

Introduction

Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, who was born in 1207 CE and died in 1273, will henceforth in this book be referred to by the name Mawlānā, Our Master, one of the two honorific titles by which he is most commonly known in Muslim lands (the other being Mawlawī, My Master). The name Rūmī, by which he is widely known in the West, is a toponym referring to the fact that he lived in the province of Rūm (Anatolia), the country now known as Turkey. Mawlānā is here preferred simply because it comes most naturally to the authors. Similarly, the title of this great work will be shortened from *Mathnawī-ye Ma'nawī*, which means the Spiritual Couplets, to just the *Mathnawī*.

Later, it will be necessary to contextualize both Mawlānā and the *Mathnawī* in terms of history, of religious and spiritual tradition, and of literary genres and antecedents; but here, at the outset, the reader is due some guarantee of the relevance to her- or himself of a long thirteenth-century poem written in Persian by a former preacher and Muslim jurist in the town of Konya in central Anatolia. While some initial justification is due for our claim to greatness for both author and work, it is not enough just to establish greatness, for there have been many great writers and works. What the reader is entitled to know is why it will be worth their while to give their time and effort to this particular author and this particular work. The short answer is because Mawlānā was a man who had attained to Reality, and who deliberately designed his *Mathnawī* to enable his readers and hearers to become real themselves. But for the *Mathnawī* to be transformative, it is necessary to know how to read it, which is the purpose of the present volume. Mawlānā often addresses the reader directly as a prospective spiritual traveler: sometimes he thunders, sometimes harangues, sometimes beguiles, sometimes entertains, sometimes inspires with flights of soaring mystical vision, and sometimes he is deliberately insulting, even vulgar. It can be a bewildering work, but if readers are prepared to work on the *Mathnawī*, they may be assured that the *Mathnawī*

will work on them, whether or not they can read it in the original Persian. This many have experienced in working on the *Mathnawī*, and there must be very few books which will reward the effort needed in quite this way. To add weight to this, it will be helpful to examine some credentials.

Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī was an acclaimed poet even during his own lifetime, and his reputation and the appreciation of his poetry has grown over the last 700 to 800 years to the point of what has been called “Rūmī-mania” in contemporary America. The current enthusiasm derives from two sources of inspiration. The main source is translations into English of some of Mawlānā’s mystical lyrics taken from the large collection of his shorter poems entitled the *Dīwān-e Shams-e Tabrīz*. The second source has been visits to America and performances there of the Dervish turning, to the haunting and poignant music of the *nay*, the reed-pipe, by members of the Mevlevi Order of Dervishes, of which Mawlānā was the eponymous founder. There are two discontinuities here: the first is translation, since the English re-creations, which are clearly effective, are, in some cases, of questionable accuracy in terms of Mawlānā’s original meaning and intentionality; the second is that the Mevlevi Order, along with other Sufi orders in Turkey, was abolished in the 1920s and the present troupes are a modern reconstitution. Nonetheless, in spite of the discontinuities, enough of Mawlānā’s poetic power, the authenticity of his mystical experiencing and his authority as a major spiritual teacher and leader have come through to create the present effect, even after more than seven centuries. Those able to read the original Persian poetry readily attest to his supreme command of the poetic art. As a poet, he has astonishing control and seems able to produce in the reader almost any effect that he wishes. What this present book will show is that his literary achievement is even more remarkable than has hitherto been realized.

