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RŪMĪ IN A POSTHUMANIST KEY: POETIC ECOLOGIES AND ETHICAL ENTANGLEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Amidst ecological degradation and the acceleration of technoscience, post-humanist ethics are increasingly seeking a vocabulary of responsibility that transcends human exceptionalism. However, existing scholarship rarely brings together Sufi metaphysics and post-humanist theory in a sustained manner, and studies of Rūmī often treat the agency of animals, materials, and supernatural entities merely as metaphors. Through the poetic framework of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, this article bridges this gap by reading selected ghazals and passages from the Masnavī alongside Rosi Braidotti's relational subject, Karen Barad's agential realism, and Donna Haraway's figures of companionship. This article develops a "poetic ecology" as an interpretative method that highlights attention, resonance, and adab as practices of being-with animals, materials, technologies, and invisible beings. Methodologically, this article combines close reading, intertextual interpretation, and conceptual translation, treating images of wind, flutes, moths, and light as sites where agency is distributed and responsibility is felt. Key findings suggest that dhikr and samāʿ function as an ethics of entanglement that disciplines perception, loosens the boundaries between self and world, and shifts responsibility from command towards "response-ability". This framework explains how devotion can operate as an ethics of entanglement, rather than as a human-centred moral command. Brief vignettes on urban pollution, data infrastructure, and AI in the classroom demonstrate how Rūmī's imagination can guide ecological care, reparative listening, and humane design. This article reinterprets the khalīfah as a companion species and formulates practical adab for institutional, pedagogical, and technological contexts.

Keywords: Ethical entanglements; Poetic ecologies; Posthumanism; Ritual attention; Sufi poetics.

ABSTRAK

Di tengah degradasi ekologis dan percepatan teknosains, etika posthumanisme semakin mencari kosakata tanggung jawab yang melampaui pengecualian manusia. Namun, kajian yang ada jarang mempertemukan secara berkelanjutan metafisika Sufi dengan teori posthuman, dan studi tentang Rūmī kerap memperlakukan agensi hewan, material, serta entitas gaib hanya sebagai metafora. Dengan bingkai poetika Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, artikel ini menjembatani celah tersebut melalui pembacaan beberapa ghazal terpilih dan bagian-bagian dari Masnavī berdampingan dengan subjek relasional Rosi Braidotti, realisme agensial Karen Barad, dan figur-figur companionship Donna Haraway. Artikel ini mengembangkan "ekologi puitik" sebagai metode interpretatif yang menonjolkan perhatian, resonansi, dan adab sebagai praktik menjadi-bersama dengan hewan, material, teknologi, dan makhluk tak kasatmata. Secara metodologis, artikel ini menggabungkan pembacaan dekat, tafsir intertekstual, dan penerjemahan konseptual, dengan memperlakukan citra angin, seruling-ruas, ngengat, dan cahaya sebagai situs tempat agensi terdistribusi dan kewajiban dirasakan. Temuan kuncinya menunjukkan bahwa dhikr dan samāʿ berfungsi sebagai etika keterjeratan yang mendisiplinkan persepsi, melonggarkan batas diri/dunia, dan menggeser tanggung jawab dari perintah menuju "response-ability". Kerangka ini menjelaskan bagaimana devosi dapat beroperasi sebagai etika keterjeratan, alih-alih sebagai perintah moral yang berpusat pada manusia. Vinyet singkat tentang polusi perkotaan, infrastruktur data, dan AI di ruang kelas memperlihatkan bagaimana imajinasi Rūmī dapat menuntun kepedulian ekologis, pendengaran reparatif, dan desain yang manusiawi. Kontribusi artikel ini menafsir ulang khalifah sebagai companion species serta merumuskan adab praktis untuk konteks kelembagaan, pedagogis, dan teknologi.

Kata kunci: *Ekologi puitik; Keterjalinan etis; Perhatian ritual; Posthumanisme; Puitika sufi.*

