



## Consilience Chronicle: A Big-History Perspective on Ejaz Rahim's *Garden of Secrets Revisited*

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### ABSTRACT

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This research analyses Ejaz Rahim's historiographical epic poem *Garden of Secrets Revisited* (2020) to explore the synergy between the overarching concept of "Big History" (regarded as good knowledge) and the integrative nature of "Consilience." Building on the idea of William H. McNeil, David Christian further expostulates the concept of "big history" in his essay "What is Big History?" where he draws on and elaborates the term "consilience" coined by E.O. Wilson, who initially envisioned it as "a return to the goal of a unified understanding of reality." The in-depth analysis of Rahim's epic seeks parallels between Christian's idea of big history by using the consilience of multiple disciplines of knowledge to understand the common themes that shape the world. Marnie Hughes-Warrington's deliberations on the concept of philosophical and universal history in poetic form, expressed in her book *History as Wonder* (2019), are triangulated with the ideas of Christian and Jacques Derrida to pursue the argument through a bricolage of theoretical positions. This paper finally develops the thesis that the concept of consilience underpins the methodology of long history by emphasizing an interdisciplinary approach to human history. A critical study of *Garden of Secrets Revisited*, therefore, provides a nuanced understanding of the ethical implications of the experience of reading big history along with an engagement with Derrida's propositions in *Specters of Marx* (1994), where he regards the experience of history as an ethical understanding of things. The study intervenes critical scholarship on the strength of its argument that historiographical poetry as a powerful and transformative sub-genre has the potential to reconnect history, ranging from humanities to natural sciences, with a universalist vision underlying the concept of big history that may help reach the objective historical truth.

**Keywords:** Big history, Consilience, Good knowledge, Universalism, Epic historiography

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## I

This paper examines Ejaz Rahim's historiographical epic poem *Garden of Secrets Revisited* (2020) to explore the synergetic relationship between the concept of "Big History" (good knowledge) and the integrative nature of "Consilience". Through the analysis of selected text, this study also investigates the complex interplay between consilience, historical narratives, and the exploration of hidden knowledge within the context of "big history". I invoke David Christian's concept of "big history" as my principal theoretical prop for this research. Since Christian draws on E. O. Wilson's idea of "consilience" and further elaborates it for his argument in his 2017 essay "What is Big History?", this term is useful for this study, and I use it in the main title of my paper.

"Consilience" refers to the principle that evidence from independent and unrelated sources can converge to build strong support for a particular explanation. Big history, on the other hand, is an interdisciplinary approach to history that examines the past on a large scale. The term speaks of an ancient tradition, yet David Christian has renewed the idea in his essay. History, as it may be considered a part of "good knowledge," has been named "big history." The concept of 'big history' is a new concept regarding the discipline of historical research. Although the term was first used by American historian William H. McNeil (1917-2016) in his seminal work entitled *The Human Web: A Bird's Eye-View of World History* (2003), when he considered the possibility of a broad vision of history, it was Australian-American historian David Christian (1946-) who developed the concept further in his essay "What is Big History?" published in *The Big History Journal* in 2017.

David Christian, a distinguished professor and director of Big History Institute at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, presents the concept of historical knowledge as a project that aims to construct a universal architecture in interactive historical treatises that envelop the entire world in patterns of interaction and exchange. Incorporating a consilience strategy into history-making develops history into a vibrant new field of research that helps to transform the understanding of history to increase human knowledge in general and reach the "objective historical truth" (Christian, 2017, p. 5) in particular. Borrowing the term from American biologist E.O Wilson's book *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (1998), Christian elaborates the concept as "a return to the goal of a unified understanding of reality, in place of the fragmented visions that dominate modern education and scholarship" (Christian, 2017, p. 1). His perspective aims to link the insights of multiple scholarly disciplines, such as the specialized views of big historians in the fields of biology, paleontology, physics, cosmology, etc., on the past so that the richness and range of various schools of knowledge may be harnessed, to develop a better understanding of today's world.

The core text, selected to explore the synergy between big history and consilience is Ejaz Rahim's historiographical epic entitled *Garden of Secrets*

*Revisited: An Epic Poem on Divine Human Relationship.* The poem starts with an existential journey in the company of the Muses to explore the realms of Divinity and humanity. To handle the complex ideas that could reflect the epistemological and ontological forms and epochs in the contemporaneous situation of Man, the author manifests a deep understanding of Sciences, Arts, and Humanities as myriad sources. He selects the epic form as the most suitable mode of expression for the breadth of philosophical knowledge that may awaken the reader to the desired spirit of universality. This study offers insights into how consilience can enrich our perceptions of history and knowledge integration. Since the exercise of universal rhetoric may be expressed through the rhetorical exegesis of poetry, this study draws conceptual parallels between David Christian's concept of good knowledge encapsulated as big history and the interactionist scholarship that has been exhibited in poetic language in the form of an historical epic. Therefore, it is important to first establish the relevance of epic poetry as a very appropriate poetical genre for philosophical historiography.