Two distinguished Western scholars, R. A. Nicholson and A. Bausani, both of whom were professors of Persian, at Cambridge and Naples respectively, have assessed Mawlānā as the world’s finest mystical poet of any age. His poetic credentials have been referred to above, so what of the “mystical”? “Mystical,” “mystic,” and “mysticism” are all slippery words. Up to about 1900 CE, mysticism was generally understood to be the theory and practice of the contemplative life, but from the publication of William James’s Gifford Lectures, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, in 1901–1902, a modernist construction began to supplant the traditional interpretation of mysticism. In this, mysticism became personal, subjective, and experiential, open to all states that transcend our everyday mundane consciousness, however they are derived. The modernist construct appears to lump together states that are phenomenologically similar, states given by Grace in response to a life of prayer and the surrender of one’s

soul to God, with those deriving from the surrender of one's mind to drugs and chemicals, or those that arise from clinical forms of madness. Within the spiritual tradition in which Mawlānā was brought up, a distinction is made between *ḥāl*, a temporary, sometimes momentary, state, and *maqām*, a station, a permanent transformation of part of one's being. The Sufi path, like the Christian mystical path, is primarily concerned with inner transformation rather than with the attainment of transcendent states. For the paradigmatic mystics of both traditions the principal issue was the extirpation of egoism and the surrender of the will to Almighty God, and Saint Teresa of Avila, for example, warns against attaching importance to transcendent states, which she regards merely as "consolations." Mawlānā was, as will be seen, educated externally in the Muslim sciences of his day and followed his father in becoming a preacher. Inwardly, he was trained in ascetic and spiritual disciplines by a spiritual mentor appointed by his father, so that by the time he met with the man who was to transform his spiritual nature even further, the dervish Shams-e Tabrīz, he was probably already a spiritual director himself, albeit a somewhat reluctant one, with a profound understanding of human nature, of himself, and of the spiritual path. What experiences Mawlānā had as a result of his association with Shams-e Tabrīz he refused to speak about directly, but it seems he was given access experientially to the transcendent spiritual world in a way he had never known before. There is also a new and deeper experience and understanding of the power and potency of Love. Mawlānā's spirituality, therefore, combines both perspectives: from below looking up, and from above looking down, which makes him one of the most authentic of spiritual guides, fully meriting one's attention. From the lyrics of the *Dīwān-e Shams-e Tabrīz*, at least from those currently re-created, it might appear that Mawlānā's concern is solely with the transcendent spiritual world, and hence that he is deserving of the categorization of mystical poet, but when the *Mathnawī* is also taken into account, a fuller picture emerges, of a spirituality as concerned with how to live spiritually in this world as with how to attain access to the transcendent world. As Mawlānā constantly reminds his readers, Almighty God is Lord of both worlds, *rabb al-'ālamayn*, and his glorification of the Creator is matched by his appreciation of and gratitude for creation and his deep understanding of the problems and dilemmas of his fellow creatures. It might then be better to regard Mawlānā as a great poet of the spiritual in its broadest sense rather than as an exclusively mystical one.

Coming to Mawlānā's *Mathnawī*, it has to be said that its genre is like nothing to be found in Western spirituality. In scope, scale, and conception it also far transcends its own antecedents, and these were considerable enough. Its very first sentence begins: "This is the Book of the *Mathnawī*, which is

the roots of the roots of the roots of Religion, in respect of its unveiling the mysteries of attainment (to the Truth) and of certainty, which is the greatest science of God.” There are then three depths of roots. The last of the roots, that is, the ones least deep and nearest the surface, are taken to refer to the *Sharī'ah*, which means a clear broad highway to a watering place, and is used to refer to the canon law of Islam that prescribes the duties and obligations that must be observed by every Muslim. This outer side of Islam also includes inter alia the sciences of theology, jurisprudence, and scriptural hermeneutics. The intermediate roots are taken to refer to the *Ṭarīqah*, the spiritual path of Sufism, *Taṣawwuf*, which is the narrower path of the spiritual traveler, the *sālik*. Finally the deepest roots are the level of *Ḥaqīqah*, Reality, the watering place itself. The attainment of Reality, then, through the general *Sharī'ah* and the more specific spiritual path of the *Ṭarīqah* is, in Mawlānā's opening words, the greatest science of God.