Introduction

Environmental crises in the twenty-first century have catalyzed a broad reconfiguration of the humanities, pushing inquiry beyond human exceptionalism toward frameworks that decenter the human and foreground entanglements among organisms, technologies, and ecosystems. Posthumanism, in particular, supplies conceptual tools for rethinking the human–nonhuman nexus, the status of agency, and the ethics of co-existence. As Ferrando succinctly opens her programmatic account, "Posthumanism is the philosophy of our time," a formulation that registers the proliferation of debates while also signaling the urgency of revising inherited ontologies and epistemologies[1]. In the same introduction she clarifies that a posthuman perspective "does not grant any primacy to the human," instead articulating conditions for knowledge attentive to nonhuman experience and alterity.[2] Haraway sharpens the methodological stakes for such a turn by resisting both futurist deferrals and apocalyptic impasses, insisting that "staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present," that is, remaining with messy, situated configurations of "places, times, matters, meanings" rather than seeking premature closure.[3] Her injunction to "make oddkin," because "we become-with each other or not at all," frames ethical and political practice as the formation of coalitions across species and constituencies.[4] These interventions together imply that environmental ethics cannot be read solely as a set of propositions but must be traced as an emergent effect of relations among texts, routines, bodies, infrastructures, and ecologies.

Latour's climate lectures further caution against theoretical totalization in the age of planetary change, especially when "global thinking" becomes a shortcut that flattens the frictions it claims to explain. He warns that "the notions of globe and global thinking include the immense danger of unifying too quickly what first needs to be composed," a danger that is at once material, empirical, and moral.[5] Latour's emphasis on composition encourages interpretive methods that move inductively from local loops and feedbacks to provisional assemblages, rather than descending from ready-made, globe-sized frames. This posture aligns with posthumanist commitments to relationality, partiality, and accountability in knowledge production, where interpretive claims are tethered to specific sites and material consequences. Posthumanist ecology also reconfigures the human organism itself, contesting the assumption

[1] Francesca Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 16
[2] Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanism*, 18
[3] Donna J. Haraway. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 17-18
[4] Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, 20
[5] Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* trans, Catherine Porter (Cambridge, UK, and Medford MA: Polity, 2017), 146.

that the human is a bounded unit that merely encounters an external environment. Morton reminds us that "a human being is an ecosystem of nonhumans, a fuzzy set like a meadow," so identity is constituted through symbiosis and permeability rather than autonomy.[6] Taken together, Latour and Morton make clear why environmental inquiry requires attention to infrastructural and multispecies entanglements such as water systems, waste flows, food provisioning, built space, microbial life, plants, and animals, since these are not background conditions but active participants in how obligations are enacted and sustained.

Within Islamic studies, parallel developments have sought to pluralize and decolonize environmental discourses by centering Muslim sources, practices, and publics as theory-generative rather than merely illustrative. Osborne's review of Anna M. Gade's *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations* captures a key programmatic intervention, namely "to present a theory of the environment that centers Muslims," thereby foregrounding how knowledge frameworks are constituted and by whom.[7] This centering is not simply additive; it reframes environmental hermeneutics through Qurʾānic exegesis, legal-ethical traditions, ritual and eschatological imaginaries, and long histories of practice in diverse Muslim lifeworlds, including pesantren agriculture, riverine livelihoods, and urban ecologies. At the same time, scholarship has not always developed methodological protocols that can hold together doctrinal vocabularies and the material infrastructures through which they circulate, particularly in institutional settings where discipline, pedagogy, and resource constraints intersect. Recent work suggests the promise of reading Islamic intellectual and devotional lineages as ecological resources without instrumentalizing them as policy slogans or reducing them to moral allegories. Fahm, for example, argues that despite its primarily mystical and didactic orientation, Rūmī's *Mathnawī* contains "discernible elements reflecting a nature-centric worldview," offering motifs and metaphors that can support ecological spirituality in contemporary African contexts.[8]

Building on these trajectories, this article advances a posthumanist hermeneutics for Islamic environmental humanities by examining pesantren as infrastructural ecologies in which ethical concepts such as amānah, khalīfah, isrāf, and ṭahārah are articulated in institutional texts and enacted through routine practices and material arrangements. Conceptually, it adopts Ferrando's non-hierarchical orientation that decenters the human while refusing a view-from-

[6] Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For A Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 85
[7] Lauren Osborne, "Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations by Anna M. Gade," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 37, nos. 3–4 (2020): 117, https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v37i3-4.1114.
[8] Abdul Gafar Olawale Fahm, "Reflections on Rumi's Mathnawi and Ecological Spirituality: Introducing an African Perspective," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah dan Pemikiran Islam* 26, no. 2 (2024): 295, https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol26no2.9.

nowhere,[9] and methodologically it follows Haraway's call to think-with concrete situations by tracing how obligations take shape through composition rather than abstraction.[10] The article proceeds by outlining a diffractive-hermeneutic protocol for reading documents and observations through one another, illustrating the approach through selected sites such as ablution infrastructures, food and waste practices, and planting and maintenance routines, and distilling implications for pedagogy and institutional care within Islamic environmental humanities.