The epic form uniquely applies to pursuing certain subjects that speak of universal human experiences. These subjects may be either legendary, historical, allegorical, or religious, coupled with the wealth of scholarly research invested in them. In her book *History as Wonder* (2019), Marnie Hughes Warrington confers on the historical past the status of "heir to epic poetry". She reiterates that an epic's scope is so extensive that it can weave well with the stories and heroes from the past (2019, p. 1). Therefore, poetry in the form of historiographical composition with a combination of aesthetic art and ethical intent may refine and reconfigure our general sense of the world. I have selected Anglophone Pakistani poet Ejaz Rahim's epic, *Garden of Secrets Revisited* (2020), as a specimen of the historiographical account of consilience that helps elaborate the concept of big history, the key standpoint of this research. The narrative embedded within the poem offers a rich tapestry of philosophical musings and contemplations drawing upon diverse perspectives of thinkers throughout history.

Based on a complex dialectic between the secular and the sacred, *Garden of Secrets Revisited* is a compilation of fifteen short-length books in addition to the Prologue and the Epilogue. Each book carries its own title. This study refers to these books by their titles and chronological order in the epic. However, Book XI of the epic, "The Garden of Secrets", shares its title with the epic *Garden of Secrets Revisited*. The word "*Revisited*" in the title refers to the fact that the poet derives his inspiration from two monumental contributions in the arena of philosophical poetry. The first is the epic poem *Gulistan e Raaz* (1311) by Shiekh Mahmud Shabistari (1288-1340), one of the most celebrated Persian Sufi poets of the 14th century. The poem was translated into English as *The Garden of Secrets* in 1920 by Edward Henry Whinfield. The second is the contribution some five centuries later by Allama Muhammad Iqbal, entitled "Gulshane Raaz e Jadid" (1927). Ejaz Rahim's *The Garden of Secrets Revisited* (2021) is the third in the series. However, this study

does not focus on drawing historical and intellectual comparisons between the present epic and its predecessors. It studies the broad spectrum of the poem as an instance of a universal history, excepting its form, which is philosophical and poetic.

The construction of this epic form requires a certain attention to its architecture. The poet constructs multiple layers into the structure and content of the poem, where the author, as the central character, embarks on a journey of exploration through different domains of religious, scientific, and philosophical inquiry “to explore the relation between the Creator and His creation, seeing Man as a privileged entity gifted with understanding and God-consciousness” (Rahim, 2020, p. x). The protagonist seeks help from the Muses to explore the Divine-Human encounter through the domains of Religion, Science, Theology, Mathematics, Metaphysics, and Poetry. Each Book represents a tour of a distinct realm of knowledge to grasp the essentialities of its complex ideas, balancing it with the presence of God. The journey culminates with the protagonist's arrival at the garden of divine secrets, the mystic garden witnessing man's union with the Divine. This part of the epic presented in Book XI helps us understand the conceptual compass of the poem.

Describing the layout of the Book in the Author's note, Rahim introduces the epic “with a whole litany of doubts raised at the beginning, about the reality of the sacred and the spiritual vis a vis the material and the worldly. These doubts are rooted in the age-old traditions of thought and history but buttressed today by advances made by modern Science and Philosophy” (Rahim, 2020, p. x). This central character is not some specified individual but someone who represents “Everyman” (Rahim, 2020, p. xi). The internal conflict in him and his quest for a deeper understanding of truth fuels the desire to delve into the intersections of the divine and human experiences.

In the person of the questing traveller, the complexity of the Divine-human relationship represents the struggle to find common grounds between the spiritual and the material, the sacred and the secular. Exploring the unique relationship of the Divine and the human is a complex idea that calls for a deep understanding of a myriad of sources of knowledge, ranging from the essentials of religion to sciences and humanities such as philosophy, literature, art, culture, and spirituality. What an all-inclusive history owes to other subjects is the record of their particular histories. Therefore, history's nature and goals become parts of a knowledge continuum instead of a fragmented vision of the past, consolidating the study of the selected epic in this research against the backdrop of big history.

Based on the idea of historical research that exercises an empowering influence on the reader in his understanding of the present and to getting at the truth about the past, the map of the poem seems to align with David Christian's longing for a complete book of history that can offer a single world of knowledge. In his essay on big history as the modern form of an ancient project, Christian captures the plan of a universal history as one with multiple authors in which each

chapter is about a different type of history, so there are chapters called: “What is Social History now?” “What is Intellectual History Now?” and “What is Cultural History Now?” (Christian, 2017, p. 7). This study invokes Christian’s idea of “big history” and seeks intellectual parallels between his unified understanding of a transformed historical scholarship and Rahim’s presentation of human history in his philosophical poem as part of a much larger past. The latter’s epic concludes that a truly universal history has to map the whole of the past, including the pasts of the biosphere and the entire universe, in order to enable the reader to have a better grasp on the real world. However, the discipline of philosophical historiography cannot be just a catalog of facts presented in chronological order.

In her book, *History as Wonder* (2019), Marnie Hughes Warrington talks about contemplating “the scale and diversity of natural features [from] the size of Lake Moeris and the richness of Scythian environment” to “exploring the margins of the world”. She further writes about reflecting on “the qualities of singular individuals – the remarkably brave and audacious – who are known to us”. Warrington prioritizes doing all that while composing history if it is meant to reflect “careful and critical thought, worthy of a philosopher king” (2019, pp. 10-12). There are particular ways of telling the story of history’s past that she considers the history of history. Of all the sciences and groups of subjects in humanities, historiographical composition has been considered as one indebted to philosophy the most. Ultimately, this approach aims to foster a deeper appreciation of the interconnectedness of all things and inspire new ways of thinking about our place in the universe. After establishing this theoretical and conceptual background, I attempt to analyze the selected text in the next section.