The *Mathnawī* reflects these three levels in its design. Design is a crucial notion, since it combines the shape and structuring of a product with its rationale and purpose, which is why it has been chosen for the title of this book. In communication theory, semantics is the science of how words connect with the world through the relationship of meanings. Pragmatics is the science of how words and meanings are used to do things with, to effect a change in some part or state of the world. The organization of a literary work from the point of view of pragmatics, of what it is trying to accomplish, is called its rhetorical structure. Mawlānā's purpose in writing the *Mathnawī* was to make it possible for its readers and hearers to transform, to change inwardly in the direction of reality, a task that he had conducted in person for many years as a spiritual director on the Sufi path.

A crucial specification of Mawlānā's design for the *Mathnawī* was clearly that its literary form should embody in its structure his own experience and understanding of reality. One of the most fundamental assumptions of his worldview is that the world of appearances, the plurality which is accessible to the senses, is not the whole of reality; there is also a hidden all-encompassing spiritual world, which is transcendent, beautiful and a unity. Humanity stands between these two worlds and is able to participate in both, in the actuality of the physical world by means of the body, senses, mind, psyche, and selfhood, and in the spiritual world through the spirit, intellect, love, and a purified and receptive heart. It is human nature to be drawn into this mundane world, even to the point of losing contact with one's own spiritual nature and the spiritual world. For those who are not satisfied with living an entirely worldly life, who aspire to retain, or regain, contact with their own spirituality, there exists the spiritual path, in this case, the Sufi path. It is the aspiring traveler

on the spiritual path, the *sālik*, to whom the *Mathnawī* is largely addressed. Mawlānā has then designed his *Mathnawī* simultaneously to reflect these three levels: this mundane world, the spiritual world, and, between these two, the Sufi path. How he has accomplished this within a single work makes the *Mathnawī* of exceptional interest not only for its rich spiritual content, but also for its literary form, which fully deserves the attention of those engaged in comparative literature.

It is not difficult to see how these three levels in the *Mathnawī* correspond to the three kinds of roots described above. The literal surface verbal level, and the edification derived from it, represent the roots nearest the surface, the outer side of religious life, the *Shari'ah*, the clear broad path open to all, which prescribes the duties and obligations incumbent on all Muslims when living in this world. Hidden within the surface text is the symbolic level of the spiritual path of the Sufi *Tariqah*, the narrower path of the spiritual seeker and traveler, which represents the intermediate roots. This assumption of an outer and an inner, of the exoteric and the esoteric, is shared by most Muslims, since in the Holy Qur'ān God is described both as the Outward, *al-zāhir*, and as the Inward, *al-bāṭin*. It would have been expected, therefore, that Mawlānā's *Mathnawī* would have an outer literal, surface, verbal level, but that there would also be hidden within it an inner, symbolic level pertaining to the spiritual path. In order to discern and understand this symbolic level, the reader would have to become an active and intelligent seeker. Much of the symbolism in the parables and stories is conventional or else is explained or implied by Mawlānā. But symbolism is multivalent; it has as many levels of reference as there are levels of understanding and being in the reader. No single understanding or interpretation can exhaust the potential analogies or correspondences present within the symbol, especially one given by someone as spiritually advanced as Mawlānā. The effect of the symbol, when well founded, is to lead one ever upward because it is open-ended. Symbolism is then a characteristic feature of the second intermediate level of the *Mathnawī*, as will become apparent later.

It is the third level of the text, the deepest roots in the opening image, which pertains to and represents the spiritual world. Here Mawlānā has done something quite exceptional. As he constantly stresses in the *Mathnawī* people are unaware of the spiritual world because they are habituated to form and, further, God wishes the spiritual world to remain unseen. Yet the spiritual world is infinitely richer than this world, it is a unity, in it all opposites are reconciled and transcended, it contains all meaning and purpose and is the source of all primary causation, since, in the shadow play of this world of opposites, there are only secondary causes. So effectively has Mawlānā hidden

this level, that almost nobody has realized it is there, or, at least, nobody has written about it as far as is known. Rather than following the imagery of the roots and burying this level deeper still than the symbolism of the Sufi path, he conveys the spiritual world in the macro-compositional structure of the entire work, in the overarching organization of the *Mathnawī*, and he does this using a quite distinct and unexpected literary technique.

