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Daisies And The Whirling Dervishes D. H. Lawrence's Metaphysics in Women in Love and Rumi's Theory of Colourlessness

Lawrence's earnest desire for an alternative knowledge that would satisfy his need for inner fulfilment took him to different parts of the world. In search of this knowledge, he also read extensively. Amongst the literature that he read, and later influenced his writing, is Persian poetry.1 This essay will show how these poems' metaphysical concerns can affect the interpretation of Lawrence's work.

These poets believed that all different forms of existence are originally from one source, that of the Absolute. Hence, man's soul is infinitely searching for the Divine by attempting to exceed the limits of his phenomenal existence. The reason for this attraction towards the origin, they thought, is love, which was generated in man, when God made himself known to him.² Therefore, they considered love as the essence of all creation. Additionally, in these poems, man's soul has a close relation with the cosmos, and it mirrors the spiritual world or traces the Infinite.

Lawrence and these mystical poets are soulmates in their belief in the concept of Oneness, or in Unity of Existence.3 Additionally, like Persian poets, Lawrence also considers the mystical journey as the means to transcend all oppositional possibilities. In Fantasia of the Unconscious he explains: "The attaining to the Infinite, about which the mystics have rhapsodized, is a definite process in the developing unconscious, but a process in the development only of the objective-apprehensive centres and exclusive process, naturally."4

Another important similarity between Persian poetry and Lawrence's writing is the amalgamation of the transcendental and the immanent levels of discourse in order to highlight certain metaphysical experiences. In mysticism, there are two levels of discourse one referring to the level of empirical or phenomenal existence, and the other to the level beyond reason, the mystical or the transcendental level. However, in Persian poetry everything is discussed and viewed simultaneously on both these levels of discourse, which essentially appear to be incompatible, since these poets believe that human language is insufficient to express the essence of transcendental love. Therefore, they often use the symbolic language of earthly love to express their spiritual experience. Lawrence's text functions in the same manner, particularly when discussing the inner development of his characters. In these occasions, the character's sensual experience swiftly becomes a spiritual one, or vice versa. These abrupt and subtle inner

transformations of the characters from one level of existence to the other are very similar to the frictionless fusion of the spiritual and sensual levels of discourse in Persian poetry.

Lawrence's knowledge of Persian poetry may have had a greater influence on his writing than we have hitherto suspected. For example, the title of his first novel, The White Peacock,5 is most misleading, and therefore is generally considered as an "oddly mis-named" novel. But if we consider the white peacock's symbolic values in Persian poetry, they connote the reconciliation of opposites: its voluptuous neck, ugly legs, and full wealth of its tail glimmering like a stream of coloured stars, point to the fusion of the two different levels of existence, the transcendental and the immanent.

His next novel, *The Trespasser*, discusses the concept of Oneness in terms of sensual and spiritual desires.8 Like in Persian poetry, especially that of Omar Khayyam, Helena and Siegmund's moment of love, or their experiencing of "supreme transcendental" is compared to a rose (which symbolizes anticipation or hope for consummation), 10 when they turn into "rosy flame of fire." The rose in Siegmund's coat intensifies the symbolic value of this incident: "With this rose in my coat I dare go to Hell or anywhere."12

Although Lawrence, like many other writers and novelists, usually does not acknowledge his debt to other writers or sources of knowledge, in Sons and Lovers,13 he explicitly refers to his knowledge of Omar Khayyam's poetry. Here, Paul, the main protagonist expresses his interest in metaphysical complexity to his lover, Miriam, by giving her a copy of Omar Khayyam's poetry.14

Lawrence's next novel, The Rainbow,15 reveals how the influence of Persian poetry develops, then deepens, and gradually matures into a certain unique system of thought. It seems to me that in this novel, his interest in Persian poetry shifts from Omar Khayyam's poetry to that of Rumi and Hafiz. For example, the significance of the Phoenix image in this novel, which is a symbol of re-birth and coming into being, is closer to its significance in Persian poetry than in any other mythology.

