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## The Alternative Intoxication: The Sufist Implications of The Work of D.H. Lawrence

In an often quoted passage from one of his letters Lawrence writes: "All the time, underneath, there is something deep evolving itself out in me. And it is *hard* to express a new thing, in sincerely... primarily I am a passionately religious man, and my novels must be written from the depth of my religious experience."<sup>1</sup> Thus, throughout his work, Lawrence's "religion" has challenged critics into expounding what this might involve, since they recognize it as the key to reading his novels. Some have tried to define it in terms of the well-known European philosophers, others by means of Christianity or some mystical religions of the East. Although Lawrence was influenced by all these concepts and beliefs, yet none of them fully encompass both the sensuality and the spirituality found in his work. The philosophers often lack spirituality (since most of them are atheists), while these religions usually encourage a monastic life, withdrawal from the senses, or the pursuit of life after death. It is my suggestion, therefore, that Sufist wisdom could be considered as a prime alternative when examining the spiritual nature of Lawrence's work. Sufism is an ancient mystical religion and its idea of a loving Oneness of soul and the Absolute embodies both the immanence and the transcendental implication of spirituality which correspond with the sensual and spiritual levels of Lawrence's writing.

In Sufism, as in mysticism in general, there are two levels of perception, one referring to the level of empirical or phenomenal existence, and the other to the level beyond reason, the mystical or transcendental level. What is characteristic of Sufism is that everything is viewed simultaneously on both these levels which essentially appear to be incompatible. In *Tertium Organum*, a book Lawrence read very carefully, P. D. Ouspensky explains this point by referring to the common practice of Sufi poems which are written in the symbolic language of earthly love in order to explain mystical love. In these poems, the mystical is fused with the sensuous, or "the spirit" with "the flesh." According to Ouspensky, the reason for this amalgamation is that Sufis believe that "there is nothing in human language that can express the love between the soul and God so well as the love between man

<sup>1</sup> *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence: Vol. II (June 1913 - October 1916)*, ed. George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981) 165. This is a letter Lawrence wrote to Edward Garnett in 22 April 1914, during the writing of *Wedding Ring*.

and woman," therefore in their poetry, "they often use the symbolic language of earthly love to express their spiritual experiences." Thus their sensuous poems "have always a hidden mystical character."<sup>2</sup>

The simultaneous function of these two levels of perception, namely the sensuous and the spiritual, gives a double vision of the world. Many of Lawrence's literary texts function in a similar fashion. For instance in *The Rainbow*,<sup>3</sup> right from the start, Lawrence makes the reader aware of the complexity of his narrative. Our attention is focussed on the theme of the novel, at the same time we are made conscious of another *activity* being charged on another level. For example, if we consider Tom Brangwen's other life, a fundamental change takes place. He meets the woman of his dreams. But at the same time there is also a major transfiguration taking place inside him, which in my reading has an obvious mystical or Sufist implication. The story unfolds, concurrently, on the two different levels of empirical and mystical awareness. Tom's final glorification or spiritual transformation is the result of the combination of his fulfillment on both these levels simultaneously. In other words, the merging and the meeting of 'meaning' on both the empirical and spiritual levels are crucial to the actualization of Tom's subsequent experience of "complete liberty" or "his entry into another circle of existence" (R, 90).

To illustrate this point, let us look closer at a passage where Tom has just proposed marriage to Lydia and she has accepted:

He [Tom] turned and looked for a chair, and keeping her [Lydia] still in his arms, sat down with her close to him, to his breast. Then, for a few seconds, he went utterly to sleep, asleep and sealed in the darkest sleep, utter, extreme oblivion.

From which he came to gradually, always holding her warm and close upon him, and she as utterly silent as he, involved in the same oblivion, the fecund darkness.

He turned gradually, but newly created, as after a gestation, a new birth, in the womb of darkness. Aerial and light everything was, new as a morning, fresh and newly-begun. Like a dawn the newness and the bliss filled in. And she sat utterly still with him, as if in the same.

Then she looked up at him, the wide, young eyes blazing with light. And he bent down and kissed her on the lips. And the dawn blazed in them, their new life came to pass, it was beyond all conceiving good, it was so good, that it was almost like a passing-away, a trespass. He drew her suddenly closer to him. (45)

<sup>2</sup> P. D. Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum: The Third Canon of Thought – A Key to the Enigmas of the World*, translated from Russian, 1920 (New York: Vintage Books, 1970) 268-9.

<sup>3</sup> All references to *The Rainbow*, hereafter quoted parenthetically in the text, are from: D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, ed. Mark Kinkead-Weeks (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979).