The first level, that of the surface literal text of lines and verses, has a linear structure; one verse follows another and one section succeeds the previous one. This sequentiality is particularly suitable because it is the direction of "time's arrow" which is a determining condition of life in this world. Further, being verbal, this level shares in the characteristics of the world of forms. The poetry is superb and has verve and variety; however, scholars have criticized the work for being rambling and lacking in orderliness, and certainly the self-presentation of the *Mathnawī* is one of planlessness, of extempore and spontaneous instruction and exhortation. Rather like life in this world, the work is episodic and at this level one never really knows what is coming next.

If this world is represented by the line, symbolizing time and space, the spiritual world is represented by the circle, the symbol of eternity. The literary form Mawlānā has used to portray the unseen spiritual world is ring composition. Ring or annular composition will be explained and demonstrated fully later, for now it is enough to show how it works in comparison with sequential ordering. Ring composition is when, for example, seven segments of text are arranged A [1], B [2], C [3], D [4], C* [5], B* [6], A* [7], where there is a particular correspondence between A and A*, B and B*, C and C*. The correspondence between a pair of segments is termed "parallelism." Parallelism was ideal for Mawlānā's purpose because it permits nonlinear and nonlocal relationships, thus allowing him to meet two of the criteria for the spiritual world, that of unity or unicity, in that every part of the poem is interconnected, and that of the reconciliation of opposites, in that opposites can be held in parallel for them then to be transcended at a higher level. As will be shown later, he has organized the whole of the *Mathnawī* by means of three levels of ring composition but stopped short at a point somewhat above the level of the verses so that the naturalness and sequentiality of the actual verses is unaffected. This overarching organization contains the rationale and purpose of the various levels and parts of the work and thus is the primary cause of what occurs, although secondary causation is to be found in the actual text itself, such as in the unfolding plot of a story he is telling. In this way, ring composition enabled Mawlānā to represent the unseen spiritual world in the organization and literary structuring of his masterpiece in such a manner

that it was to remain seemingly undetected for centuries, thus confirming his constant assertion that those habituated to the world of form will rarely if ever be aware of the spiritual world.

Intermediate between the world of form, the surface textual level, and the spiritual world, represented in the overarching circular organization of the entire work, is the symbolic level of the spiritual traveler, the *sālik*, struggling along the spiritual path, to whom the *Mathnawī* is most often addressed. The spiritual traveler participates in both worlds, so it is appropriate that the literary form of this level combines the characteristics of each of these worlds. There is progression in that the various stages of the spiritual path proceed successively, but each stage is treated in a distinct discourse that is organized by ring composition. Perhaps the idea of a spiral would not be too far-fetched as a description. Certainly this level of the spiritual traveler has about it the quality of recurrence, of returning to where one started but, it is hoped, each time starting slightly higher up and with a different perspective. This is the level at which Mawlānā is most demanding, of the spiritual traveler and hence of the reader. He has not marked the discourses, so readers have to become seekers to find them for themselves. The ring compositional structures of these discourses are often complex and highly sophisticated, each one different, and all the parallelisms have to be explored and pondered. Then there is the symbolism of each discourse to be identified and reflected on, and allowed to do its work within at whatever level. These tasks could not possibly be performed in a single sequential reading; recurrent reading, work, and reflection are necessary, but each new reading will lead to a new realization at some level.