The inner transformations of Anna and her dance to the unknown is one example of how the myth of Simurgh (Persian Phoenix) and her travels could have been used as a symbol of spiritual experiences of self-annihilation, and self-subsistence. The other is the image of the rainbow (which is the colour of Simurgh) at the end of the novel, 16 where Ursula experiences her Oneness with the whole world of Being and non-Being.

Ursula's experience here coincides with Rumi's theory of colourlessness, a theory which is developed further in his next novel, Women in Love. ¹⁷ In a metaphor, Rumi reminds us that the total addition of all the colours is white. The creation is the explosion of this primal colourlessness into individuation, separation and opposition. And then he asks, how did colour

appear from colourlessness? Do the apparent opposites really clash, or are they all different manifestation of one reality?18

Both semantic and textual evidence suggest that Rumi's poetry provides a unifying framework for the narrative of Women in Love, Lawrence's fifth novel, which is also the main focus of this paper. The title itself suggests love as its main concern, but soon we realize that which Lawrence is celebrating is not an emotional love, but a metaphysical one. His definition of love, which is a union of two separate or single selves that transcends the lovers beyond their ordinary existence, coincides with Rumi's theory of love, which is also closely connected to his theory of colourlessness, and is first suggested in "An Island," when Birkin drops some daisies on the pond. Birkin's remarks, comparing their circular movement on water to the Dervish's dance,19 explains the metaphysical significance of the whole scene, not only on the narrative plane, but also as a starting point for Lawrence's discussions.

The Whirling Dervishes usually wear white garments with wide skirts, and while listening to musical recitals of Rumi's poems, they dance in an ecstatic and circular movement. This circular movement mystically empties and 'annihilates' their spiritual heart of their egoistic desires, and extends their inner beings to the transcendental level of their existence. While whirling, they also point to the centre of the earth with the palm of one hand, and to the sky with the other, indicating that the Truth is both immanent and transcendent.

Birkin's reference to the Dervishes' dance distinctly points to Lawrence's knowledge of Rumi's theories of colourlessness and love. Therefore, it is not surprising that Lawrence's celebration of metaphysical love, as experienced by Ursula and Birkin in this novel, runs parallel to these theories, and connects the overall structure of the novel. They also support and explain the development of ideas. For example, Ursula's trance, or the "strange feeling," which consumes her while watching the daisies slowly going round, is an indication of the metaphysical connotation of Lawrence's arguments in this particular scene.20 "The daisies were scattered broadcast on the pond, tiny radiant things, like an exaltation, points of exaltation here and there. Why did they move her so strongly and mystically?"21

To Rumi, love is the most essential of all fundamental issues, because it is the force behind all movements. In Divan he says; "Save love, save love, we have no other work."22 Further, in Fihi ma fihi, he illustrates that phenomenal love is a vehicle by which the lovers, by gradually dying to their worldly desires, transcend towards their Oneness with the Absolute, until they are totally immersed in the ocean of transcendental light. In other words, in the beginning, earthly love gives rise to a multiplicity of forms, but eventually it is diverted towards the essence. 23

Throughout this novel, there is a clear dichotomy between emotional

and metaphysical love, in order to highlight the significance of Lawrence's metaphysical arguments. The emotional love, represented by the love relationship between Gerald and Gudrun is rendered insignificant, since love as such is not of a permanent nature and cannot become absolute.24 It finally ends with Gerald's death, in the cold icy snow, as "a barren tragedy, barren, barren."25 One could also pursue the love between Birkin and Gerald, which many critics have considered as homosexual attraction. This paper, however, will focus on the significance of Ursula and Birkin's metaphysical love.

Lawrence uses different metaphors and symbols to communicate inner experiences. The precise vocabulary he specifically uses when dealing with Ursula and Birkin's non-phenomenal experiences, further intensifies the metaphysical significance of each incident, illustrating that he is writing "from the depth of [his] religious experience."26 In the same manner as in Rumi's poetry, throughout this novel, Lawrence's language fluctuates between two different levels of the transcendental and the immanent. This perpetual alternation between these two different states of being is of utmost importance in relation to the inner development of the characters, since it is through these changes that finally, towards the end of the novel, both Ursula and Birkin reach the highest state of their inner fulfilment.

