately about 'Herbert's loveability'<sup>128</sup> and discloses to us that Herbert like Rumi deeply cared about the community where he had lived.





lands, performed the pilgrimage to Mecca and finally settled in Konya, Anatolia (Turkey), where he succeeded his father in 1231 as professor in religious sciences». See for e.g. [www.naqshbandi.net/haqqani/sufi/saints/Sayiddina\\_Rumi.html](http://www.naqshbandi.net/haqqani/sufi/saints/Sayiddina_Rumi.html) (accessed 11 March 2004) see also Translations by Coleman Barks *The Soul of Rumi*: A New Collection of Ecstatic Poems, 2002, 3 where it states that «Rumi was born near the city of Balkh in what is now Afghanistan, then the eastern edge of the Persian empire, on September 30, 1207».

<sup>5</sup> See statement by Coleman Barks above note 1. As Rumi apparently wrote his poems in Persian (Farsi) (see *Like This* [:] *Rumi 43 Odes*, Versions by Coleman Barks at the back flap where it is stated that Rumi wrote most of his poems in 'Persian'. Hence by geographical or national origin and in part using present-day designation of countries it can be stated that Rumi was a Persian or an 'Afghan' by national origin even though Rumi spent most of his life in Konya in what is present day Turkey. See Coleman Barks, *The Soul of Rumi* above note 1, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Coleman Barks writes that 'Rumi died at sunset on December 17, 1273. His tomb in Konya is still visited by thousands each month. It is said that representatives from all major religions attended his funeral. They saw Rumi and his poetry as a way of deepening their own faith... Every year on December 17, the anniversary of his death is celebrated the world over as the night of his union with the divine'. *The Soul of Rumi* (ibid.) 7. Fortuitously, perhaps even felicitously, I happened to give my presentation on the three poets and their poems and talked for a few minutes about one of Rumi's poems on 17 December 2003, the 730<sup>th</sup> anniversary to the day of Rumi's death at the opening day of the conference *Traditions of Knowledge in Southeast Asia* held from 17 to 19 December 2003 in Rangoon, Burma.

<sup>7</sup> Alan Godlass *Sufism's Many Paths* [www.arches.uga.edu/~godlass/Sufism.html](http://www.arches.uga.edu/~godlass/Sufism.html) (accessed 11 March 2004).

<sup>8</sup> According to Coleman Barks (*The Soul of Rumi*, above note 1, page 7) in the last twelve years of his life «Rumi wrote one long continuous poem, the Masnavi, sixty-four thousand lines of poetry divided into six books». Barks asserts that such a poem or series of poems have «no parallel in world literature». (Ibid.)

<sup>9</sup> See for e.g. James Boyd White *This Book of Starres* above note 2 at ix that in the year «1626 Herbert was made prebend of the church at Leighton Bromswold, in Huntingdonshire [in England] near the new religious community of Little Gidding». Just as the anniversary of Rumi's death on 17 December (1273) is celebrated even now at least by some Sufis each year (see notes accompanying above note 3) February 27 is also still celebrated by some Anglicans as the «feast day of George Herbert, Anglican priest and Metaphysical poet of the 17<sup>th</sup> century». *Dr Mac's Cultural Calendar* [www.nortexinfo.net/McDaniel/0227.htm](http://www.nortexinfo.net/McDaniel/0227.htm) (accessed 11 March 2004). See also [www.xnec.org/writing/BC20030223.php](http://www.xnec.org/writing/BC20030223.php) (accessed 11 March 2004) for the description of Herbert as an 'Anglican priest'. James Boyd White (at page 36) states that though of Christian faith «Herbert was a Protestant and an English one, for preaching had a role under Protestantism and in England different from that in the Catholic tradition». Hence at least in the case of Hebert the 'sub-categorising' of George Herbert's poetry as inspired not only from Christianity but also from (Protestant) Anglicanism perhaps could better facilitate an understanding of the poem to be analyzed.

<sup>10</sup> This is a fairly well-known Buddhist saying. This particular translation is taken from Dr. Pranav Pandya *Intercommunion of Religion With Science* [www.awgp.org/English/Represent/intercommunion\\_science\\_religion.html](http://www.awgp.org/English/Represent/intercommunion_science_religion.html) (accessed 17 March 2004).

<sup>11</sup> *Psalms* 23, 1-3.

<sup>12</sup> See for e.g. Idries Shah, *The Sufis* (New York: Anchor Books, 1971), p. 70. There are numerous versions of references to this well-known Sufi story especially on the Internet. One example could be found in *Once Upon a Time Using Teaching Story as a Metaphor to Enhance Learning* [web3.woodbury.edu/faculty/sdhiman/Teaching%20Story%20Methodology.doc](http://web3.woodbury.edu/faculty/sdhiman/Teaching%20Story%20Methodology.doc) (accessed 22 March 2004). Various versions and varying interpretations of this story can be found not only on web sites concerning Sufism and educational psychology (ibid.) but also on web sites dealing with other non-

Sufi religions. See for e.g. *Two Kinds of People* [www.catholic-center.rutgers.edu/FrRonStanley/two\\_kinds\\_of\\_people.html](http://www.catholic-center.rutgers.edu/FrRonStanley/two_kinds_of_people.html) (accessed 22 March 2004) for an 'interpretation' of this story from what can be considered to be a Catholic perspective.

<sup>13</sup> Of course different, differing or 'obverse' explanations or interpretations about this story can be made. The article *Two Kinds of People* (above note 12) states its view of the story thus:

«This story spotlights a foolish and futile error. We have lost the key to happiness and are searching for it outside ourselves where it cannot possibly be found. We look outside because it is easier and more pleasant. There is more light outside, and also more company. If we search for happiness outside ourselves, we will have plenty of company, because this way of life is heavily traveled».

<sup>14</sup> *Two Kinds of People* [www.catholic-center.rutgers.edu/FrRonStanley/two\\_kinds\\_of\\_people.html](http://www.catholic-center.rutgers.edu/FrRonStanley/two_kinds_of_people.html) (accessed 22 March 2004).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. See the excerpts from the web site at foot note 13.

<sup>16</sup> Catholic Encyclopedia *Eucharist* [www.newadvent.org/cathen/05572c.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05572c.htm) (accessed 22 March 2004).

<sup>17</sup> See text and notes accompanying above notes 12, 13, 14.

<sup>18</sup> W. Carl Ketcherside *Holy Places and Days* [www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/wcketcherside/mm/mm28\\_09a.html](http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/wcketcherside/mm/mm28_09a.html). (accessed 27 March 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> *Love III* poem Line 16.