Research Methods

This article employs a qualitative, diffractive-hermeneutic design centered on textual analysis of Rūmī's poetry. Rather than treating poems as repositories of fixed doctrine, the study approaches them as relational sites in which human and more-than-human existence are configured through image, rhythm, voice, and metaphor. The primary corpus consists of selected ghazals and passages from the Mathnawī chosen purposively for their sustained engagement with nonhuman figures and material processes, including reed, wind, water, fire, animals, dust, and vegetal life. These elements are read not as decorative motifs but as active presences within a poetic ecology that repeatedly unsettles the boundaries between self and world, matter and meaning, and human and nonhuman life.[11]

Diffraction provides the guiding analytic sensibility. In this study, Rūmī's poetry and posthumanist concepts are read through one another in order to trace resonances, tensions, and points of non-alignment rather than to establish linear equivalence. The method combines close reading, intertextual tafsīr, and conceptual translation. Close reading attends to diction, repetition, apostrophe, sonic patterning, and shifts in perceptual scale, especially where agency appears distributed across human and nonhuman forms. Intertextual tafsīr situates key motifs within broader Islamic and Sufi vocabularies without reducing the poems to doctrinal summary. Conceptual translation then places these poetic configurations in dialogue with contemporary discussions of entanglement, relationality, and more-than-human ethics while remaining alert to semantic loss, historical difference, and the interpretive work of translation itself.[12]

Analysis proceeds abductively in iterative cycles. An initial reading identifies recurrent motifs, figures, and relational scenes across the selected texts. A second stage of focused coding

[9] Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanism.*
[10] Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene.*
[11] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 71–72.
[12] Lawrence Venuti, "Translation, Intertextuality, Interpretation," *Romance Studies* 27, no. 3 (2009): 157–73, https://doi.org/10.1179/174581509X455169.

traces the article's main analytic concerns, namely porous subjectivity, distributed agency, ethical entanglement, and more-than-human companionship. These patterns are then synthesized through analytic memoing and repeated comparison across poems, translations, and, where possible, the Persian text. Interpretive rigor is supported through transparent corpus delimitation, explicit tracking of translation choices, and sustained attentiveness to the relational scenes through which ethical meaning emerges. The study does not claim that Rūmī offers a modern environmental doctrine, nor does it presume full commensurability between Sufi metaphysics and posthumanist theory. Non-alignment is treated as analytically productive.[13]

Results and Discussion

The discussion unfolds in three interconnected movements in order to clarify how Rūmī's poetry can be read in a posthumanist key. It begins by examining the decentering of the human at the level of ontology, showing that the poems repeatedly imagine existence as relational, porous, and constituted through interdependence rather than autonomy. It then turns to the poetic texture of this relational vision by tracing the presence of elemental, vegetal, animal, and material figures that animate Rūmī's verse and complicate any strict division between human and more-than-human life. The final movement draws out the ethical implications of these poetic ecologies, arguing that Rūmī's work invites a mode of attentiveness grounded in humility, exposure, and responsibility within a world that exceeds human mastery. Together, these three sections demonstrate that Rūmī's poetry does not merely ornament spiritual reflection with images of nature, but articulates a more fundamental rethinking of being, relation, and ethical coexistence.

Decentering the Human: Rūmī's Relational Ontology

A posthumanist reading of Rūmī begins by separating the human from the logic of human exceptionalism. His poetry does not negate the human as a site of ethical striving, feeling, or perception, but it persistently dislodges the assumption that the human stands as the sovereign center of meaning and agency. The self in Rūmī is rarely presented as an autonomous consciousness confronting a passive world from a position of mastery. Chittick's reading of Rūmī makes clear that the human being becomes intelligible only through its relation to a reality that exceeds and transforms it, rather than through any self-grounding identity or isolated

[13] Thom van Dooren, Eben Kirksey, and Ursula Münster, "Multispecies Studies: Cultivating Arts of Attentiveness," *Environmental Humanities* 8, no. 1 (2016): 1–23, https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3527695; and see Melanie Birks, Ysanne Chapman, and Karen Francis, "Memoing in Qualitative Research: Probing Data and Processes," *Journal of Research in Nursing* 13, no. 1 (2008): 68–75, https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987107081254.

interiority.[14] Such a framework shifts attention from possession to participation, from self-sufficiency to dependence, and from command to receptivity. The world of the poem is therefore not arranged around the human as its unquestioned measure, because existence itself appears as dynamic, layered, and shared. Human life enters that order not as its owner, but as one vulnerable mode of being among others, exposed to forms, forces, and presences that continually undo the fantasy of separateness. This is the first sense in which Rūmī may be said to decenter the human: he relocates subjectivity within a broader field of relation where existence is disclosed through entanglement rather than through sovereign identity.