## II

Beginning with the Prologue, the poet entitles Book I as “Petitioning the Holy Prophet,” in which guidance from the Holy Prophet, as the magisterial presence of God, is beseeched to dispel the doubt if the universe and mankind are ownerless entities. Questions as to why divinity is silent “in the face of cataclysms” and contemporary disarray or the sense of wonder, if the Holy One has chosen to wash His hands of “the world’s dirty linen”, are brought to the threshold of the Prophet of God, the bearer of the final version of “Religion’s ancient narrative”. These and some “Fifty thousand questions” arise that originate from the current dispensation of the laws of nature ranging from “The raptorial to the coleopteral /The curlicued to the elliptical/ The geometrical to the mathematical/And from the microscopic to the astronomical” (Rahim, 2020, pp. 12-14) .

The complex scientific phenomena of the academic disciplines referred to in the lines cited above are treated as monuments of scientific advance reflecting the human mind’s intelligence and skill and its forays into energy and matter as the epic advances to seek a common vision between science and faith that “celebrates the Universe/ Of Matter, Life and Man/As a single indivisible span” (p. 27). These

lines indicate that all aspects of the universe, from the smallest subatomic particles to the largest structures in the cosmos, are interconnected and cannot be fully understood in isolation. According to this perspective, the universe is not simply a collection of disparate parts but rather a complex web of relationships and interactions that give rise to emergent properties and patterns. Life, for example, results from intricate chemical and physical processes that occur within and between cells “containing genetic intelligence/ As the true drivers of evolution”, which in turn are shaped by the larger ecological and evolutionary contexts in which they exist. The secret of evolution is seen as a half-truth that is most often unable to explain the mystery of Nature’s diversity:

Or why there is such astounding variety  
Of feathers and flowers  
Competing more in beauty’s sport  
Than in survival’s game. (Rahim, 2020, p. 37)

Similarly, human societies are shaped by various factors, including geography, climate, technology, and culture, which are influenced by larger historical and environmental forces.

By viewing the universe as a single indivisible span, scholars with a broad historical vision seek to develop a more comprehensive and integrated understanding of the world around us. Therefore, to connect himself with the divine source of creativity and to infuse his writings with depth, meaning, and artistic vision, Rahim summons the muses at the poem’s beginning to seek their assistance in navigating the complexities of religion, science, and philosophy. Ideas shape better if they are embedded “in the philosophy of knowledge (epistemology), philosophy of being (ontology), ethics and aesthetics to refine or to reconfigure our general sense of the world” (Warrington, p. xiii). This perspective emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and the need to bridge the gap between the natural and social sciences, academia, and the broader public. The richness and range of a vibrant consilience chronicle is not restricted to a combination of natural sciences. Big history recognizes no disciplinary barriers to historical knowledge. In his essay, Christian focuses on how a historian constructs stories from the past: “[H]ow we describe the past matters because our accounts may shape the future” (Christian, 2017, p. 7).

Rooted in the Greek word “mous” representing the Greek goddesses associated with creativity and inspiration, the act of inviting the muse represents the artist’s call for a catalyst that enables him to explore his inner depths. Historiographical in nature, the poem is an existential journey in the company of Muses. Books II and III, entitled respectively “Arrival of the Muses” and “The Muses Speak”, constitute invocation to the Muses “for their empathy/And assistance in undertaking/ another pilgrimage in verse” (pp. 17, 24, 17). Following a traditional poetic convention that symbolizes the artistic and spiritual dimension of the act of

creation, an invocation to the muse underscores the belief that poetry is not just a product of human effort but also a gift from higher powers.

The supplication to muses is in the form of “the knock at the gates of two wise muses/those of Religion and History”, before the poet embarks upon his course to the garden of Divine secrets. The two “wise Muses” appear as comrades and confirm their presence until the poem’s end to assist the poet in his exploratory journey through undulating terrains of Theology, Philosophy, and Science towards the happy premises of a garden of holy secrets. Although coming from different destinations, the poet welcomes them as “siblings” (2020, pp. 17, 19) as they bear “striking similarity” in their countenance.

Expressing amazement at the “grinding mills” of modern science, *Garden of Secrets Revisited* compares the tools of modernity’s advance, such as science and technology, with “warrior incarnations of Alexander and Macbeth”, that have rendered Religion’s maxims obsolete. Since old issues regarding disbelief and doubt in faith return afresh in the human mind that has already started to think of itself as an ownerless entity, the poet tends to search for

... fresh seeds of significance

Hoping to hoe them

In the furrowed fields of History and Religion. (Rahim, 2020, p. 18)