<sup>21</sup> White above note 9, p. 261.

<sup>22</sup> Philip Goodchild, *Speech and Silence in the Mumonkan: An Examination of Use of Language in Light of the Philosophy of Giles De Leuze* 43 (1) *Philosophy East and West* cited at [ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-PHIL/philo1.htm](http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-PHIL/philo1.htm). (accessed 24 March 2004).

<sup>23</sup> The exact date or even year in which Rumi composed the *Sweetness* poem is not known though it could be sometime after 1237 AD (when Rumi was about 20 years old) and 1273 AD (when Rumi died on 17 December of that year). It is generally regarded that Herbert's *Love III* was a 'late poem' in that Herbert composed the poem perhaps in the last few years if not the last months of his life when he died in 1633. (See for e.g. Chapter 6 of White's *This Book of Starres* where *Love III* is included in the Section after 'Four Late Poems', page 231, in *Final Transformations*, page 249). Hence supposing that Hebert composed the poem *Love III* in 1630 and Rumi composed the poem any time after 1237 there is a possible maximum of nearly four hundred years between the composition of the two poems.

<sup>24</sup> William Stuart Nelson, *The Tradition of Non-violence and its Underlying Forces* [www.mk Gandhi.org/gandhi-his%20relevance/chap01.htm](http://www.mk Gandhi.org/gandhi-his%20relevance/chap01.htm) (accessed 27 March 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Compare Karen Armstrong's statement that «[w]estern people often regard the Buddha's doctrine of *anatta* as nihilistic or depressing, but at their best all the great world religions formed during the Axial age seek to curb the voracious frightened ego that does so much harm. The Buddha, however, was more radical. His teaching of *anatta* did not seek to annihilate the self. He simply denied that the self had ever existed. It was a mistake to think of it as a constant reality. Any such misconception was a symptom of that ignorance which kept us bound to the cycle of suffering»: Karen Armstrong, *Buddha*, 2000, 102.

<sup>26</sup> This well-known poem of Emily Dickinson can be 'abundantly' found on the Internet. For one such reproduction among more than six thousand see for e.g. at [www.bartleby.com/113/4027.html](http://www.bartleby.com/113/4027.html) (accessed 27 March 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Myint Zan *Emily Dickinson yei Anicca Kabyar* ('Emily Dickinson's Poem of Impermanence') July 1996 *Sarpay Journal* (Rangoon, Burma).

<sup>28</sup> Compare the Biblical passage «For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known» *1 Corinthians* 13, 12. The 'seeing' in Rumi's poem, in my view, is (somewhat) 'obverse' of the 'seeing' in the *Corinthians*. For Rumi boldly states that «Now you will see into the Invisible» in contrast to the past (then) of the 'subject' /reader/ hear-

er «been an unsafe house». Whereas the passage from the Corinthians seem to denote a past or a future of completeness 'then face to face' in contrast to the *present* uncertainty or vagueness ('now we see through a glass darkly') or incompleteness ('now I know in part'). A similar interplay of 'now' and 'then' can also be found in the latter part of Rumi's poem through the words and imagery that flows from the phrase «Then Silence and now more Silence» immediately after the 'Voice' speaks to the speaker. One could perhaps argue that the 'then' in the Corinthians perhaps was indeterminate but 'then Silence' in Rumi's poem is more 'immediate' in 'sequential time' (perhaps) than that of the passage in the Corinthians' expectation, promise or 'recall' of seeing 'then face to face'. The 'now' in 'now more silence' in Rumi's poem is pregnant with both meaning and 'emptiness' and indeed joy and wisdom. Compare text accompanying above note 22. Compare also this statement apparently from Taoism «Behind me are illusions of reality. Before me emptiness and silence» *Know Thou art That. Om Tat Sam Om*: [www.angelfire.com/in/sbm/om.html](http://www.angelfire.com/in/sbm/om.html) (accessed 19 April 2004).

<sup>29</sup> Nowhere in the poem *Love III* is the Table (or) Chair mentioned. But since the 'speaker' in *Love III* actually 'sits' and 'eats' one is reminded not only of the symbol and imagery of Christ's last supper but also of the phrase 'Be Lord of the table' in Rumi's poem.

<sup>30</sup> See for e.g. Joseph Campbell, Eugene Kennedy, *Thou Art That* (2001).

<sup>31</sup> Compare this observation from the 'outside' by a former Catholic nun that nirvana can be obtained in this life: «[t]he term for the attainment of Nibbana in this life is *sa-upadi-sesa*»: Karen Armstrong *Buddha* (above note 25) 165.

<sup>32</sup> White, *This Book of Starres* above note 2 at x.

<sup>33</sup> A summary of George Herbert's biography is taken from *ibid.* at ix. There are also many biographies of George Herbert on the Internet. See for e.g. <http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/herbert/herbbo.htm> (accessed 28 March 2004).

<sup>34</sup> James Boyd White in *This Book of Starres* (above note 2 at pages 262 and 263) reproduced the photos of two handwritten copies of *Love III* in what was called the 'Williams manuscript' and 'Bodelian manuscript' both versions of which contain the word 'Finis' at the end of the poem. Hence it is presumed that in the first and subsequent published versions of *The Temple Love III* was the final poem of the book. See also [www.sermonmall.com/SRRSample/113003d.html](http://www.sermonmall.com/SRRSample/113003d.html) (accessed 28 March 2004) where it is stated that *Love III* is the «final poem of the book *The Temple*». I would like to record my thanks to Jim White for sending me a signed copy of his book in May 2002.

<sup>35</sup> Among other sites *Love III* poem can be accessed at [www.brpc.org/publications/bulletins/bulletin.Aug-04-2002.pdf](http://www.brpc.org/publications/bulletins/bulletin.Aug-04-2002.pdf) (accessed 28 March 2004).

<sup>36</sup> White, *This Book of Starres* p. 261.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 261-64. In an electronic mail correspondence with this author dated 16 November 2002 White slightly elaborated on the poem thus: «What struck me most was your response to *Love III*. I think it really is Christian; it is about a relationship with another, about the fundamental character of love, about the side of the self that feels unworthy of love, and so on». I have lost the 'out' e mail that I sent to James Boyd White a few weeks earlier, before White responded to my e mail an excerpt of which is reproduced above. Notwithstanding the fact that there is 'so much' to say about the poem which leaves the Herbert scholar James Boyd White essentially speechless, in awe and 'without comment' I will endeavour within the limited confines and scope of this paper to give my views, interpretation and comments on the poem.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 261.