This displacement of centrality becomes even more visible in the way Rūmī animates the more-than-human world. His poems repeatedly grant force and intelligibility to reeds, birds, dust, water, wind, flame, trees, and other elemental or living forms, not as decorative surfaces but as active presences within the drama of becoming. Schimmel shows that natural imagery in Rūmī is integral to his symbolic and metaphysical imagination, since the visible world functions as a field through which truths about longing, transformation, and relation become perceptible.[15] The more-than-human, then, is not merely used by the poem; it also structures the poem's ontology. The figure of the reed-flute offers an especially dense instance of this logic because the reed acquires expressive force only after being cut open, hollowed, and rendered vulnerable to breath. Keshavarz notes that Rūmī's lyric mode consistently privileges openness, fracture, and receptivity over any ideal of completed self-possession, which means that the subject is imagined less as a sealed interiority than as a resonant medium.[16] Breath intensifies this relational condition because it marks life as an event of passage across boundaries rather than the property of an enclosed self. Rashid's account of *nafas* in Rūmī clarifies that breath names a mode of ontological exposure through which subjectivity is constituted by exchange, rhythm, and alterity rather than by autonomy.[17] Such figures matter because they refuse the anthropocentric assumption that only the human can generate significance. Meaning in Rūmī circulates through a world already alive with expressive forms, and the human becomes meaningful precisely insofar as it can enter that circulation without reducing it to possession.

Materiality is therefore not secondary in Rūmī's poetic world, nor is it a disposable shell for a purely inward spirituality. Lewis emphasizes that physical and sensuous imagery in Rūmī is

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[14] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

[15] Annemarie Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalāloddin Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

[16] Fatemeh Keshavarz, *Reading Mystical Lyric: The Case of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998).

[17] Zahra Rashid, "Nafas: Breath Ontology in Rumi's Poetry," *Poligrafi* 28, no. 111–112 (2023): 121-141, https://philarchive.org/rec/RASNBO.

indispensable to the articulation of metaphysical insight, because truth is not reached by abandoning the world but through a transformed apprehension of its forms, textures, and movements.[18] Earth, water, fire, vegetal life, and animal figures are among the very media through which ethical and spiritual knowledge become imaginable. The more-than-human does not sit behind the poem as scenery; it participates in the production of relation, perception, and obligation. That is why decentering the human in Rūmī should not be confused with flattening all beings into sameness or denying the distinctiveness of human responsibility. Human beings remain answerable in his poetry, yet that answerability no longer rests on mastery. Sells's account of mystical language is instructive here because it shows how such discourse destabilizes possession, certainty, and self-enclosure, thereby displacing the subject's claim to command what exceeds it.[19] Rūmī's poems enact precisely this kind of destabilization, but they do so through a poetics of resonance in which the self is taught to listen, undergo, and respond rather than dominate. Ernst likewise stresses that Sufi thought frames the human through relation, dependence, and the relinquishment of autonomous authority, a framework that makes worldliness and spirituality inseparable rather than oppositional.[20] Read from this angle, Rūmī's relational ontology offers a powerful challenge to anthropocentric assumptions because it imagines existence as shared from the beginning. The human is not erased, but relocated within a living order in which no being stands alone, no self is fully self-made, and no ethical life can emerge apart from the more-than-human conditions that sustain it.

Poetic Ecologies: More-than-human Presence in the Ghazals and Mathnawi

Rūmī's poetic ecologies become most legible where his verse distributes presence across elemental, vegetal, animal, and luminous forms without reducing them to decorative background. In the ghazals, wind, fire, sea, birds, dust, moonlight, gardens, and the reed-flute do not merely furnish the emotional landscape of a human speaker. They participate in the very production of lyric intensity. Bürgel's study of the ghazal form in Rūmī shows that repetition, return, and rhythmic extension are not secondary formal devices but integral to how meaning is carried and transformed within the poem.[21] That formal insight matters because the more-than-human in the ghazals is not simply represented; it becomes part of the mechanism through which the lyric unfolds. Keshavarz similarly argues that Rūmī's lyric should be read as an event of unfolding