Both history and religion as two distinct specialized fields of scholarly disciplines are powerful academic strategies. In his essay on a broad-scale history, Christian considers them as ever-smaller compartments while reiterating E.H. Carr’s dissatisfaction with the exclusiveness of specialized scholarships in history-making endeavors, presented in his book *What is History* (1961). When considered in isolation, history, and religion offer their pinhole views of the world, thereby cutting off the ancient links among fields of knowledge, leaving them increasingly isolated from each other. This trend may lead to a fractured and isolated discipline of history that becomes silent and less sure of itself at places where it is supposed to plunge into various realms of knowledge, therefore giving rise to a state of “scholarly *anomie*, both from each other and from a unified world of knowledge” (Christian, 2017, p. 3). Big history, therefore, consists essentially in seeing that the inquiry conducted by the historian tends to narrow down the gulf between the perspectives of human history and religion so that it becomes “a natural vehicle for a unified history of humanity” (Christian, 2017, p. 19). This is so because a universal history, such as big history encounters humans as a single, homogenous species. Therefore, as a modern-day historical-poetical exploration, the poem *Garden of Secrets Revisited* engages with different threads of investigation to focus on the narrative with increasing precision and confidence.

In the beginning, awe-struck and mystified by the magical and scintillating intricacies of nature, the author seeks to submit to the Creator as one intelligent designer who seems to be the plausible explanation for the intricate structure and

system of the universe. However, driven by the powerful impact of science and technology, he feels obliged to ponder over the scientific assumption that it all occurred spontaneously and without a purpose. Like a bewildered spirit, the author grapples with doubt and disbelief regarding his faith. The poet switches over to questions of a more sensitive nature when he experiences the irksome realization that time-honored notions receive a nerve-shattering attack at the hands of Modern Science. Driven by floodgates of doubts, the poet dares ask the Muses if the narrative of “Life as well as Consciousness” discovered by the high priests of science has not been “authored by anyone?” Or, to be more precise: “Is it Nature’s ordinance that/ As Science advances Religion must retreat?” (Rahim, 2020, p. 15). Whereas religion expects one to believe in miracles, something unseen and less tangible; science, on the other hand, believes in explanations. Nowadays, an invitation to science is an invitation to certain mysteries of life and matter. In his interview with PTV World, Rahim argues, “Nowadays, science is no longer just explanations. Science is mysterious also. Today, we have to accept the mysteries of life and give a station of meaning to the mysterious” (Rahim, Art with World, 2024). Discoveries give birth to new questions that demand evidence. Addressing this issue, the epic transitions to scientific inquiry and exploration. In this context, the protagonist poet ponders over the mysteries of the universe, contemplating scientific theories and marveling at the wonders of the natural world.

Book IV in *Garden of Secrets Revisited*, entitled “Science and the Divine: Of Miracles and Mysteries” (p. 36), describes at length how science has unlatched the doors to inquiry by unveiling a multiplicity of miracles. Modernity’s advances led by technology and science caused the fall of the ancient icons. Well-equipped with modern knowledge, the human voice speaks volumes of what it knows regarding the advancement in multiple theoretical and experimental advancements and impactful scientific discoveries, such as the unfurling of the “Standard Model design/As a seminal leap in the material Universe” (p. 38). Particle Physics theory defines the most basic building blocks of the universe. The term “Standard Model” was first introduced by Dutch science historian Abraham Pais (1918-2000) and American physicist Sam Trieman (1925-1999) in their article “How Many Charm Quantum Numbers are There?” (1975), published in *Physical Review-Journal*. The theory incorporates all that is known about tiny and indivisible subatomic particles that make up matter and predicts the existence of additional elementary particles called quarks. However, one mystery leads to the discovery of another.

One critical element of this quantum mechanics theory pertains to the measurement process and the behavior of particles in quantum mechanics, elucidating how these fundamental constituents of matter are instantiated during the collapse of their wave function upon human observation. According to the concept, when a measurement procedure is undertaken on a quantum system, such as the position or momentum of a particle, the wave function appears to collapse or decohere into a specific eigenstate. An eigenstate is a state in quantum mechanics corresponding to a measurable quantity of a physical system, such as an



observable property like position or momentum. In simpler terms, an eigenstate is a state of a system for which a particular measurement results in a definite value with certainty. American physicist John von Neumann (1903-1957) discovered the “collapse of the wave function” in quantum mechanics. Hence the conclusion:

Particles and Waves play cricket  
When they please on their chosen pitch  
And switch over to soccer  
At their own sweet will  
No foreign hand can scribe even  
A syllable in nature’s workbook. (Rahim, 2020, p. 21)

The discovery of the Standard Model has been another of science’s feats, taking the global scientific community by storm. Despite the intricacy of the discovery, it remains insufficient to offer the most precise depiction of the Universe, as the complexity of the cosmos demands a more comprehensive and nuanced approach. Many things related to the matter, from the smallest earthly objects to the brightest stars, remain unanswered. Talking about the fundamental laws and parameters of physics and “the distribution of matter and energy-balanced on a razor’s edge”, Prof. Atta ur-Rahman, Unesco Science Laureate, Professor Emeritus International Centre for Chemical and Biological Sciences, University of Karachi, reminds us in his Foreword to the *Garden of Secret Revisited*:

... while technology and science have come like locusts and devastated the croplands of belief, they have also provided startling discoveries about the stunning beauty, and the meticulous planning that has gone into the development of the galaxies and ultimately into the formation of our planet and of life. (Rahim, 2020, p. xvi)