In this passage Lawrence clearly draws our attention to the religious implications of the relationship between Tom and Lydia. In their *stillness*, a major mystical transformation presents itself in the inner-beings of these two characters which is beyond emotional experience at the phenomenal level. Nothing exists now except for their togetherness. Their stillness signifies the solitary nature of their essences in the eternal now. We see here how love by transcending itself becomes one with its object. In the transcendental of this moment, Tom's individual self is obliterated in "utter extreme oblivion" and subsequently his new spiritual self is "freshly" born in "light" and Oneness with the Absolute. Tom's spiritual transmutation indicates his experience of spiritual 'self-annihilation' or the effacement of his individual self – his mystical death – and his experiencing 'self-subsistence' or his new life in Oneness with the Absolute.

Here, I have used the terms self-annihilation and self-subsistence in their Sufi connotation in which annihilation signifies the total obliteration of a mystic's empirical consciousness and results in his/her absorption into the underlying unity of existence. Self-subsistence refers to the spiritual stage at which all things of the world that have lost their ontological solidity in the original Oneness with the Absolute, regain their reality or come into being through a spiritual waking experience allowing one to perceive all things from a new dimension.<sup>4</sup>

We also notice in this passage that Tom's and Lydia's spiritual transformation occurs in Light. Their newness and their new life in transcendental Light is an immediate experience which has a mystical significance. The moment in which they realize this Light in their consciousness, is a turning point in their spiritual life. It marks their second birth into luminous reality. In Lawrence's text light or brightness usually refer to that state of existence where one experiences spirituality or Oneness with the Ultimate, and darkness often symbolizes the sensuous state of a character's being or the world of multiplicity. This corresponds to Sufi's terminology where Light signifies the transcendental root experience of the mystic in his/her moment of spiritual illumination where (s)he experiences Reality or Oneness with the Absolute, beyond the darkness of his/her empirical or phenomenal existence.

To give another example of how Sufi conceptualization might elucidate passages or incidents in Lawrence's work, I refer to another incident in *The Rainbow* where Lawrence stresses the importance of spiritual intoxication, which is also one of the favourite images in Sufi poetry for describing the joys and ecstasies of union. In Sufi poems, wine is the symbol of that which intoxicates, where the cup may be an allusion to the wine itself or to its receptacle: the lover's body, the spirit, or existence. Spiritual intoxication which is involuntary, is the result of a powerful spiritual influx.

<sup>4</sup> For further clarification of these two concepts refer to: Toshihiko Izutsu, *Creation and the Timeless Order of Things: Essays in Islamic Mystical Philosophy* (Ashland, Oregon: White Cloud Press, 1994) 77-79.

In the episode quoted below, Ursula and Skrebensky are riding in a motorcar. Sitting close to each other, a major inward transformation takes place, as if they lose their phenomenal existence and become "intoxicated." As the result of this "intoxication," the countryside becomes a "wonderland" to Ursula. If only they could dismount into this "magic land," they would leave their "dull, customary [selves]" and become "enchanted" people.

[It] was all so magic, her cup was so full of bright wine, her eyes could only shine... The fact of his driving on meant nothing to her, she was so filled by her own bright ecstasy. She did not see him go, for she was filled with light, which was of him. Bright with an amazing light as she was, how could she miss him?

In her bedroom she threw her arms in the air in clear pain of magnificence. Oh, it was her transfiguration, she was beyond herself. She wanted to fling herself into all the hidden brightness of the air. It was there, it was there, if she could but meet it. (282-84 )

Intoxicated by the power and the exalting experience of love, Ursula undergoes a major inward transformation. She becomes enchanted and leaves her customary self. Her spirit (cup) is so full of love (bright wine) that she is beyond the physical world surrounding her, as though her phenomenal existence had disappeared and her inner-being transformed into spiritual Light. Light has enveloped her being or her existence in such a way that nothing else exists for her except her bright ecstasy. Notice here, as in the previous incident, Ursula, like all the other characters in Lawrence's novels, experiences her inward transformation in Light. In fact here Ursula, through her inner transmutation, becomes a being of Light herself.

At first glance, this incident could be conceived as an ordinary episode of two lovers enjoying a ride in a motorcar, however the precise words which are used here, such as "intoxication," "brightness," "bright ecstasy," "light," "magnificence," "leaving her customary self," "transfiguration," and so on, can only suggest that, although initially Ursula is moved by the power of her love for Skrebensky, her final experience is of another nature which has more depth and significance than might be understood on first reading. In other words, her experience is of a mystical nature and is not merely an ordinary emotional yearning for Skrebensky. What is significant in Lawrence's text is that he shifts from one level of perception to another in an particularly frictionless manner, subtly suggesting that these two contrasting levels of existence which are seemingly paradoxical are in fact interchangeable. Similarly this is the precise fashion in which Sufi poetry amalgamates sensuality with spirituality. Moreover, it is also important to consider the significance of the phrase "clear pain of magnificence" in this passage, which indicates the dualistic elements present both in Lawrence's and in Sufi texts. They usually occur at the most crucial moments of a char-

acter's spiritual expansion. However, upon the mystic's complete spiritual transformation, this duality resolves itself into his/her Oneness with the Absolute Reality.