[18] Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teaching, and Poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000).
[19] Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
[20] Carl W. Ernst, *Sufism: An Introduction to the Mystical Tradition of Islam* (Boston: Shambhala, 2011).
[21] J. Christoph Bürgel, "'Speech Is a Ship and Meaning the Sea': Some Formal Aspects of the Ghazal Poetry of Rūmī," in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rumi*, ed. Amin Banani, Richard Hovannisian, and Georges Sabagh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 44–69.

rather than as a fixed container for mystical doctrine, which clarifies why elemental and animate figures in the poems act less like illustrations than like dynamic forces of poetic disclosure.[22] Schimmel's work on Rūmī's imagery reinforces this point by showing how recurrent figures such as flame, birds, celestial movement, and gardens belong to a symbolic world organized around transformation, migration, and combustion rather than static description.[23] The result is a lyric environment in which human feeling cannot appear as self-contained, because it is continually refracted through nonhuman intensities that alter its scale, rhythm, and affective force.

This more-than-human animation is especially important because the ghazals resist descriptive stability. Their images rarely settle into a contemplative tableau in which nature stands still for human reflection. Instead, they flash, scatter, return, and mutate, producing a poetics of motion in which the speaker is repeatedly displaced by forces passing through the poem. Arberry's translations make this mobility especially visible, as birds in flight, flames of annihilation, boundless seas, and winds of ecstatic disturbance do not simply compare human inwardness to natural process but reorganize the terms of perception itself.[24] In such moments, the lyric "I" becomes less a stable center than a site of interruption, burning, dispersal, and reassembly. Sells's account of mystical language helps clarify the significance of this instability, since ecstatic discourse often works by unsettling the ordinary relation between subject and predicate, self and world, so that language itself begins to register the excess of what cannot be possessed or contained. In Rūmī's ghazals, more-than-human presence intensifies precisely that excess. Fire is not only a metaphor for desire, nor is wind simply a symbol of freedom. Both become operative agencies in a lyric ecology where the human speaker cannot claim full authorship over feeling, utterance, or transformation.[25] The poem is made by what traverses it, and those traversing forces are repeatedly figured as nonhuman. For that reason, the ghazals are central to a posthumanist reading of Rūmī not because they preach an environmental ethic in direct terms, but because they formally enact a world in which relation exceeds human control and meaning arises through more-than-human participation.

The *Mathnawī* develops this ecological imagination through a different poetic logic. Where the ghazals intensify more-than-human presence through compression, musicality, and ecstatic dislocation, the *Mathnawī* expands it through narrative layering, anecdotal sequence, and pedagogical redirection. Hamid's analysis of Rūmī's storytelling technique demonstrates that the

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[22] Fatemeh Keshavarz, *Reading Mystical Lyric: The Case of Jalal al-Din Rumi* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998).
[23] Annemarie Schimmel, *I Am Wind, You Are Fire: The Life and Work of Rumi* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992).
[24] A. J. Arberry, trans., *Mystical Poems of Rūmī: First Selection, Poems 1–200* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).
[25] Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

apparent digressiveness of the *Mathnawī* is in fact a deliberate formal strategy through which meanings emerge by juxtaposition, interruption, and recursive return rather than linear exposition.[26] This matters because animals, reeds, birds, insects, earth, water, and vegetal forms in the *Mathnawī* do not appear as inert examples subordinated to a purely human lesson. They enter a narrative ecology in which voices cross species boundaries, materials become articulate, and instruction arises through relation rather than simple allegorical decoding. Nicholson's translation and commentary made the opening lament of the reed-flute foundational for generations of readers, and that opening remains decisive because it immediately binds vegetal matter, sound, severance, and longing into one scene of utterance.[27] The nonhuman is articulate from the beginning. The *Mathnawī* does not first establish a human speaker and only afterward decorate that speaker's insight with natural imagery. It begins by letting cut reed and moving breath generate the conditions of speech itself.