As a vibrant new field of research in history, the consilience of different scholarly disciplines captures a holistic blend of a wide variety of distinctive perspectives to understand “the deep roots of today’s world” and transform our understanding of history. Therefore, *Garden of Secrets Revisited* attempts to present the fullness of knowledge, following a research strategy that creates a unifying paradigm of various disciplines in which the author tries to avoid the use of skepticism while struggling for objective historical truth. However, an imaginative understanding of the past is the prerequisite for a unified worldview of history. The author's expertise lies in the strategy in which he constructs the stories from the past. Talking about the empirical rigor of the historian, Christian asserts that: “History consists of stories about the past constructed by historians, and how we construct those stories changes as our world and our purposes change.” One could, therefore, deliberate on *Garden of Secrets Revisited* as a significant historical narrative within the realm of emerging scholarly writing, offering fresh and transformative perspectives on the past.

Methods of scientific inquiry bring scientists closer to the work of historians. Both try to “reconstruct a vanished past from the random clues it had left to the present . . . from ancient starlight to zircon crystals, to fossil trilobites- and using them to reconstruct plausible and even meaningful accounts of the past” (Carr, 1961, p. 10). Scientific skills, therefore, work on the basis of a prolonged familiarity with a given field, as in the case of modern forms of universal history. In view of German scholar and researcher on Roman religion, Jeorg Rupke(1962-), the complex process of writing history helps us learn that “writing history is not only an intellectual exercise, but that the path from the event to the written result has to pass through a series of successive stages including taking notes, collecting information, scholarly networking, archiving, ordering material [. . .]” (2015, p. 11). The purpose of history assumes a realist and naturalist understanding of knowledge, as in the case of science, due to the rigorous and complex investigation process that can help embed human history within the history of the biosphere.

In case of *Garden of Secrets Revisited*, conversing in scientific language demanded a full understanding of the basic essentialities of the most complex scientific ideas and their concomitants on the author's part. For that matter, Rahim, not having a scientific background, shared the drafts of the specific portions of the epic with some distinguished and multi-disciplinary people both in the Sciences and Humanities to seek their valuable input for the completion of the poem (Rahim, 2020, p. xi). In the “Author's Note” provided at the beginning of the epic, Rahim acknowledges the contributions made by eminent scholars from the contemporary intellectual community, whose profound insights were sought to lend authenticity to the scientific and humanistic contents of the epic. Among them, Dr. Abdullah Sadiq, former Rector of GIK Institute of Engineering Sciences and Technology, Professor Akbar Ahmed, the esteemed academician and anthropologist who currently holds the Ibn-i-Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies and is Professor of International Relations at American University in Washington DC, and Professor Emeritus Lloyd A. Jacobs M.D., author of *The Surgeon and the Spirit* (2016) and *The Mystery of Mysticism* (2016), formerly President of the University of Toledo in USA, also served as Chief of Staff at the Veterans Administration Centre in Ann Arbor, stand out as the prominent men of wisdom and learning in their particular fields (Rahim, 2020, p. xi). Much akin to Christian's notion of sharing and accumulating information across multiple generations and sources, as collective learning, *Garden of Secrets Revisited* explores human history as part of a larger past that includes the pasts studied by biologists, paleontologists, geologists, and cosmologists.

The muses are expressive of wonder at the burgeoning mystery of the Dark matter constituting an overwhelming bulk of energy in the rapidly expanding Universe: “Despite that frenzied expansion/Reflecting a stable temperament”. Then finally, the question as to who is driving the acceleration of the racing universe and the haunting fear expressed in the grand uncertainty regarding the possibility of everything turning hot if there is a sudden shift in the position of the Dark Energy in space. And then the conclusion: “What will be will be” (Rahim, 2020, pp. 36-51).

A philosopher-poet, Rahim cannot help but imbue the spirit of scientific knowledge with a plethora of philosophical images and words:

Dark Energy is even more puzzling  
Neither present, nor absent  
Seen, nor unseen  
Like the elusive ghost in Hamlet. (2020, p. 49)

At another place, the comparison of tiny particles and fundamental forces of nature known as supersymmetric strings in Strong Gravity situations, as are often conceived by astrophysicists with

Like extraterrestrial kites  
When they wish to engage  
Metaphorically speaking  
In the Lahori spirit of Basant. (Rahim, 2020, p. 49)

A metaphor is a poetic device that embodies the world in view and the word in hand. Rahim's frequent use of the metaphor leaves an impact on the reader. His poetry passes through the junction of hard-core facts to their symbolic representation in the simple ways of life. For him: "Metaphor is closer to life and its issues" (Rahim, *Art with World*, 2024), a philosophical tool for a poet who has to wage a battle between himself and his subject matter.

History has not always been an integral part of philosophy. Still, it has helped make sense of the world by discerning universals whenever it got entangled with philosophy on certain matters. The art of poetry provides the philosophical stage on which history becomes a source of a moral experience. Warrington seeks the connection between history and philosophy: "Historians took a steer from philosophical ways of thinking about existence, knowledge and categories, and their endeavors to make the most general sense of the world" (2019, p. xii). In the leading segments of the poem, the protagonist poet engages in introspection and shifts the focus of his inquiry towards philosophical debates on existential questions. While addressing fundamental questions about human existence, the poem incorporates theological perspectives to emphasize human agency and ethical decision-making in relation to concepts like sin, redemption, and salvation.