<sup>40</sup> One of the earlier translations into English of Rumi's long epic poem *Mathnawi* (also written as *Masnawi*) appeared only in the year 1898 more than 260 years after Herbert's death in 1633. See the *Masnawi I Ma'navi* by Maulana Jalalu-'d-din Muhammad Rumi (Abridged and Translated by E.H. Whinfield [1898] [www.sacred-texts.com/isl/masnawi](http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/masnawi) (accessed 28 March 2004). It is stated that in

late 13<sup>th</sup> century Konya (of what is now) Turkey «representatives from all major religions» attended Rumi's funeral when he «died at sunset on December 17, 1273»: *The Soul of Rumi* above note 4 at page 7. Rumi's familiarity with (at least) the fundamental tenets of Christianity has already been discussed. The 'language' and 'technical' barriers would overwhelmingly militate against the 'scenario' of Herbert being familiar or interested in other religions or doctrines, Rumi's poems or Sufism. Even if *ex hypothesi* they were available in the native language of Herbert (i.e. in English) the effect on Herbert would have been minimal to say the least. White in *This Book of Starres* (above note 2 at page 91) writes that Herbert was «committed to the truths of Christianity but more than that he is overcommitted for a part of him is didactic, conclusory and authoritarian as he imagines the church, or his God, to be». White also states (*ibid.* footnote 19) that «[t]hrough the requirement was no doubt evaded, in England [during Herbert's life time] every person was obliged by law to attend the established church» (emphasis added). From the 'impressions' that the author has been able to derive from writings about Rumi (mainly through the writings of Coleman Barks, above note 4) and Herbert (mainly through the writings of James Boyd White above note 2) it appears that mid to late 13<sup>th</sup> century Konya was a more tolerant place than early 17<sup>th</sup> century England and Wales as far as interchange of religious discourse was concerned.

<sup>41</sup> As, among others, found in *Leviticus* 19, 18.

<sup>42</sup> The *Metta Sutta* [:] The Buddha's Teaching on Loving-kindness [www.members.tripod.com/Shakyamuni/Sutras/metta\\_sutra.htm](http://www.members.tripod.com/Shakyamuni/Sutras/metta_sutra.htm) (accessed 28 March 2004).

<sup>43</sup> Julius Stone, *Social Dimensions of Law and Justice*, 1966, p. 490.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> A 'mischievous idea' or a 'naughty thought' comes to mind as I ponder what *if* the speaker of *Love III declines* 'Love's' invitation to taste His 'meat'. After all, the speaker was initially quite 'slack' from the 'first entrance in' notwithstanding 'Love' bidding him welcome. This 'counter-factual' is of course just that and that there would be no poem if such a 'decline' were to take place.

<sup>47</sup> In my view, Herbert's poem is self-validating in the sense that it reiterates the core message of Christianity albeit subtly and beautifully but inexorably. Compare the assertive (and explicit) «who creates the eyes but I?» and «know you not who bore the blame?» in Herbert's poem the 'answer' to which can easily be found in Christian scripture and teachings for Christians and (interested, knowledgeable) non-Christians alike. In contrast compare Rumi's «if you become this you will be That» and «Silence then more Silence». Whose message or theme is more (theologically) specific or more confining?

<sup>48</sup> Though many discerning readers of Herbert's poetry could easily identify the fundamental Christian message of Herbert's poetry it is perhaps fair to say that (as an 'outsider') I was unable to detect an *explicit* 'Islamic' message in Rumi's *Sweetness*. The fact that the metaphors and the message of Rumi's poem raise thoughts and 'spillovers' to other religious doctrines in an expansive manner indicate, to this one particular reader, that Rumi's poem is more 'porous' and embracing than that of Herbert's.

<sup>49</sup> White, *This Book of Starres* above note 2 at page 90 (quoting from *1 Corinthians* 1, 23).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p. 91.

<sup>51</sup> See text and notes accompanying above 43 to 45.

<sup>52</sup> I am unable to provide the reference for this statement. But (on this generic theme) see Melford Spiro, *Anthropological Other or Burmese Brother? Studies in Cultural Analysis* (1991).

<sup>53</sup> In the article *Rumi Rules* in the October 7, 2002 issue of *Time* magazine [www.time.com/time/asia/magazine/article/0,13673,501021007-356133,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/asia/magazine/article/0,13673,501021007-356133,00.html) (accessed 2 April 2004) it was stated that «*The Essential Rumi*, published by HarperCollins in 1995 [have] 250,000 copies in print, [and that] it is easily the most successful poetry book published in the West in the past decade».

<sup>54</sup> This is a rough translation of the Burmese phrase 'po-mauk' in Zaw Gyi's *Zaw Gyi and Shein-hsar-yar* poem discussed below.

<sup>55</sup> Real name U Thein Han. Since the poet is generally and affectionately well-known by his pseudonym Zaw Gyi he will be mentioned as Zaw Gyi throughout the article.

<sup>56</sup> The tribute essay can be found in *Hsayar Zaw Gyi Ahmhat Ta Ya Sar Su Myar* ('Tributes in Remembrance of Hsayar Zaw Gyi') which contains a collection of tribute articles by many writers. The tributes written by various authors are mainly in the Burmese language but two or three including the one by U Thet Tun are in English.

<sup>57</sup> Myint Zan, *Hsayar Zaw Gyi Hnint Thu Ei Ga Byar 2 (Hsayar Zaw Gyi and his Poetry)* «Moe Magazine» (April 2004) pp. 76, 77.

<sup>58</sup> See for e.g. Dr Khin Maung Nyunt *Honouring a Literati* [www.myanmar.gov.mm/Perspective/persp1999/11-99/honour.htm](http://www.myanmar.gov.mm/Perspective/persp1999/11-99/honour.htm) (accessed 3 April 2004).

<sup>59</sup> The *Zawgyi and Sheinhsaryar* poem is reproduced in *Zawgyi Gapyar Paungchoke* ('Complete Poems of Zaw Gyi'), 1997, p. 423. It is stated there that the poem was composed at the 'second ceremony to give homage to writers' in the year 1984. Since Zawgyi was born on 12 April 1907 in the town of Phyapon in Burma (ibid. p. 427) and died on 26 September 1990 in Rangoon (ibid. p. 431; see also *Honouring a Literati* above note 58) Zaw Gyi must be around 77 years old when he composed the poem in 1984.