For instance, his description of Ursula in the beginning of novel suggests her openness to radiant inner experiences, indicating that there are some metaphysical elements at work here. Additionally, the "strange brightness of an essential flame,"27 that she always has within her, reveals her unique mystical nature (This phenomenon, of course, is not strange to those of us who are familiar with her mystical experiences in The Rainbow). The same passage also keeps the reader in suspense, signalling a prospect of significant inner transformation, even though she is not ready for it as yet, "[h]er active living was suspended, but underneath, in the darkness, something was coming to pass."28 This characteristic is further intensified by her first meeting with Birkin in her biology class. Ursula is suddenly "awakened," her face radiates the tender light of dawn. Both Ursula and Birkin are "arrested" in "stillness" and "silence."29 His presence, which is in light, "gleaming like fire, watching her, waiting for her to be aware,"30 also points to a mystical encounter between the two, an illuminating expectancy, which prepares the reader for an extraordinary result.

Furthermore, the red of the flower Birkin shows Ursula in class may refer to Khayyam's rose³¹ and suggest the fusion of dualistic forces of sensuality and spirituality, or the immanence and transcendence aspects of life. "Her absorption was strange, almost rhapsodic. Both Birkin and Ursula were suspended. The little red pistillate flowers had some strange, almost mystic-passionate attraction for her."32

In *The Forked Flame*, H. M. Daleski also observes that earthly love, or as he puts it, the "sex act," is a means by which [man and woman] transcend their separateness in a union which is greater than either."33 He calls this union, "a tangible manifestation of the Holy Ghost," or "the unifying third Person of the Trinity."34

Earthly love, Rumi says, is a vehicle. Then one should travel beyond it. This is also what Birkin, who is already familiar with this alternative knowledge, brings to Ursula's attention, when he drops the daisies on the pond; that the "root is beyond love," it is "beyond any emotional relationship."35 As he explains, it is the union between two individual selves, or two opposites, who approach one another in their free selves, without any "obligation." It is not a physical attraction, 37 Birkin says, "I don't want to see you [...] I want a woman I don't see."38

In "Question of Gravity," Gerald Doherty argues against the spiritual significance of Birkin's remarks here. Instead he sees it as a clear indication of Birkin's need for identification through senses; "for the replacement of the eye, as the organ of possessive internalizations, by the hand which, by contrast, externalizes the flesh of the other, and substantiates its propinquity by palpable touch."39 His reading, however, does not fully explain Birkin's next statement, which emphasizes the metaphysical implications of the unrevealed mysterious plane, where Birkin and Ursula should come together, or consummate, and has both immanent and transcendental connotations. As Birkin explains, because "no understanding has been reaped from that plane . . . , nothing known applies."40

This again brings us to Rumi's dualistic theory of the amalgamation of the opposites. He explains that in order for the two opposites to transcend their duality and reach the state of colourlessness, they must undergo a complete inner transformation by first dying to their desires, or negating their egocentric needs.⁴¹ Once more we see the similarity between Rumi's theory of the great upward spiral of metamorphoses, and Lawrence's inner journey. Both consider mystical quest a process at the end of which one experiences Oneness with the Absolute. It is completed in three different stages: attraction of two separate selves, or multiplicity of form; dying to one's desires, or self-annihilation; and consummation, or Oneness with the Absolute. It is explained by Rumi that in the last stage, which is also the highest stage of inner fulfilment, all oppositions disappear, dualism dissolves, and thus the subject and object become one. Birkin illustrates the process to Ursula:

I deliver myself over to the unknown, in coming to you, I am without reserves or defenses, stripped entirely into the unknown. Only there needs the pledge between us, that we will both cast off everything, cast off ourselves even, and cease to be, so that which is perfectly ourselves can take place in us.42

Additionally, there is a suggestion of an inner transformation into new way of life from Birkin, when he invites Ursula to join this inner experience: "I want love that is like sleep, like being born again, vulnerable as a baby that just comes into the world I do want to die from this life and yet it is more than life itself."43 In turn, Ursula must first "cease to be," or has to die to her desires, in order to come into being (or achieve fulfilment): "'I shall die—I shall quickly die,' said Ursula to herself, clear as if in a trance, clear, calm, and certain beyond human certainty."44