Book VIII of the epic, entitled "God and Christian Theologians (Since the Sixteenth Century AD)", enlists some of the eminent Christian, Jewish, Swiss, and German philosophers and theologians of American and European origin through the centuries in the form of a periodic sequence. The argument moves across a wide range of information on famous theologians from the sixteenth century AD down to the twentieth century. For instance, the poet writes:

Luther's handwritten note in 1516  
Captures the essence of his thought-  
'We are beggars,' he wrote

‘Depending on God’s grace  
For our final happiness.’ (Rahim, 2020, p. 133)

The theological arguments on behalf of these philosophers on religion are consulted to discover that there runs a common thread among their ways of thinking: “Calvin too, saw salvation/ As an act of Grace from God”. Most of these divines caught the attention of many scholars and philosophers interested in understanding the mystical dimensions of the human-divine relationship throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These men are referred to as “men of reformation” who underlined the essence of worship as much more important “Than ritual and outward form” (Rahim, 2020, p. 133). By incorporating a wide range of theological frameworks, distinct narratives, and interpretations of existence, Rahim explores authentic ways of engaging with the world and a sense of direction rooted in the ideals of faith.

The discourse on theology goes on to mention five key figures of Western theology, known as the pinnacles of Western theological enlightenment: German American philosopher Paul Tillich (1886-1965), Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965), Swiss Reformed Theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968), an influential existentialist thinker Martin Buber (1878- 1965) and German philosopher of religion, Rudolf Otto (1869-1937). These scholars engaged themselves in the phenomenology of religion while making significant contributions to the exploration of the numinous. Some of the theologians explored existential ideas to reframe religious concepts as part of an interdisciplinary strategy. For instance, Paul Tillich incorporated existential themes into his theology, emphasizing the existential dimension of faith and the human encounter with ultimate concerns. This congregation of mystics from across history and the world is shown to contemplate a sense of a single humanity while placing confidence in the traditional visions of the world whose idiom might change with time. Yet, the content remains unaltered, in which basic questions regarding God, the Universe, and man do not evaporate from the human mind, emphasizing that the struggle to make the most general sense of things charts the mutual interests of historians and philosophers. The journey culminates in a moment of epiphany, realization, and further contemplation on the complexities of the human experience in relation to each other, this world, and the divine.

God-experience, for Rahim, is like discovering a Rosegarden at a location intermediate “Between Earth and Heaven”. A much larger congregation of people from various cultures, religions, and traditions receive the poet and muses as they reach the most important part of the journey, the mystic Garden of Divine Secrets in Book XI. Sharing the title with the epic, Book XI of the poem, entitled “Garden of Secrets” (pp. 172, 171), enacts a tour of the Garden where aromatic plants and orchids have been planted by the sages of all ages, who get together, to sum up the challenges of their times by raising questions and then answering them one by one in an orderly succession. The poet’s delegation is surrounded by the august company

Of poet-saints in which  
Muslim savants sat knee-to-knee  
With Hindu and Bakhti sages  
Exchanging verse like amulets. (Rahim, 2020, p. 178)

Based on a universalist vision, the imagined holy Garden presents the theme of the intellectual interconnectedness of the globalized world: “As though they had one soul/ One mind, and a single heart” (Rahim, 2020, p. 181) There are benches silhouetted here and there in this mystical world where luminaries introduced as God-seekers belonging to different ages sit in a state of contemplation, sometimes reclining on garden chairs “in the shades of junipers” and sometimes under the shady “groves of pomegranate” (2020, p. 178) reciting verses to one another. When their active indulgence is sought in responding to questions of a complex nature, these geniuses are found humming their verses: “Their words bring comfort to our hearts”. These personages include luminaries, sages, and poet-saints passed in history, coming “from different hemispheres/ East and West” (2020, p. 182). There is “Plotinus who came many centuries after Plato/ ..enjoying his conversation with/ The Persian martyr Suhrawardy/Who lived in the twelfth”, castigated for his convictions in which he had coalesced Greek and Zoroastrian elements with Sufism. Mahmood Shabistari of Iran, Hindu and Bakhti sages such as Master Sanai, “Rumi, the thirteenth-century bard”, the fifteenth-century saint poet, Master Jamy, author of *Garden of the Pious*, Saint Tukaram, one of the most influential figures in the seventeenth century Bakhti movement within Hinduism. Hafiz, “the Persian genius”; Goethe, “the German titan” (2020, p. 181); Mother Julian and Saint Theresa of Avila; and Jakob Bohme and William Law, the German mystics. Once the great journey of God-experience commences, all these luminaries subscribe to the idea of reality as a state of perfection that the human soul can access only through the act of collective contemplation.