<sup>60</sup> «Rumi was born near the city of Balkh, in what is now Afghanistan, then the eastern edge of the Persian empire on September 30, 1207» (*The Soul of Rumi*, above note 4 at page 3) and «died at sunset on December 17, 1273 ... in Konya» (ibid. p. 7). Unlike Zaw Gyi's poems *Zawgyi and Shein-hsar-yar* which the poet Zaw Gyi was known to have composed in the year 1984 the exact year in which *Sweetness* by Rumi and *Love III* by Herbert were composed is not known. In the case of *Love III* though since it is known that it was one of Herbert's 'late poems' (see above note 34) it must have been written no more than three or four years before Herbert's death in 1633.

<sup>61</sup> George Herbert was born «in Montgomery, Wales on April 3, 1593» and «died of consumption on March 1, 1633». *The Life of George Herbert* [www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/herbert/herbbio.htm](http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/herbert/herbbio.htm) (accessed 3 April 2004). Fortuitously (or is it providentially?) just as I gave a presentation of my paper at the *Traditions of Knowledge in Southeast Asia conference* which includes discussions about Rumi's poem on the 730<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rumi's death I am also reproducing this brief biographical information on 3 April 2004 on the 411<sup>th</sup> anniversary to the day of Herbert's birth.

<sup>62</sup> *Plato Ni-Dan (Introduction to Plato)* (first published 1967). A researcher has stated that in doing the translation of parts of Plato's works Zaw Gyi mainly relied on the book *An Introduction to the Wisdom of Plato* by Professor Jowett and translated (from English to Burmese) excerpts from the *Phaedrus*, *Theaetetus*, *Ion*, *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Lysis*, *Gorgias*, *Symposium*, *The Republic*, *Apology* and *Phaedo*. The whole of the *Meno* and *Crito* (apparently from Jowett's book) was translated into Burmese. The chapter by Pe Myint *Plato Nidan in Hnint-hsei-yar-zu-ah-htoo-char-hsone-Myanmar-sar-oat-myar* 'The Most Special Myanmar Books of the Twentieth Century', 2002, pp. 234-37.

<sup>63</sup> The relevant passage reads «Starres are poore books, & oftentimes do misse: This book of Starres lights to eternal blisse» from Herbert's poems *The Holy Scriptures* (II) *The Poetical Works of George Herbert* [www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/herbert/holyscripts.htm](http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/herbert/holyscripts.htm) (accessed 7 April 2004).

<sup>64</sup> Such a reading (like Zaw Gyi's reading of the Bible as a – religious – 'outsider'), appreciation and writing about mainly religious subjects and religious poetry should not be discouraged either academically, aesthetically or even at appropriate times and settings for 'inter-religious' dialogue or exchange of 'traditions of knowledge'. I could mention here that while I am writing this article I happened to forward by electronic mail the article 'Rumi rules' (above note 53) to a few of my friends and colleagues. One senior colleague of the author, a Burmese Muslim, wrote me (by electronic mail) that «[i]f you want to fly off at a tangent and indulge yourself in poetry, chose other poets but NOT sufi writings... For one thing you are not a muslim...

Jalaluddin's [Rumi's] material is on a different plane which you... would 'definitely' NOT understand... you just translate [and write about] non Sufi poems only... (electronic mail on file with author; capital letters and spelling as in original communication). The author of this article submits that such thinking is symptomatic of an 'inside' indeed in the negative sense of the words insular and exclusive attitudes, thinking and dilemma which the author had discussed when I commented about Herbert's *Love III* from the 'outside' (see text and notes accompanying notes 43 to 45) which were written before I received the above message from my senior colleague asking me to (in effect) 'lay off' Sufi poetry. When I forwarded the message from my senior colleague – with requests for comments – to 'other' (pun intended) colleagues of mine one commented to the effect that for persons (like my senior colleague who sent me that note) they felt that 'poetry can be owned [only] by certain people or types of people. A sufi realizes that wisdom lies at different levels for different people. Even if you and I might be far from enlightened sufis, no enlightened sufi would prohibit us from reading, enjoying, gaining insights appropriate to our own level and talking about the poetry» (electronic mail on file with author). Another colleague also wrote that the first colleague who sent me that 'chiding note obviously felt that «[t]he implied distinction between aesthetics & faith cannot be permitted» (electronic mail on file with author). Finally James Boyd White from whose book I learnt much (though, I am sure, not 'adequately' at least from an internal Christian perspective) about George Herbert's poetry wrote me that «[i]t is really quite extraordinary to be told ... that you have no business interpreting the poetry of someone in that tradition! I should have thought that the literature of the world belonged to the world» (electronic mail on file with author).

In addition I also believe that my first (chiding) colleague's e mail is also (perhaps) in my (not so) humble view contrary to Rumi's 'porous' cross-cultural and (at least in certain senses) inter-religious message. (See note accompanying footnote 48). It is in this sense of 'porousness' and the theme of the conference regarding the (non-censorious accommodation one hopes) of (various) 'Traditions of Knowledge' that despite my 'handicaps' as a non-poet (but as one who is interested in poetry) and as an 'outsider' that I am attempting an analysis and commentary of the three poems.

<sup>65</sup> I have used the pseudonym of U Thein Han (the poet Zaw Gyi) as a personal name and hence without italics. Since a few of the poems (the poet) Zaw Gyi wrote also mentions the Burmese word *Zaw Gyi* (which denotes the puppet *Zaw Gyi* in this particular poem) I have used italics when referring to *that Zaw Gyi*. In addition when I mention the traditional Burmese folklore concept of *Zaw Gyi* the word is also italicized.

<sup>66</sup> The Burmese word 'maww' is roughly and 'proximately' translated as 'anxious'. In the translator's discussion, in September 2002, with Professor F.K. Lehman (*Hsa-yar* U Chit Hlaing) of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Professor Lehman expressed the view that the word could also be translated as 'non-plussed'. The translator is of the view that the word 'maww' in the context of this poem perhaps denotes or connotes a mixture of emotions or states of mind the predominant one being that of anxiousness. Such other emotions such as feeling non-plussed or puzzlement and that of angst and ennui can perhaps be imputed to the meaning of the Burmese word 'maww'. Nevertheless in the context of this poem I would submit that anxiety at the Zaw Gyi's antics (by the 'speaker' or 'observer') is the primary message conveyed by the Burmese word 'maww'.

<sup>67</sup> 'rambunctious, overflowing' is the author's translation of the Burmese word 'po mauk'. See also foot notes 99 and 104 below.