This then is how Mawlānā has designed and executed the *Mathnawī* to shame, inspire, awaken, guide, and transform. Each of the three levels makes different demands and offers different rewards. The first level is the poetic text itself which requires a sequential reading. Here there is the impact of immediacy. There are constant variations in voice, in pace and urgency, in theme, and in the density of imagery. Stories and anecdotes are told sometimes at length, sometimes with astonishing brevity. The text presents itself as spontaneous, extempore, directly pointed at the aspiring Sufi traveler and the reader. So rich and controlled is the poetry that interest rarely flags: sometimes the instruction is explicit, sometimes the moral is implicit; sometimes Mawlānā shows himself as storyteller and entertainer, sometimes as preacher or spiritual guide, sometimes as mystical poet with flights of high mystical vision, sometimes as a supplicant before God with prayers of gratitude and glorification. It would have to be a very dull reader indeed who was not captivated, edified, and inspired to change by such a text as this. It has about it the feeling that it

comes from some very high place but through the mediation of a profound and compassionate understanding of the human condition, and certainly through the voice of a true master of the poetic art.

The second level, that of the spiritual Sufi path, requires recurrent readings and for the reader to become an active seeker. The demands it makes on the reader are considerable and have been already mentioned: to identify larger discourses, to grasp their structures, to identify and ponder the symbolism, and to explore and reflect on all the parallelisms and their implications. In the first level Mawlānā is met as the master poet; at this level he is encountered as a master architect, since the variety and sophistication of the discourse structures reveal him as the virtuoso of ring composition. Quite apart from the astonishing and hitherto unnoticed craftsmanship, at this level the contexts are larger than the first level. In sequential reading the context is "the passage," the size of which is determined by the extent of the reader's short-term memory, whereas, at this second level, the context is the "discourse," which has its own larger structure, scale and proportions. The result is to enlarge the present moment of the reader. Each discourse deals with a separate stage on the spiritual path, and this is done far more systematically and autobiographically than has hitherto been recognized. Here Mawlānā is encountered as the Sufi Shaykh, the spiritual guide who has been through each stage himself and shares his insights. The contemplation and reflection on the discourse, the search to uncover the hidden rationale and the exploration of the shapes, forms, inner connections, and perspectives within which it is articulated, result in what may be called realization. The reader makes the form, shape and content of what has been read and worked on her or his own. In so doing, as it enters deeper into the reader's consciousness and understanding, it becomes transformative and part of their reality. This level of the *Mathnawī* is designed to "sink in" and to be realized within the reader. Most books that people read simply add to their "acquired" or "secondhand" knowledge, which diminishes as the memory fades. Here is a work so designed that, with a reader's sincere effort and searching, it can become a real and permanent part of themselves on their path to Reality.

Finally, there is the third level, that of the unseen spiritual world, which is represented in the overarching organization by ring composition of the entire work. There are, in fact, three levels of ring composition: the level of the discourse, the level of the book and the level of the work as a whole. Starting with the work as a whole, there are six books, naturally ordered 1–6. But the organization, rather than the order, of these books, is ring-compositional A, B, C, C*, B*, A*. The parallelisms indicate that Book One is reflected in Book Six, Book Two in Book Five, Book Three in Book Four, but in reverse order

and at a higher level. Thus the first discourse in Book One is thematically parallel with the last discourse in Book Six, the second discourse in Book One is thematically parallel with the penultimate discourse in Book Six and so on. The first half of the *Mathnawī* is thus the mirror image of the second half and vice versa. As will be seen, the notion of the mirror has very great importance in the *Mathnawī*, not only in symbolism and imagery, but crucially in spiritual practice, so it is entirely appropriate that Mawlānā has given a spatial representation of the mirror in his overall literary form. Nor is this all, for he has hinged the mirror so that the two sides can reflect one another, and the hinge is a story begun at the end of Book Three and concluded at the beginning of Book Four. This is the only example of two books being so joined, and it occurs precisely in the center of the work. In ring composition, both in Mawlānā's usage and elsewhere, the crux, crisis, or real inner significance is given at the very center. This story, which acts as the hinge of the two halves of the mirror, or the binding holding the two halves of the *Mathnawī* together, is a story of love. Love is the crux of the *Mathnawī*, as it is of the spiritual path, and the *Mathnawī*, in every sense, hinges on love.