Death, Rumi explains, is the total annihilation of an individual's egoconsciousness resulting from an intense concentration of the mind in meditation.45 Accordingly, this approach to death, or nothingness, means the removal of "I," or self-determination, emptying consciousness and relating one's self to infinity, thereby enabling one to enter the next stage. Rumi advises us to "die . . . die," do not be afraid of death: 46

Did ever a grain fall into the earth that did not unfold beautifully? Do you think that the seed, which is man, would behave differently?⁴⁷

The basic point of death as consummation, Rumi explains, is that man in his self-determination or in his egocentric self, cannot experience Oneness with the Absolute, or enter the world of colourlessness. 48 Lawrence too, tells us that, "Death is a great consummation, a consummating experience."49

In this sense, death, in its metaphysical connotation, is a turning point, a development in a series of developments, and an important part of the process, or the inner journey. "Darkly, without thinking at all, she knew that she was near to death. She had travelled all her life along the line of fulfilment, and it was nearly concluded."50 As a consequence, in a transformational moment, with the metaphysical significance of her ego losing its determination and turning back to its original absolute indetermination, "[i]n a kind of spiritual trance, she yielded, she gave way, and all was dark."51

Whereas Ursula's metaphysical death was "within the ultimate darkness of her own soul,"52 her coming into being, which would be the next stage of her inner development, is luminous, and is suggested again by the particular imagery and metaphors Lawrence uses in order to demonstrate the radiance of her nature. They also point to the transcendental aspect of the whole incident. For example, if we look at the following passage, we notice the significance of this technique: "He looked at her, and wondered at the luminous delicacy of her beauty, and the wide shining of her eyes. He watched from a distance, with wonder in his heart, she seemed transfigured with light."53

Rumi explains that there is a fundamental difference between the world of multiplicity at this stage, and the same phenomenal world as it appears to a person before that person experiences metaphysical death:

Footprints but come to the ocean's shore, Therein, no trace remains.54

Similarly, in her coming into being, in the dimension of her waking reality, things from the stage of absolute indiscrimination regain their reality for Ursula. "She had the perfect candour of creation, something translucent and simple, like a radiant, shining flower that moment unfolded in primal blessedness. She was so new, so wonder-clear, so undimmed."55 She also seems unaffected by time-space limitations, "She had learned at last to be still and perfect."56

Every experience, in its metaphysical connotation, is an act of illumination, but also every act of illumination is itself only a means of illuminating the psyche and the heart in order to gain knowledge. A gradual process, of course, that leads to the final consummation or Oneness, which Rumi recognizes as existence in its pure and absolute indetermination.⁵⁷ Ursula and Birkin's marriage is an example of this process, as Birkin explains to Ursula:

In the new, superfine bliss, a peace superseding knowledge, there was no I and you, there was only the third, unrealised wonder, the wonder of existing not as oneself, but in a consummation of my being and of her being in a new One, and new, paradisal unit regained from the duality. How can I say "I love you", when I have ceased to be, and you have ceased to be, we are both caught up and transcended into a new oneness where everything is silent. because there is nothing to answer, all is perfect and at one. Speech travels between the separate parts. But in the perfect One there is perfect silence of bliss.58

Due to their inner transformations, things appear to be deprived of their self-subsistence, which connotes their experiencing a new existence in a new world: "It was the superficial unreal world of fact. Yet not quite the old world. For the peace and the bliss in their hearts was enduring."59 Consequently, their coming together is also their re-birth; "[t]his marriage with her was his resurrection and his life."60

Their final decision to leave the eternal snow, which is "the frozen centre of all,"61 and to go "somewhere,"62 seems to be the beginning of infinite mystical satisfying experiences. On the other hand, the duality, which is created between Gudrun and Gerald, and is based on darkness of passion, generates hostility and negativity. Their relationship ends by Gerald's tragic death and Gudrun's growing perplexity. Her desire to reach the peak of the mountain in order to reach consummation in snow, demonstrates the futility of her purpose, since fulfilment, Lawrence tells us, comes from the unknown, 63 it is not found on the mountaintops. Therefore, one has "to be connected to the mystery,"64 in order to experience what Rumi defines as the colourless world.65