<sup>68</sup> Ma Theingi, *As Smooth as Silk*, [www.myanmar.gov.mm/myanmartimes/no82/Timeouts/1.htm](http://www.myanmar.gov.mm/myanmartimes/no82/Timeouts/1.htm) (accessed 8 April 2004).

<sup>69</sup> 'taung-hway' in Burmese.

<sup>70</sup> See generally Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements in Burmese Buddhism*, (1962) and especially the Chapter *The Cult of Alchemy* at pages 41 to 50. See also Aaron *Four Puppets: A Tale of Burma* [www.aaronshp.com/stories/043.html](http://www.aaronshp.com/stories/043.html) (accessed 12 April 2004) where the writer states that «[t]he sorcerer – *zawgyi*, in Burmese – is a survivor from pre-Buddhist Burma. The *zawgyi* practices alchemy to at-

tain immortal life, along with lesser attainments such as the power of flight. An almost exact parallel is in the Chinese popular concept of the Taoist 'Immortal'. The 'dance of the *zawgyi*' is one of the most popular portions of the puppeteers' pre-play warm-up».

<sup>71</sup> Dr Htin Aung writes that «before Buddhism with its doctrine of the impermanence of all compounded things, influenced the Burmese mind, it was believed that «the fully developed alchemist» would live forever with his eternally youthful body», *ibid.* p. 44. Dr Htin Aung defines *Aggiya* as «the work with fire» (*ibid.* p. 41). Dr Htin Aung also states that «the final goal [of those who practised *Aggiya* especially in pre-Buddhist Burma] «is to attain, after more experiment, a superhuman body and an eternal youth» (*ibid.* p. 42).

I have stated the obvious truism that 'eternal life' which the would-be *Zaw Gyi*s inspired to achieve as explained in more detail in Dr Htin Aung's chapter is shorn of the Christian or Christological 'promise' of 'eternal life' that is, for example, paradigmatically asserted in the following passage of the Bible «For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life»: *John* 3, 16.

<sup>72</sup> Roughly translated into English as 'Impermanence'.

<sup>73</sup> Roughly but imperfectly (inadequately?) translated as «suffering». Karen Armstrong in the Glossary of her book *Buddha* (at page 185) explains *Dukkha* as 'awry, flawed, unsatisfactory'; often simply translated as suffering».

<sup>74</sup> 'Non-Self'. Karen Armstrong (*ibid.* p. 184) defines *Anatta* as «'No-Soul': the doctrine that denies the existence of a constant, stable and discrete personality».

<sup>75</sup> Citing Buddhist texts (in translation) Karen Armstrong defines the obverse of *Akusala* which is *Kusala* as «[t]he 'skilful' or 'healthful' states of mind and heart that Buddhists should cultivate in order to achieve enlightenment»: *ibid.* p. 186.

<sup>76</sup> If the concept of a successful human alchemist being able to transform himself into a *Zaw Gyi* is taken as a 'mythical paradigm' in Burmese folklore Dr Htin Aung, in a work first published in 1959, states that «[t]he majority of Burmese Buddhists frown upon alchemist experiments [aimed among others at becoming a *Zaw Gyi*] as a waste of time, and look upon the alchemist as a seeker after gold and after sensual pleasures»: *ibid.* p. 45. Writing more than forty-five years earlier in a translation and commentary on *The Dhammapada* (London, John Murray, 1912 first edition, reprint 2001) K.J. Saunders (member of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch) states (*ibid.* p. 93) that «Arahats were said to possess this power (*Iddhi*) of flying through the air, or 'levitation'. There are still Hindus who claim these powers; but southern [Theravada] Buddhism does not take them seriously. I asked several Buddhists if this power were now attainable. «Possibly in Thibet [sic]» they answered».

<sup>77</sup> Dr Htin Aung translates the word as «the stone of live mercury which is the Burmese equivalent of the Philosopher's Stone in European alchemy». *Folk Elements in Burmese Buddhism* above note 70 at 42.

<sup>78</sup> *Thi-Ah-Yay* ('This Cause') in *Zaw Gyi Ga Byar Paung Choke* (Complete Poems of *Zaw Gyi*) above note 59 at p. 114. The poem was published in the April 1936 issue of *Gandha Lawka* magazine. Ludu Daw Ahmar writes in her obituary-tribute of *Hsayar Zaw Gyi* that the poet gave a handwritten note of this poem during the 'second' University student strike against the British colonial authorities in February 1936 I do not have the article written by Daw Ahmar where she mentioned this fact but it can be found in the compilation of tribute essays of *Hsayar Zaw Gyi Ah-hmata Ya-Sar-Suu-Myar* 'Collection of Essays in Tribute to Hsayar Zaw Gyi'.

<sup>79</sup> *Folk Elements in Burmese Buddhism*, above note 70 at p. 46.

<sup>80</sup> After the conference the author had had the chance to briefly discuss the 'wizard' concept (or construct) of (some) Occidental cultures with the *Zaw Gyi* concept in Burmese culture with Maung Thar Noe, a Burmese writer who is also a linguist. Maung Thar Noe expressed his views that there is some etymological similarity between the *Zaw Gyi* concept and the 'wizard'.

<sup>81</sup> I first have the chance to read the *Zaw Gyi and Shein-hsaryar*

poem in late 1994. I read an article by Maung Thar Noe entitled *Zaw Gyi Yei Anatta Gabyar* '*Zaw Gyi's Poem Concerning Anatta*' in the compilation of essays written in tribute of the poet *Zaw Gyi* (above note 56). The article by Maung Thar Noe is also reproduced in his book (in the Burmese language) *Myanma Zagar Hnint Sar Pay* ('Burmese Language and Literature'), 2001. Even though the author 'glimpsed' the message of the poem since Maung Thar Noe 'explains' it, I was mainly in the dark as to the exact etymology and meaning of the word. When I made a presentation about this poem at a conference in Gothenburg, Sweden in September 2002 a Burmese scholar, a Ph.D holder (in political science) asked innocently «What is *Shein-hsaryar*?» As to the foreign etymology of the phrase '*shein-hsaryar*' see footnote 85 below.