This narrative ecology becomes even clearer when one considers how moral and spiritual perception in the *Mathnawī* repeatedly arises through material and more-than-human mediation. Fahm's recent ecological reading is valuable precisely because it resists treating rivers, landscapes, animals, and elemental forms as merely symbolic and instead argues that the poem contains a discernible nature-centered orientation in which the material world participates in spiritual reflection without being emptied of its own significance.[28] Chittick's exposition of Rūmī's teaching on love complements this by showing that love in Rūmī is not a private sentiment located inside the individual but a cosmological force that binds beings together and draws them beyond self-enclosure.[29] Once these two perspectives are placed together, the more-than-human in the *Mathnawī* appears not as scenic ornament but as a medium through which relation itself is learned. Animals do not simply stand for human virtues or vices. Water does not merely serve as a metaphor of purity. Fire is not only a trope of passion. Each enters a pedagogical poetics that teaches the reader to think through companionship, vulnerability, dependence, and transformation. The *Mathnawī* therefore extends the ecological force already visible in the ghazals, but it does so by slowing lyric intensity into narrative instruction and by giving more-than-human presences a sustained role in the unfolding of thought.

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[26] Farooq Hamid, "Storytelling Techniques in the *Masnavī-yi Maʿnavī* of Mowlana Jalal al-Din Rumi: Wayward Narrative or Logical Progression?" *Iranian Studies* 32, no. 1 (1999): 27–49, https://doi.org/10.1080/00210869908701944.

[27] Reynold A. Nicholson, trans., *The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi*, 8 vols. (London: Luzac, 1925–40).

[28] Abdul Gafar Olawale Fahm, "Reflections on Rumi's *Mathnawi* and Ecological Spirituality: Introducing an African Perspective,"

[29] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

Taken together, the ghazals and the *Mathnawī* offer two complementary modes of poetic ecology. The ghazals stage more-than-human presence through lyrical immediacy, sonic recurrence, and ecstatic dispersal, while the *Mathnawī* develops it through narrative accumulation, dialogic teaching, and recursive scenes of relation. Lewis stresses that Rūmī's corpus cannot be collapsed into a single literary mode, since its genres differ significantly in voice, texture, and rhetorical operation.[30] That distinction is methodologically useful because it shows that more-than-human presence in Rūmī is not confined to one image bank or one formal strategy. It works across lyric and narrative alike, which suggests that relation to elemental and animate worlds is central rather than peripheral to his poetic imagination. The ecological force of Rūmī's poetry therefore lies not in isolated references to birds, reeds, gardens, wind, or flame, but in the larger compositional fact that these presences help make thought, feeling, and ethical perception possible. They are not passive scenery for a human drama already complete in itself. They are among the conditions through which that drama is constituted from the start.

Ethical Entanglement: Reading Rūmī in a Posthumanist Key

Rūmī reconfigures ethical life by displacing the fantasy of sovereignty and grounding responsibility in relational existence. This shift matters because it allows ethics to persist after the decentering of the human without simply returning to a weakened version of human exceptionalism. In a posthumanist frame, the ethical subject cannot be imagined as a self-grounding will that first secures its autonomy and then chooses whether to extend care outward. Wolfe's account of posthumanism is crucial here because it shows that what must be abandoned is not embodiment, vulnerability, or responsibility, but the humanist fiction of a subject that stands above the biological, technological, and ecological fields that sustain it.[31] Rūmī's work offers a strikingly compatible ethical intuition, though from a very different intellectual horizon. Again and again, his poetry and prose expose the ego not simply as morally flawed but as ontologically deluded, because it imagines itself central where it is in fact derivative, dependent, and exposed. The ethical problem is therefore deeper than pride in the ordinary sense. What must be overcome is the desire to possess meaning, to master relation, and to inhabit the world as though it were ordered for the self alone. Bennett's account of distributed agency sharpens this point by suggesting that action is never the product of a solitary will but of assemblages in which human and nonhuman forces are already entangled.[32] Read alongside Rūmī, that insight helps clarify why ethical life cannot begin with self-possession. The self in his writings becomes

[30] Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teaching, and Poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000).
[31] Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
[32] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

capable of response only when it ceases to enthrone itself as the origin of value and instead learns to inhabit a world in which agency, affect, and significance are shared across relations it neither initiates nor controls. Ethical entanglement in this sense does not diminish moral seriousness. It intensifies it, because the subject must answer within a field of dependencies that exceeds its command.