Not only is the work as a whole organized by ring composition, but so are the discourses in a book, and the sections within a discourse, as will be seen later. Readers' attention can only be in one place at a time, so until they know the discourse they are reading really well they will miss the parallelisms within that discourse; and until there is full familiarity with the whole of the book in which that discourse is located, they will miss the parallelisms with other discourses in that book; and until the entire work is thoroughly known, they will miss the parallelism with other discourses in other books. It is then unsurprising that this level of overarching organization has remained undetected for so long. A good example of parallelism between discourses occurs in Book One, in which there are two "Lion" discourses in parallel. In the first discourse the lion is all ego, the great "I am" par excellence, pure self-centeredness; in the second the lion is without ego and has been granted the true individuality that lies beyond ego. Both lions are fierce, but the first is ineffective and the second a true master. In placing these two lions, ego and nonego, in parallel, Mawlānā is making use of a contrastive parallelism which is aesthetically neat, intellectually satisfying and spiritually apposite, but he is also offering the reader the opportunity to hold the two together and reach up beyond them both to their transcendent origin. As an example of interbook discourse parallelisms, there is in the final discourse of Book Two a discussion of the spiritual symbolism of the duck in which it is praised for being able to travel both on land, this world, and in water, the spiritual world, thereby being able to live in both worlds. The parallel discourse at the beginning of

Book Five also deals with the duck, but this time as a symbol of greed, since it spends its life with its beak in the mud looking for food. These two contrasting views of the spiritually symbolic potential of the duck are held together in parallelism and invite the reader to that place in the imaginal world where everything can be seen as a symbol of something higher and charged with spiritual significance. The full importance of this level of the *Mathnawī* will only become apparent when the entire work has been thoroughly thematically mapped, for the moment it is enough to know that it is there.

It is possible to read, enjoy and benefit from the *Mathnawī* without even being aware of this level of spiritual organization let alone being familiar with its particularities, as countless reader and hearers have proved throughout the centuries. Equally, it is possible to live in this world and enjoy oneself without any awareness of the spiritual world. But many of those readers will have brought to their reading their own conviction of the existence of such a world and would have felt that the *Mathnawī* derived from some such realm even if they did not know how the *Mathnawī* was designed. For the contemporary reader, coming new to the *Mathnawī*, to know that what is being read is connected through a network of correspondences with other parts of the work within an overarching unseen organization of significances, is to extend the present moment, to enhance consciousness and to open a dimension of transcendence, which is itself training to live spiritually in this world. When later, through increased familiarity with the work, the opportunity can be taken to reflect and meditate on Mawlānā's parallelisms and where they are contrastive to seek to reach beyond the contraries to the place where they are transcended and reconciled. This process is itself spiritual training, while at the same time returning the *Mathnawī* to the place from whence it came. To do this, interestingly, is not to leave the text behind, because the extension upward of the present moment brings about an equal extension downward, so that there is a new awareness of the very sounds or letters of the lines but, this time, not externally but from within. All of this is possible and much more, because this is how Mawlānā designed and executed his *Mathnawī*.

The present book aims to facilitate the processes just described for readers of the *Mathnawī*. Mawlānā did not do things by half-measures. He constantly asserts that one really should keep secrets, especially about spiritual matters. He therefore has hidden the inner, spiritual organization of his poem in what, even in his time, must have been an unexpected and highly sophisticated way. He provokes the reader or hearer to search, and he left clues and indications and, no doubt, intelligent seekers nearer his time were able to grasp what he had done. There is evidence to suggest, however, that the contemporary reader, whether of the original Persian or in translation, will no longer be able to pick

up the clues and uncover the hidden spiritual organization unaided. This is most unfortunate, particularly for readers, since it means they are missing perhaps the most important dimension of this extraordinary work and its possible transformative effect. But it is also unfortunate for the author, because it is in the hidden superstructure of the work that Mawlānā displays a hitherto unsuspected degree of mastery of architectonic skills and literary craftsmanship.