<sup>82</sup> *Myanmar Dictionary*, 1991.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* p. 323.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Due to 'passage of time' I no longer have a copy of Professor Lehman's electronic communication and exposition. But I believe I have re-communicated here in essence what Professor Lehman has stated in his explanation regarding my query. Moreover the brief explanation (in acronyms) in the *Myanmar Abidan* itself synchronizes with what Professor Lehman informed me. The dictionary states that 'Shri' (written in Burmese script) means '*Theikdi*' (in Myanmar) '*Id-dhi*' (in Sanskrit) + (plus) *Hsar Yar* (which is in Pali). Karen Armstrong in the glossary of her book *Buddha* 'defines' or explains *Iddhi* as «[t]he dominion of spirit over matter, the miraculous power thought to come with proficiency in yoga, e.g., levitation or the ability to change shape at will» (*ibid.* p. 185). Compare these twin verses of the *Dhammapada* (translated by W.D.C Waggiswara and K.J. Saunders, London John Murray first edition, 1912 reprint, Department of Religious Affairs, Rangoon, Burma, December 2001) pp. 22-23: «Those who mistake the shadow for the substance, and the substance for the shadow never attain the reality, following wandering fires [lit. followers of a false pursuit]» (Verse 11) and «But if a man knows the substance and the shadow as they are, he attains the reality, following the true trail» (Verse 12). In his commentary (*ibid.* p. 85) K. J. Saunders compared the above twin verses with 'St. Paul [who] speaks of covetousness as «idolatry»- the pursuit of the great «shadow», Mammon (*Col.* 3, 5).

<sup>86</sup> The original poem uses the Burmese word 'Tago' roughly in this context translatable as 'power'.

<sup>87</sup> I have deliberately used the 'gendered' he since the mythical *Zaw Gyi* was (and 'is') a he. See Ma Theingi's description above note 68 and Dr Htin Aung's above note 70 in which it is clear that the *Zaw Gyi* is male.

<sup>88</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Buddha* *ibid.* p. 113. Quoting from Vinaya: Mahavagga, 1, 12 (*ibid.* p. 180).

<sup>89</sup> Maung Thar Noe *Zaw Gyi Yei Anatta Gabyar* above note 81, pp. 274-75. Translation by the author. According to Maung Thar Noe the poem has effected him tremendously. Maung Thar Noe further wrote that «none of the poems of *Zaw Gyi* that he had read has moved or 'shook' (the Burmese word is '*toan-hloke*') as much as this poem», *ibid.* The poem *Love III* (composed around the year 1630 to about 1633) by George Herbert and '*Zaw Gyi and Shein-hsaryar*' (composed in the year 1984) were in different epochs and very different religious and cultural milieus. Yet both *Love III* and *Zaw Gyi and Shein-hsaryar* poems have profoundly affected at least a few individuals. James Boyd White describes the «miraculous 18 lines» of *Love III*'s poems and also that «[t]his was the poem that Simone Weil found as perpetually transforming of her life as the Lord's Prayer, and like that prayer, she used to repeat it daily». (*This Book of Starres*, p. 261). I could briefly state my personal reaction to the poems of Herbert and *Zaw Gyi* here. I have written in my Burmese language article about *Zaw Gyi*'s poem (*Hsayar Zaw Gyi Hnint Thu Ei Gabyar* (above note 57) that not only through religious or philosophical outlook but also through poetic aesthetics there are poems which I like equally – and which had moved or 'shaken' me more than *Zaw Gyi and Shein-hsaryar*. These poems which moved me in the sense either or a combination of both being intellectually challenged and emotionally moved

were written by Zaw Gyi himself as well as other Burmese poets. As to Herbert's poetry I was more 'moved' or affected by (perhaps) Herbert's earlier work *The Pulley* than by *Love III*. Indeed I can say that though it is rare that I recite 'in my mind' either of the above poems of George Herbert I have recited *The Pulley* perhaps more frequently than *Love III*.

<sup>90</sup> For the theme of *Vimutti* or liberation that I have attempted to (inchoately or eclectically) extrapolate in Rumi's *Sweetness* poem see text and notes accompanying foot notes 30, 31. In one sense Zaw Gyi may, by this poem, trying to increase his own awareness or mindfulness of the concept of 'non-self'. In a different (but not uncomparable) cultural and psychological context Daniel Goleman in his book *Emotional Intelligence* [:] *Why it can matter more than IQ* (1997) in a Chapter 'Know Thyself' explains that '[m]y usage of *self-awareness* refers to a self-reflexive, introspective attention to one's own experience, sometimes called *mindfulness*. (Chapter 4, Footnote 1, page 315.). Compare Jon Kabat Zin *Wherever You Go There You Are* [:] *Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life* details of book can be found at [www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0786880708?v=glance](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0786880708?v=glance) (accessed 13 April 2004).

<sup>91</sup> As I write the word 'pine for' the following lines from George Herbert's 'earlier' (i.e. earlier than *Love III*) poem of *The Pulley* comes to mind .... Yet let him [ God's creation 'man'] keep all the rest [that is strength, beauty, wisdom, honour, pleasure which God had earlier 'poured' on man] but keep them with *repining restlessness*' (emphasis added). In a different cultural and religious context but in a comparable poetic metaphor or word some humans 'pining' for power, pleasure and riches not only demonstrates the entanglement of the powerful 'driving ego' (or metaphorically speaking *shein-hsar-yar*) but also denotes (repining) 'restlessness' a rough equivalent of which can be found in the Pali word 'byar-par-da'. And according to my vague cognition or conception of the poems of Rumi and Zaw Gyi the 'antidote' to such 'repining restlessness' of the striving – and at the same time confining ego – is in Rumi's poem to 'walk out of the house' and in Zaw Gyi's through the realization of the ultimate futility of such strivings as revealed in the Buddhist doctrine of *Anatta*.

<sup>92</sup> *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene 7, lines 61 to 63.

<sup>93</sup> For one example of such misconceived or at least sweeping characterization see the comments of Lynn Margulis, an American biologist and scientist that «the passivity of Buddhism reminds me of stagnant resignation» as cited in the Chapter *Lynn Margulis and Symbiosis Theory* in John Simmons, *The Scientific 100* [:] *A Ranking of the Most Influential Scientists, Past and Present*, 1996, p. 376.

<sup>94</sup> I am aware that my transliteration of Pali terms and Burmese words here as elsewhere in this article is not phonetically correct but in the absence of books on phonetics especially dealing with the Burmese language I have to make do with what I can and I crave the specialists and readers indulgence in this regard. Also, at this moment I am unable to provide references to the three doctrines which are not compatible with the *Kamma* doctrine of Buddhism. For one foreign anthropologist description of *Kamma* mainly vis-à-vis certain Burmese villages where he had done anthropological field work see Melford Sprio, *Buddhism and Society* [:] *A Great Tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes* (1970) *par tim*.