Notes

¹ My reference here is to the poems written approximately between the years 900 and 1500. At first, our understanding of Lawrence's knowledge of these poems, especially that of Rumi (1207-1273), seems limited. But Keith Sagar, in A D. H. Lawrence: A Handbook (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1982), tells us that around 1904, Lawrence read FitzGerald's translation of Omar Khayyam's poetry ('The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám'), and gave a copy to Jessie Chamber at Christmas. The twenty volumes of The International Library of Famous Literature (Ed. Richard Garnett, 1899). which Lawrence possessed at home, could be another source. It included various poems by a number of Persian poets. This was one of the early sources used by Lawrence to enrich his knowledge. Often he and Jessie discussed and analyzed the content of these volumes (See for example, The Letters of D. H. Lawrence (Ed. James T. Boulton, 8 vol, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1979-93, pp. 4-5)). Yet the third source for Lawrence's early education and his knowledge in Persian poetry could be his uncle's librarv. Fritz Krenkow, the German Orientalist who was married to Lawrence's aunt, Ada, apparently possessed an impressive library, especially a collection of Oriental texts, and Lawrence's frequent visits to their house almost always ended with him in the library reading or translating po-

In The Romance of the Rubaiyat: Edward FitzGerald's First Edition Reprinted with Introduction and Notes (Ed. Arthur Arberry, London, Allen, 1959). Arberry tells us that Persian poetry was a known phenomenon to most nineteenth century and early twentieth century writers of Britain, such as: Blake, Keats, Rossetti, Tennyson, Fitzgerald, Hardy, Ruskin, Carlyle, Arnold (pp. 25, 29, 32-34, 36). Additionally, the American Transcendentalist, especially Emerson, whose essays on Persian poetry are highly informative, could be another source for Lawrence. Other American Transcendentalists who were influenced by Persian poetry and whose texts Lawrence studied with interest are: Whitman, Thoreau, Alcott and Melville (Christy, Arthur, The Orient in American Transcendentalism: A Study of Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott New York, Columbia UP, 1932). For a more detailed treatment the reader may consult my own study, Sufism and the Quest for Spiritual Fulfilment in D. H. Lawrence's "The Rainbow" (Göteborg, ACTA Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 2000), pp. 7-30.

For example see Rumi, Jalaluddin, Masnavi (6 Books) Ed. R. A. Nicholson, Tehran, Amir Kabir, 1982 (hereafter cited as M) Book I: 2624-27 (All translations from Rumi texts are my own).

Here, I am not considering the concept of Oneness to be exclusively Persian. Rather, its basic structure in its different stages of development is commonly practiced in several Oriental religions such as: Vedanism, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. However, what is of interest here, when comparing Lawrence's text to Persian poetry, is the amalgamation of the transcendental and the immanent, both on the semantic and lexical levels of their discourses.

In a letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell, he writes: "all souls of all things do but compose the body of God" (The Letters vol. II, 271-72: letter 854; 1 February 1915). By the same principle, in his poem, "The Gods," Lawrence explains his conviction that when we are purely ourselves, in a transcendental state of our existence, our souls experience Oneness with Absolute:

> The gods are all things, and so are we, The gods are only ourselves, as we are in our moments of pure manifestations.

(Lawrence, David Herbert, The Complete Poems Ed. and intro. Vivian De Sola Pinto et al., Penguin, 1977, p. 673).

⁴ Lawrence, David Herbert, Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious Middlesex, Penguin, 1977, p. 240.

⁵ Lawrence, David Herbert, *The White Peacock* Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1961.

⁶ Ibid., Intro., 8.

⁷ Lawrence, David Herbert, *The Trespasser* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 70-72.

⁹ Ibid., p. 101.