The conclusion that firmaments of love and reason will have to jointly mediate to save empires from turning into principalities is drawn by collaborative introspection of the camaraderie exercised by the inmates of the Mystic Garden:

If Life does not become a miracle  
Through Love’s incandescence  
All other things are worth  
Not even a matchstick. (Rahim, 2020, p. 190)

Here, the theoretical support of this study calls for an expansion to incorporate Jaques Derrida’s concept of “learning to live” with the ideals of enlightened progress that combines the universal values of spirituality and reason. The phenomenon of the revival of history has been named in Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* (1994) as “learning to live with ghosts”. His concept of non-contemporaneity associated with “respect for justice” (p. xviii) provides the modus operandi through which my intended field of inquiry shall formulate its conclusive argument. The

concept suits the ideals of this study since it connects the idea of the re-establishment of ethics to the responsibility of those who experience “the spectral moment” in their disturbing encounter with history. The spectral moment in history is like going back in time to have a meaningful, intuitive experience of things, thoughts, and events, including intimations about the soul and the afterlife:

Who can deny that basic questions  
About God, Universe and Man  
Reason and Faith, Life, and Death  
Have altered their idiom from time to time  
But never really gone away? (Rahim, 2020, p. 176)

These lines define the idea of history as one that bears deep concerns with exploring the earthly and divine sources of emancipation and self-realization to seek every potential for happiness.

The discovery of universals, therefore, becomes the logical imperative of philosophical thinking, which appears best in the form of expanded poetic designs, such as epic poems. The goal of consilience of knowledge, like that of all good knowledge, empowers us by the recognition of divine secrets that lay embedded underneath the soil of the

Garden of Secrets whose  
One and only secret is this-  
Life is an opportunity to discover  
Love’s hidden door of bliss. (Rahim, 2020, p. 173)

The purpose of history, according to the conclusive lines of the poem, is to shrink the distance between God and Man. Knowledgeable insights provided through science and technology pass through “imagination’s smoldering oven” to cause an awakening to “a Merciful Providence” (Rahim, 2020, p. 189), a protective force in the universe that is otherwise beyond human understanding.

Philosophical encounter with history is an unsettling phenomenon. The historiographical and philosophical reflections on the part of the sages from across the globe create a feeling of “unhoming” while reflecting on some uncomfortable aspects of history “in ways that acknowledge peoples who are often treated as objects rather than subjects. Therefore, it can be, and arguably ought to be, unsettling.” (Warrington, 2019, p. xvii). Warrington connects the feeling of homelessness during an encounter with history with something “unsettling” in the mind because it contains a feeling of confusion and disturbance within its folds. This feeling is experienced despite world-shaking advances claiming to have transformed our destinies: “Prometheus remains in chains, alas, /And Sisyphus is still struggling /To ascend the mountain heaving /A giant rock on his shoulders” (Rahim, 2020, p. 177). Although mythological, the Greek figures of history prompt the poet to use them as metaphors for the futility of human capacity in philosophy and sciences. The repetitive nature of life’s challenges invites Rahim to question the

meaning of human actions, the possibility of finding fulfillment, and the resolve to reevaluate perspectives as he reaches the close of his sacred journey in search of truth.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida builds up a case in the capacity of “learning to live” for the sake of ethics. About an unending dialogue between the present and the past, he writes: “It is a matter there of an ethical and political imperative . . . [I]t is a matter of the injunction itself—if there is one” (1994, p. 36). This attempt at learning to live, which has moral connotations, can only be done through a recurrent encounter with “ghosts, inheritance and generations, generations of ghosts,” implying the need to develop a wider view of our existence that entails a sense of responsibility, i.e., the “respect for justice, concerning those who are not there” (Derrida, 1994, p. 36). In Rahim’s words, one cannot shut the book of history, which does not stir the mind’s consciousness from the universe itself to the humans and finally to the individual cells by connecting the dots. No narrative can be considered complete if it falls short of “Man’s variegated sources/ Of experience and enlightenment-/Heart and Soul, Mind and Body.” (Rahim, 2020, p. 40).

A throwback to history with its wondrous events and people can be an attempt to address the call for justice and sympathy for all human beings irrespective of their temporal, spatial, and racial connections. Therefore, *Garden of Secrets Revisted* raises fundamental questions about human rights, justice, and societal ethics, where oppressive systems in human history are challenged for their sordid trade of power:

When greed becomes king  
Empires turn into principalities  
.....  
Every opportunity to build  
Fortress of fairness and justice  
Monuments of compassion and dignity  
Mansions of knowledge and spirituality  
Were squandered away.(2020, p. 184)

There is a longing to transform the body politic from a sinful state to a condition of grace. The intense philosophical exertion and mystic conceptions of the sages residing in the neighborhood of divinity do not vindicate the kind of justice that is reducible to a set of laws and rights specific to a certain place or a distinct period of time “but the one that is beyond all living present, which disjoins the living present before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead” (Derrida, 1994, p. xviii). This statement focuses on the phenomenon of broader justice, which moves out of the narrow circumference of the temporal and spatial practice of laws and rights. For Derrida: “. . . memories no longer recognize such borders; by definition, they pass through walls, these revenants, day and night, they trick consciousness and skip generations” (1994, p. 36).