<sup>95</sup> I am aware that apart from me rushing into a metaphysical and theological 'mine field' regarding among others the problem of 'theodicy', the brief comparisons that I have attempted above may be in different contexts. For the Buddhist concept of *Kamma* mainly is an explanation (some would say rationalization or even justification) of the inequalities, discrepancies or anomalies that can easily be seen in human societies : some are born rich, some abjectly poor, some died during infancy a few live to over a hundred years, the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer, etc. The Christian concept of free will on the other hand is not mainly an explanation or rationalization of the inequality in the fates (using in the generic sense) of humans but a philosophical (in fact religious) explanation that humans are mainly responsible for their own actions and it is not 'God' that caused them since God had given 'free will' to 'man'. Still, as far as the general moral message is concerned – and shorn of the theological and met-

aphysical dimensions of these two great religions and postulating that such a 'severability' is possible or at least at times desirable – the Biblical message of «As you sow, so you will reap» can be analogized with that of the *Kamma* of Theravada Buddhism.

<sup>96</sup> See text and notes accompanying foot note 64.

<sup>97</sup> Margaret Davies, *Asking the Law Question*, 1994, pp. 275-76. In my review of the book, Myint Zan, *Justice: in theory and philosophy* in 6 (3) *Campus Review* (Australia), February 1-7, 1996, p. 11, I quoted parts of the above message («everything that has been written also leads outside the book to the world») and added that (they also lead) «to the world of ideas, thoughts and musings and perhaps even irrelevancies».

<sup>98</sup> *Wingawutti alinga* in Burmese is defined in *Myanmar Abidan* (at page 358) as «indirectly composing and communicating one's message».

<sup>99</sup> In Burmese 'po-mauk'. The *Myanmar Abidan* defines 'Po' (at page 217) as 'in excess, in excess of what is required or necessary, unnecessary' and 'mauk' (at page 274) 'rising in full, [and] also rising in pride' (all re-translations of Burmese phrases into English by author). Hence I have taken some translator's poetic license in variously translating or imputing the Zaw Gyi's *Shein-hsar-yar* as 'overflowing' 'spill-over' 'excess' and 'rambunctious'.

<sup>100</sup> For an (over)confident and sweeping explanations of the subject see for e.g. Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 1992. For a brief criticism of the fundamental thesis of Dennett see Martin Gardner's Introduction in *The Night is Large* (1996). For a contemporaneous report on the body-mind problem in scientific hypotheses see Margaret Wertheim, *After the Double Helix Unravelling the State of Being* «New York Times», April 13, 2004 <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/13/science/13CRIC.html?th> (accessed 13 April 2004).

<sup>101</sup> For an earlier work by a western scholar on a related subject see for e.g. C.W.F. Rhys Davids, *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics* [:] *Buddhist Psychology* (Republication, 1996, New Delhi)

<sup>102</sup> For one popular website's explanation of the 'Dependent Origination' concept in Buddhism see [www.chezpaul.org.uk/buddhism/books/wheel/depend.htm](http://www.chezpaul.org.uk/buddhism/books/wheel/depend.htm) (accessed 12 April 2004).

<sup>103</sup> As Julius Stone has stated in relation to his 'outsider's' view of Soviet Marxism (see text and note accompanying foot note 45) I do realise and acknowledge that at least at times, a 'thoughtful' outsider's could possibly have a clearer view than the 'insider' who have to carry his or her religious and cultural 'bag and baggage' and which often act as 'blinkers' or to use a Buddhist phrase 'fettlers' in one's perception, cognition or interpretation of the phenomenon, phenomena or concepts concerned.

<sup>104</sup> Footnote inserted. Before I read the phrase 'voracious, frightened ego' I have used the term 'overflowing, rambunctious' *Shein-hsar-yar*, antics or ego of *Zaw Gyi*.

<sup>105</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Buddha* p. 102.

<sup>106</sup> Footnote inserted. Emphasis in original.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 103-104. Compare these passages written by a former Catholic nun with the thoughts and latter part of the *Sweetness* Poem by Jalaluddin Rumi. I am slightly encouraged and emboldened in this cross-cultural indeed cross-religious comparison when Maung Thar Noe- who at my invitation attended the single session of my presentation at the Traditions of Knowledge in Southeast Asia Conference in Rangoon- that aspects of Sufi thought also denotes the concept of *Anatta*. I realize that my mentioning thus may not go down well with both orthodox Buddhists and orthodox Muslims but in the theme of exchanging not only traditions of knowledge but also perceptions, thoughts and views about these traditions I justify my cross-cultural comparisons and unorthodox statements. Compare: «Rumi's poetry belongs to everyone, and his impulse was toward experience rather than any language or doctrine about it: our lives as text, rather than any book, be it Qur'an, Gospel, upanishad, or sutra»: *The Soul of Rumi* p. 101.

<sup>108</sup> Translation by this author. U Aye Maung was, among others, author of the three-volume *Buddha and Buddha Vada* (*Buddha and Buddhism*) which was first published in the years 1963, 1964 and 1965. I am of the view that U Aye Maung's trilogy of books on the

subject should stand as one of the most outstanding scholarly (rather than 'pious') works on Buddhism written in the Burmese language in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>109</sup> Foot note inserted. Compare the observation of Karen Armstrong in *Buddha* (page 102) that «[t]he eighteenth century Scottish empiricist David Hume came to a similar conclusion but with an important difference: he did not expect his insight to affect the moral conduct of others».

<sup>110</sup> Footnote inserted. Wife of Dr C.W.F Rhys Davids. Though both were Buddhist scholars husband and wife apparently had differing views on and about Anatta as a Buddhist doctrine.

<sup>111</sup> From the article *Myat Buddha ei Ariya Lanzin* ('The Buddha's Ariya Path') in the book *Buddha Amyin, Luthar Swann Inn* ('Buddha's Vision, Humans' Energy') (2002) pp. 218-19. Translation from Burmese by this author.

<sup>112</sup> E mail on file with author. I have mischievously used my (senior) colleague's 'proclamation' as an 'irredeemable Christian' (the concept of redemption as it is theologically understood being peculiar to Christianity rather than to Buddhism I should – non-mischievously – add). In my review article *Best and Interesting Reads of 2002* ("Jordan Times", 9 December 2002) I wrote in effect that even if I understand some of George Herbert's poetry I found it hard to 'accept' many of its premises and conclusions perhaps «due to the fact that I am irredeemably a non-Christian». (Emphasis added).