¹⁰ In D. H. Lawrence: The Early Philosophical Works (London, Macmillan, 1991), Michael Black writes: "One source for the idea of 'spending' with its sexual undertone may be the Rubaiyat. D. H. Lawrence read it and presented it to Jessie. The attractive profligacy of FitzGerald's rose could easily seem more appropriate to the poppy.

> Look to the blowing Rose about us 'Lo, Laughing,' she says, 'into the world I blow, At once the silken tassel of my Purse Tear, and its Treasure on the Garden throw'

The rose itself is glorified in the 'Forward,' and recurs in the philosophical writings as a symbol of the hoped-for consummation." (Black, Michael, D. H. Lawrence: The Early Philosophical Works, p. 451; note 4).

In addition to Black's references, for example, see the poems "I am Like a Rose" or "Rose of all the World," I also refer to Lawrence's idea of singleness of Self, as it comes into being, or "the quick of the Self," as it is illustrated in his essay, "Democracy." In "The American Edition of New Poems," Lawrence also connects the concept of the Perfect Rose to a work of art, in particular to true poetry, which he believes embodies "the quick of life." He then explains life as such: "Life, the ever-present, knows no finality, no finished crystallization. The perfect rose is only a running flame, emerging and flowing off, and never in any sense at rest, static, finished. Herein lies its transcendent loveliness. The hold tide of all life and all time suddenly heaves, and appears before us as an apparition, a revelation" (Lawrence, David Herbert, Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence Ed. Edward D. McDonald, London, Heinemann, 1936, p. 219). Qtd. from my own study Sufism, p. 133, note 16.

¹¹ The Trespassers p. 101.

¹² Ibid., p. 100.

¹³Lawrence, David Herbert, Sons and Lovers London, Penguin, 1989.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 308.

¹⁵ Lawrence, David Herbert, *The Rainbow* Ed. Mark Kinkead-Weeks, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

¹⁶ The Rainbow p. 458-59.

¹⁷ Lawrence, David Herbert, Women in Love Eds. D. Farmer, et al, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

18 M I: 2470ff.

¹⁹ Women in Love p. 130.

²⁰ In my reading of *Women in Love*, Birkin, as many critics agree, is the mouthpiece for Lawrence's philosophy.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 130-131.

²² Rumi, Jalauddin, Kuliat-e Divan-e Shams-e Tabrizi Tehran, Entesharat-e Nashr-e Tulu, 1989 (hereafter cited as D), 1475/15557.

²³ Rumi, Jalauddin, Fihe ma fih ed. Badi al-Zaman Foruzanfar, Tehran, Amir Kabir, 1983, p. 139.

²⁴ Women in Love p. 129.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 476.

26 Letters II 165.

27 Women in Love p. 9.

28 Idem.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

30 Ibid., p. 35.

31 See note 10.

32 Women in Love p. 38.

33 Daleski, H. M. The Forked Flame: A Study of D. H. Lawrence London, Faber and Faber, 1965, 164.

34 Ibid., p. 38.

35 Women in Love, p. 145.

36 Ibid., p. 146.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 147.

38 Idem.

39 Doherty, Gerald "A Question of Gravity: The Erotics of Identification in Women in Love", D. H. Lawrence Review 29:2 (2000), p. 34.

40 Women in Love p. 147.

41 M III: 3834-36.

42 Women in Love p. 147.

43 Ibid., p. 186.

44 Ibid., p. 192.

45 M III: 4658-63.

46 D 636/6628ff. Also see M VI: 3837-38.

47 D 911/9563.

⁴⁸ D 35486-87 and F 233/240.

49 Women in Love, p. 191.

50 Idem.

51 Women in Love p. 192.

52 Ibid., p. 194.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 194-5.

⁵⁴ As qtd. in Nurbakhsh, Javad In the Tavern of Ruin: Seven Essays on Sufism New York, Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi, 1981, p. 11.

55 Women in Love p. 368.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 315.

57 M III: 4312.

58 Women in Love p. 369.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 389.

60 Ibid., p. 369.

61 Ibid., p. 410.

62 Ibid., p. 436.

63 Ibid., p. 438.

64 Ibid., p. 479.

65 MI: 2456-60.