This ethical displacement becomes clearer when one considers the centrality of *walāya* in Rūmī's teaching. Mojaddedi demonstrates that friendship with God is not a marginal or decorative theme in Rūmī, but a major axis of his thought and one that decisively reorients the relation between piety, authority, and selfhood.[33] Friendship with God does not elevate the self into private mystical distinction; it dislodges the self from legalistic and egoic forms of certainty by placing it in a relation of dependence, receptivity, and intimacy. For that reason, love in Rūmī cannot be reduced to emotional intensity or devotional ornament. It is an ethical force because it strips the subject of the illusion that it can stand apart from others, from the world, or from the Real while remaining whole. This is where a posthumanist reading becomes especially productive. Love does not simply connect already-formed beings; it reveals that beings were never fully self-contained to begin with. Rūmī's discourses repeatedly return to this point in practical terms. In *Fīhi mā fīhi*, as translated by Thackston, Rūmī treats vanity, haste, and self-regard as disorders of perception that prevent the subject from seeing the truth of its own condition.[34] The ethical failure of the ego lies not only in disobedience, but in the desire to occupy the center of interpretation. Such a self does not merely act wrongly. It misperceives reality by imagining itself to be self-authorizing and self-sufficient. Once that fantasy is displaced, ethics appears less as a code externally applied to conduct than as a transformation of orientation. The subject becomes good not by consolidating its own power but by relinquishing the demand to be the unquestioned measure of what matters. Responsibility emerges, then, from relation because relation is what reveals the self to itself as limited, answerable, and dependent.

Humility is the disposition that stabilizes this ethical transformation. In Rūmī's world, humility is not a sentimental virtue or an etiquette of smallness. It is a rigorous condition of right relation because it corrects the distorted scale through which the ego imagines itself central. Khalil's study of humility in Islamic contemplative ethics is especially useful on this point, since he shows that *tawāḍuʿ* occupies a position between pride and self-loathing, refusing both self-

[33] Jawid Mojaddedi, *Beyond Dogma: Rumi's Teachings on Friendship with God and Early Sufi Theories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[34] Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Signs of the Unseen: The Discourses of Jalaluddin Rumi*, trans. W. M. Thackston Jr. (Boston: Shambhala, 1999).

exaltation and pathological negation.[35] That balance matters for a posthumanist reading because the decentering of the human should not collapse into the annihilation of significance. The ethical subject is not asked to disappear into nothingness, but to inhabit its limits truthfully. Murata's cosmological account of the relations among God, world, and human being deepens this point by showing that Islamic thought often imagines reality through patterned correspondences and reciprocal dependencies rather than through isolated substances.[36] Read alongside Rūmī, such a framework clarifies why humility is never merely psychological. It is ontological and epistemic at once. It restores proportion by reminding the human that existence is received, that knowledge is partial, and that agency operates within relations that no single being commands. This is why humility in Rūmī does not diminish dignity. It secures a more truthful dignity, one grounded not in superiority but in participation. The humble subject can respond because it no longer mistakes possession for strength or control for wisdom. Ethical entanglement therefore requires humility, since only a non-sovereign self can remain open to others without first converting them into instruments of its own self-confirmation. In this sense, humility is not the negation of ethics but its enabling posture, the discipline through which the subject learns how to remain answerable within a world it shares but does not own.

The pedagogical form of Rūmī's writing gives this ethical posture a narrative and affective texture. Zargar argues that premodern Islamic storytelling does not merely transmit moral content but cultivates the habits of perception, judgment, and affect through which virtue becomes possible.[37] This is particularly relevant to Rūmī, whose narratives rarely function as simple allegories with fixed meanings waiting to be extracted. Instead, they expose readers to scenes of misperception, vanity, heedlessness, greed, and failed attention, thereby training moral understanding through dramatic encounter rather than abstract prescription. Ethical insight emerges through the slow reshaping of what the reader notices and how the reader learns to dwell with ambiguity, interruption, and reversal. This is where the more-than-human becomes ethically significant in a distinct way. Foltz's work on animals in Islamic tradition reminds us that Islamic moral reflection has long extended beyond strictly interhuman obligation and has included questions of cruelty, stewardship, and right conduct toward other creatures.[38] Within that broader ethical horizon, the nonhuman presences in Rūmī are not merely symbolic

[35] Atif Khalil, "Humility in Islamic Contemplative Ethics," *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 4, no. 1–2 (2020): 223–52, https://brill.com/view/journals/jie/4/1-2/article-p223_10.xml#top.
[36] Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).
[37] Cyrus Ali Zargar, *The Polished Mirror: Storytelling and the Pursuit of Virtue in Islamic Philosophy and Sufism* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2017).
[38] Richard C. Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006).

conveniences. They are part of a pedagogy that decenters the human by refusing to let significance remain exclusively human. When animals, elemental forms, and material processes are granted moral and perceptual force, the reader is drawn into a world in which ethical attention must reach beyond the self and beyond the human. Narrative becomes a training in relational response. It teaches that the world is already inhabited by others whose presence alters the terms of judgment. The ethical work of the text therefore lies not only in what it says about humility or love, but in how it compels the reader to inhabit a field of relation where the self is no longer sufficient to itself. Entanglement here is pedagogical because moral maturity develops through exposure to forms of life and forms of narration that repeatedly interrupt anthropocentric self-assurance.