It is hoped that the above brief introduction to Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī and his *Mathnawī* has proved sufficient recommendation to the reader, both on account of the poem's great literary interest and for its rich spiritual content. Those already familiar with the *Mathnawī* may well be surprised, even startled, by this description of its design, just as were the authors of this work when they began to realize what Mawlānā had done. There is, however, nothing in this description that will not be demonstrated, it is hoped fully convincingly, later in this book. This volume deals with Book One of the *Mathnawī*, which is concerned with the spiritual path and the development and transformation of the selfhood at the various stages on that path. Those readers coming from a Christian background will find much in this work familiar from St. Teresa of Avila's *Way of Perfection* and the *Interior Castle*, although cast in a different idiom and put over in a strikingly different manner. For the general reader there is an introduction to the life of Mawlānā, his religious and spiritual position and his literary antecedents in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 identifies ring composition as the major structuring principle in the *Mathnawī*, explains the various features of this macro-compositional style and the need for a synoptic reading. Chapter 3 is the necessary reader's guide to the text of Book One. It gives a synoptic reading of the whole of Book One, providing summaries of the text, analyses of the various structures and offering spiritual interpretations from a synoptic point of view. In Chapter 4 there is an analysis of Book One as a whole, the identification of its rationale and an indication of how Book One can also be seen as a fully integrated part of the *Mathnawī* as a whole. Chapter 5 draws conclusions from what has been revealed and discusses how Mawlānā must have planned the *Mathnawī*, how he must then have composed it and the purpose of his design, which lies in his wish to transform the natures of his readers and share with them his experience of reality.

What does the reader of the *Mathnawī* need? First, he or she needs the text of the work itself. There are several excellent editions, the most reliable of which are given in the Bibliography, but fortunately the textual tradition is excellent and there are not very great differences between the editions. This work has used the Nicholson text, so if the reader is using another edition they will need to be aware of this and make the necessary adjustments for all references. If the reader cannot read the Persian—and it is well worth

learning Persian solely to read the *Mathnawī*—then they will need to read it in translation. There exist translations of the whole of the *Mathnawī* in English (R. A. Nicholson), French (Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch), Turkish (Gölpınarlı), Hindi (V. C. Pandey), Arabic (Ibrahim al-Dasuqi Shita), Urdu (Muhammad Gulshanabadi), Swedish, Italian, and Spanish. These translations vary in their accuracy, their elegance, and their completeness. Nicholson's English translation is extremely close to the original, but some find it awkward and dated. He reverts to Latin when he encounters passages that he feels might offend "good taste"; he even spent time developing his Latin for this particular task. Fortunately two excellent new English translations of Book One have recently been published by Jawid Mojaddedi in the Oxford World's Classics Series, and Alan Williams, in Penguin Classics.

These are certainly the recommended reading for the first encounter with Book One. But putting a translation into verse comes at a price, an inevitable loss of completeness. For the further study of Book One, the fullness of Nicholson's translation will also be needed.

The translations often include notes and explanations of difficult or unfamiliar items or references, and Nicholson has produced two volumes of commentary in addition to his text and translation. None of the commentaries, however, of which there are many, deal with what is offered in this book, a synoptic reading, simply because it was not hitherto realized how Mawlānā had organized his work. Two other important works should be mentioned for someone embarking on the serious study of the *Mathnawī*: Franklin Lewis's compendium to Rumi studies, *Rumi, Past and Present, East and West* (Oxford, One World Publications, 2000) and William Chittick's excellent systematic treatment of the spiritual teachings of Mawlānā, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany, SUNY Press, 1983). Both of these works can be treated as works of reference for present purposes and need not be read sequentially from beginning to end. They both have an excellent table of contents at the beginning and a fine index at the end so that one can see immediately what these works contain and can find the references at once.