<sup>113</sup> H. Patrick Glenn, *Legal Traditions of the World*, 2000, p. 191. For this author's review of Glenn's book including a brief critique of some of Glenn's misconceptions of some doctrines of (Theravada) Buddhism see <http://law.vanuatu.usp.ac.fj/jsp/2002%20Volume6Number2/glenn> (accessed 13 April 2004).

<sup>114</sup> For one description of *Vipassana* meditation see for e.g. [www.dhamma.org/](http://www.dhamma.org/) - 9k (accessed 13 April 2004).

<sup>115</sup> Indeed about a year after Zaw Gyi composed the poem analyzed here he wrote a sequel in 1985 which will not be translated here in detail. In the 'sequel' to *Zaw Gyi and Shein-hsar-yar, Sann Kyei-Phoat- Pae* «For [you] to try' the poet strongly implied (though the actual word was not used) that *Zaw Gyi* and others whose egos are veering out of control should try *Vipassana* a meditation to rein in his/their 'riotous' (in Burmese 'Yine') antics and to 'recapture his/their lost mind(s)»: *Zaw-Gyi-Ga-Byar-Paung-Choke* p. 424.

<sup>116</sup> Excerpt from the electronic mail of my 'chiding' senior Muslim colleague see foot note 64 above.

<sup>117</sup> See text and note accompanying foot note 89.

<sup>118</sup> See the article 'Rumi Rules' above note 53.

<sup>119</sup> Two of which are *The Essential Rumi* (1995) which according to 'Rumi Rules' article have sold over 250,000 copies and *The Soul of Rumi* (2001).

<sup>120</sup> Even though the particular poem 3090 was described as translated by A. J. Arberry with renditions by Coleman Barks *The Soul of Rumi* published in 2001 states that «Translations, Introductions, and Notes [were done] by Coleman Barks with John Moyne, Neit Ergin, A. J. Arberry, Reynold Nicholson, and M.G.Gupta» in the opening unnumbered page of the book.

<sup>121</sup> Jason Andrew Carbine, who at the time of the conference in December 2003 was completing his Ph.D thesis on the Shwekyin Buddhist sect in Burma. I would like to thank participants in both the conference and the talk in Mandalay who have made the thoughtful comments and whose comments I have mentioned – anonymously or otherwise – in this article.

<sup>122</sup> Compare this statement of James Boyd White which I found sometime after I wrote this sentence concerning 'methodology': «I mean this book to reflect, the view then, that literary texts can be read not as objects of analysis, but as expressions of human minds as if they had something to say to us. My sense of reading Herbert is that I am listening to the voice of another person from another world, with the aim of learning some thing of value in my own life. Of course such an approach may be dismissed by some as naïve or unscholarly but I mean it as a serious argument for the value of this way of reading, and this way of writing too. This may help explain why my book

is more personal and autobiographical than is usual. In it I try to bring to the foreground what is significant in my own life and education that makes me see Herbert, and listen to him, in the particular ways I do. But I mean this as an argument too, and not just about Herbert: all of our readings are from particular points of views and not from our theoretical or political commitments only, but if our readings are real ones, from points of view defined by our histories of our mind much more fully imagined»: James Boyd White, *This Book of Starres*, pp. 233, 234.

<sup>123</sup> Compare again these apt observations of James Boyd White: «The art of managing and establishing relations with others is largely a matter of learning first to understand the language of another, and then to create a space in which that language can be placed against one's own. This is what the world is like to you; this is what it is like to me; between them there are of necessity gaps and irresolvable differences; these define the central issues we need to address, each of us recognizing that his or her language is not a superlanguage, entitled to override the other, but one way of meaning among many. This is true as man talks with woman, parent with child, Christian with Muslim, white with black, you with me and so throughout the world. Learning the language of another is at once an intellectual, ethical, and political activity. It is perhaps the most important kind of understanding of others: learning what things are like from another's position – both in another culture (or point in culture) and as another mind and person – and how by what question and claim and gesture, the writer has found it possible to use the language that defines his or her world»: *ibid.* p. 274. Compare also the statement by H. Patrick Glenn: «Information which is recognizable as 'something from outside' is already «inside» and often has been for centuries»: H. Patrick Glenn, *Are Legal Traditions Incommensurable?*, «American Journal of Comparative Law», 49 (2001), pp. 137, 142.

<sup>124</sup> Ko ('Brother') Than Htay who is a writer and book-shop owner in Mandalay.

<sup>125</sup> Still, as I have stated earlier (text and notes accompanying footnotes 28 and 29) Rumi's poem can also be said to contain elements of Christian symbols as well as 'messages' and 'themes'. Coleman Barks writes that 'Rumi's connection with Jesus stay strong. Christians feel it when he speaks of the Friend. My friend, the writer Jim Kilgo, says that the Christian idea that God is available to human beings as a friend is what he hears when he reads Rumi - that inner friendship': *The Soul of Rumi* p. 225.

<sup>126</sup> The last 'Part' of James Boyd White's *This Book of Starres* (which contains two Chapters) (at page 189) is titled *The Acceptance of Love* and the last section of the last Chapter of White's book about Herbert's poetry is titled (at page 249) *Final Transformations*.

<sup>127</sup> *Soul of Rumi* p. 5.

<sup>128</sup> James Boyd White, *This Book of Starres* p. 261.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.* p. ix.

<sup>130</sup> Note that the Burmese word for teacher can be either spelled as 'Hsayar' or 'Saya' and its meaning is different from the differently spelled but rarely used word 'hsar-yar' of the oft-repeated word *Shein-hsar-yar* in this article.

<sup>131</sup> See for example *Hsayar Zaw Gyi Ahmhat Ta Ya Sar Suu Myar* ('Essays in Remembrance of Hsayar Zaw Gyi') (1991) (above note 56) where many writers write glowingly not only about Zaw Gyi's poetic gifts but his endearing personal qualities.

<sup>132</sup> See text accompanying above note 128.

<sup>133</sup> See for e.g. H. Patrick Glenn *Are Legal Traditions Incommensurable?* above note 123 where Glenn makes the strong argument that legal traditions are commensurable. In making this assertion Glenn among (many others) quote Don Regan who in his essay *Value, Comparability and Choice* in R. Chang (edited) *Incommensurability, Incompatibility and Practical Reason*, 1997, p. 137 (*ibid.* p. 143) contends that «the more refined our perception ... the less often we are going to find ourselves unable to make comparisons». I find these statements at the end of my writing this article. I do not wish to claim that they 'vindicate' my attempt to compare (perhaps what some would consider as 'incommensurable' poems) but they give me some sense of satisfaction that my efforts were worthwhile.