Embodiment is equally central to this ethics. Rūmī is often read as though his spiritual intensity required an escape from material life, yet his writings repeatedly imagine the subject through breath, movement, hunger, burning, receptivity, and affective exposure. The ethical self is not pure mind but a body in contact, traversed by forces it neither invents nor masters. Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality is helpful here because it describes bodies as materially intermeshed with the environments through which they move, rather than as sealed interiors protected from the world by clear boundaries.[39] Although Rūmī speaks from a very different metaphysical tradition, his poetics often imagines the self in strikingly similar terms, as constituted by passage, exchange, and vulnerability rather than by enclosure. Ethical consequence follows directly from that ontology. A body so understood cannot imagine responsibility as a private inward decision detached from matter, environment, or relation. It must reckon with implication. Tsing's account of collaborative survival strengthens this point by showing that life persists through precarious and contingent interdependence rather than through purity, autonomy, or self-sufficiency.[40] Read alongside Rūmī, this suggests that love and humility are not simply devotional sentiments but practical modes of inhabiting dependence without converting vulnerability into domination. To love is to accept exposure to what transforms the self. To be humble is to acknowledge that flourishing is never self-made. Ethical entanglement, in this light, names a mode of coexistence in which the subject learns to endure and respond within a world of shared precariousness. What makes this ethically demanding is precisely that dependence cannot be escaped. It can only be misrecognized or inhabited well.

[39] Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).
[40] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

A posthumanist reading of Rūmī does not require the claim that he anticipated contemporary environmental theory, nor does it flatten his metaphysical commitments into a generic language of interconnectedness. Its value lies elsewhere. It makes newly visible the ethical seriousness with which Rūmī imagines non-sovereign life. His work repeatedly insists that the self becomes capable of truth only when it relinquishes the desire to stand above relation, and that moral formation requires not the intensification of mastery but the surrender of centrality. Read this way, ethical entanglement in Rūmī is not an incidental consequence of mystical doctrine. It is one of the primary ways his writing reconceives what it means to live well. Responsibility does not arise because the human remains supreme. It arises because the human is answerable within a world whose vitality, significance, and demands are irreducibly more than human. That is why Rūmī remains so productive for posthumanist thought. He offers a demanding vision of coexistence in which love reorients the self away from possession, humility restores ontological proportion, narrative trains forms of attention adequate to shared life, and embodiment exposes the subject to dependencies it cannot finally transcend. Ethics, in such a world, is neither abstract rule nor private feeling. It is the ongoing labor of inhabiting relation without domination and of remaining receptive within a reality no self can claim as its own.

Conclusion

Rūmī's significance for environmental humanities lies not in offering a proto-modern ecological program, but in unsettling the assumptions that have made ecological crisis thinkable within anthropocentric terms. His poetry and teaching displace the sovereign subject, not by denying human ethical responsibility, but by locating that responsibility within a field of relation that no human being originates or controls. What emerges from this reorientation is an ethics grounded in exposure rather than mastery, in receptivity rather than possession, and in coexistence rather than command. Such an ethical horizon matters because contemporary ecological thought often oscillates between moral urgency and conceptual exhaustion, repeating the demand for responsibility while leaving intact the image of the human as the primary measure of value. Rūmī opens a different path. He imagines a form of life in which the human becomes answerable precisely by relinquishing its claim to centrality.

Reading Rūmī in a posthumanist key also expands the scope of Islamic environmental humanities. It shows that classical Sufi poetry can function not merely as devotional inheritance or symbolic resource, but as a serious archive for rethinking subjectivity, relationality, and ethical life in a more-than-human world. This shift has methodological as well as conceptual consequences. It requires attention to poetic form, metaphysical language, and ethical pedagogy

as sites where ecological thought may be articulated without adopting the vocabulary of modern environmental discourse. Such a reading makes visible a mode of coexistence that is spiritually charged yet materially attentive, ethically demanding yet resistant to the fiction of self-sufficient agency. Rūmī's work remains valuable because it compels thought to move beyond the opposition between human interiority and external nature, revealing instead a world in which life is shared, vulnerability is constitutive, and ethical maturity depends on learning how to inhabit entanglement without turning it back into domination.

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