In its universal shape, the sense of justice promises extensive interests that connect subjects, regions, and epochs into a series of interconnected continuity, bringing a sense of self-realization. As in the words of Rahim, “At the end of the day, whether it is poetry, philosophy, science or politics, humanity will find self-realization and joy of creation only when there is a sense of justice, a sense of sympathy for others and the great and powerful force we call, the power of love” (Art with World, 2024). Here, the dynamics of Science tend to vindicate the fundamentals of faith when the God-Man union is described through the act of volition observed by Oxygen and Hydrogen before turning into the water: “Oxygen will not become water/ by observing hydrogen/ From a safe distance” (Rahim, 2020, p. 202). The complex dialectic between history, science, and religion may have an empowering influence once they interact with the human mind to seek the ideals of truth. Unless driven by emotions for leading fuller lives and yearning for the good of the body politic and of the common people, knowledge remains a cause of intellectual distress supporting the dreams of “Power, Money and Markets/Politics and Wars” (p. 187). Chronicles of history that fail to accomplish inner development by mapping out a fusion between spirituality and reason and discovering a relevance between past and present for the sake of larger and loftier causes lie insignificant in spite of extensive research on all areas of human concern: “ Unless living can bring/ You personal happiness/ What is the point of/ Accumulating knowledge/ Or amassing power” (p. 189).

In selecting the text that makes up the kind of history where history, science, and metaphysics are intertwined, I have looked to the process of a combined attempt on their part to provide the evidence of an engaged and reflexive exercise that can claim to bear the dispositions towards the general sense of things. The text presents an example of history, as it is written not just for the sake of describing a series of thrilling anecdotes or a repetition of speeches that might have been delivered earlier but also presents a record that has the fidelity of expression intending to make it instructable as is necessary for the rightful operation of the mind, the self, and the society.

In his article on big history, Christian has not focused on the literary aspect of a historical scholarship that takes help from the world of science and technology to formulate a standard consilience narrative. To be more precise, he does not emphasize the importance of philosophical poetry in constructing a big historical narrative. This research, however, focuses on the potential of epic poetry as a very suitable medium for an experiment of big history in its philosophical, aesthetic, and ethical experiences. Broadening the scope of the whole lexicon of poetry, Rahim sees the epic form “as a uniform where the struggle of history may rhyme with the struggle of poetry for the sake of all human knowledge” (Rahim, Art with World, 2024). The experience of knowledge calls for a profundity of expression on the poet's part. Reason and evidence alone may not suffice as the sources of knowledge and enlightenment that generate new sorts of behavior. Part of knowledge and awareness comes from a sense of faith and emotion as well, as Rahim argues:



“Change is not being guaranteed by technology alone. If technology were enough to change people, there would be no Ghazas” (Art with World, 2024).

Emotion, thought, and knowledge may fuse in an epic to make poetry the key to understanding the present. The end of poetry is to help create a single work that can represent the whole material world. Poetry may not promise a utopian setup as aspired by the advances of science and technology. However, it helps keep the dream regarding the struggle for a higher degree of living intact:

Science has turned  
A million human hearts  
Into a million stones  
But it has failed to convert  
Even a single stone  
Into a human heart. (Rahim, 2020, p. 31)

The broad vision of poetry, however, can bring together basic human conditions of joy and suffering and fear of the known and the unknown to act for change: “That is the true function of poetry: the creation of fresh meaning with old words. One truth that poetry struggles with is the struggle itself. At a time when technology and science tend to contradict faith, poetry can serve as one force that can still dialogue with us” (Rahim, Art with World, 2024). Philosophical poetry as a meaningful talk is an act of responsibility in which the word has to carry the load of authenticity and appropriateness derived from all the existing sources of knowledge. That well-organized process of accumulation of thought and feeling aspiring for truth may claim to accomplish the goals of a meaningful consilience narrative. Viewed against the backdrop of these arguments, *Garden of Secrets Revisited* (2020) stands out as a detailed account in the genre of big history, characterized by a meticulous philosophical analysis, aiming to satisfy the yearning for comprehensive knowledge that seeks to benefit humanity in the foreseeable future.

### III

Analysis of the selected text in the foregoing pages provides me a clarity to conclude my argument. The discipline of history is a responsible institution. It aims to seek the truth that is the hallmark of good knowledge to create a map of the past that allows the readers, as beneficiaries, to grasp the real world better. In modern-day history, it would be useful if there was no fundamental chasm between the humanities and the natural sciences. The broad trend introduction of consilience into the field of historical research emphasizes the importance of sciences, social sciences, and history as interconnected fields of study, complementing one another wherever necessary. The concept of consilience, introduced by E. O. Wilson earlier and promoted afresh in history-making attempts by David Christian, promotes the argument that all fields of knowledge converge on the single aim, i.e., to increase

man's understanding of and mastery over his environment. The field of history may, therefore, serve as a suitable and convenient forum where different disciplines can combine for the sake of cohesiveness. A historical record that is no longer singular in approach and is constructed with a view to seeking help from all scholarly disciplines as a knowledge continuum, especially a marriage between Arts and Sciences, carries a universalist vision. Therefore, a universal history is quite suitably recognized as a Big History in modern terminology, as highlighted by David Christian. This research article studies Ejaz Rahim's *Garden of Secrets Revisited* as a specimen of modern historiography in the form of an enriching epic that fulfills the perspectives of big history. Through the analysis of the poem in the light of its theoretical props, the study concludes that the richness and range of big history, as a vibrant new field of study, may transform our understanding of history and help us understand deep roots of today's world.

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