It is difficult to say to what extent Lawrence was familiar with Sufism and Persian poetry. But the records show that Lawrence's German Orientalist uncle, Krenkow translated into German some of Biruni's (a Persian scientist, philosopher) books on mineralogy, light, astronomy, and religion. E.C. Sachau, a good friend of Krenkow was also a translator of Sufi texts. Lawrence visited his uncle frequently, and sometimes stayed a week. The possibility cannot be denied, therefore, of Lawrence coming into contact with Sufi wisdom through his uncle's work, and also of having the opportunity of using his uncle's library.<sup>5</sup> It seems as though Lawrence knew of Sufism more indirectly as well. For example we know that in December 1905 Lawrence read Emerson's *Essays* and Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.<sup>6</sup> He was therefore familiar with the literature of the American Transcendentalists, who were highly influenced by mystical Sufi knowledge,<sup>7</sup> before writing *The Sisters* which was eventually turned into the two novels *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. In the same year he also gave a volume of Omar Khayyam's poems as a present to Jessie Chambers.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, we know that he was well read in European, especially German philosophy. By the end of the same year, namely 1905, he had already read books written by Hegel, Goethe, and Nietzsche whose works were clearly influenced by Sufi literature.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For a comprehensive study of Fritz Krenkow influence on Lawrence's early intellectual growth, refer to Zeinab Abdul-Mohsen Ahmed Shirazi, *Eastern Themes in the Fiction of D. H. Lawrence*, diss., (Exter University, October 87).

<sup>6</sup> All references to Lawrence's reading are taken from *A. D. H. Lawrence Handbook*, ed. Keith Sagar (Manchester, Great Britain: Manchester University Press, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> In "The Rose Garden of the World: Near East Imagery in the Poetry of Walt Whitman," *Walt Whitman Review* Summer, 5.1 (1987): 12-20, Arthur L. Ford, discusses Near and Middle Eastern, particularly Sufi influence on Emerson and Walt Whitman. He writes that Whitman's interest in Sufism and Sufi poetry began in the early years of *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman owned a copy of W. R. Alger's *The Poetry of the East* (1856) which has a lengthy introduction on Sufi poetry by Emerson. Whitman read this book "over and over" to himself, and read it to hospital groups during part of the Civil War. Ford believes that Whitman undoubtedly "also read Emerson's article, 'Persian Poetry' in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1858." In this article Emerson introduces Sufi poetry to his readers by emphasizing its seven masters. Since Lawrence himself read extensively, it is possible that he also read Alger's book on Persian poetry or/and Emerson's article on Sufism.

<sup>8</sup> Omar Khayyam, was a twelfth century Persian mathematician, physician, astronomer and a free-thinker philosopher, who also wrote a number of quatrains, 'rubais' which were translated into English by F. G. FitzGerald. Although, by many, Khayyam is not considered as one of the Sufi poets, there are times when his poems reveal some of the Sufi spiritual wisdom.

<sup>9</sup> In *The Triumph Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalaluddin Rumi* (London: Fine Books Ltd, 1978) 388-393, Annemarie Schimmel writes that Persian poetry was first translated into German in early 19th century. It highly influenced the German philosophers of that century. They adopted its form, ghazal, and were affected by its meaning. Hafez's *Divan* inspired Goethe to write *West-östlicher Divan*. But he was critical of what he called Rumi's pantheistic trend. Instead Hegel was deeply influenced by Rumi whom he called 'the excellent Rumi'. Rumi seemed to be a perfect model for his pantheistic thoughts and his dialectics. Initially, it was mainly through Hegel that Rumi became a favourite with European philosophers, and with literary and religious scholars.

However, to my knowledge, the only time Lawrence refers to Sufism directly is in *Women in Love*,<sup>10</sup> in a chapter called "An Island," where Ursula and Birkin are standing by a pond and are discussing the concepts of love and individuality. Birkin picks some daisies and drops them into the pond. The daisies turn slowly round. To him, their movement resembles "a slow Dervish dance." He watches them with "bright absolved eyes" (130). This is a direct reference to the Whirling Dervishes who are influenced mainly by Rumi's poems. These Dervishes, who usually wear white garments with wide skirts, dance in an ecstatic and circular movement. This circular movement mystically empties and 'annihilates' their beings or their spiritual 'hearts' of all of their egoistic desires, and extends their inner-beings to the transcendental level beyond their phenomenal existence. While whirling, they also point to the centre of earth with the palm of one hand, and to the sky with the other, indicating that the Truth is both immanent and transcendent.

Ursula watching the daisies slowly going round, becomes spiritually entranced. "A strange feeling possessed her, as if something were taking place. But it was all intangible. And some sort of control was being put on her. She could not know... The daisies were scattered broad-cast on the pond, tiny radiant things, like an exaltation, points of exaltation here and there. Why did they move her so strongly and mystically?" (130-31). A strong mystical feeling possesses Ursula and she experiences what a Dervish experiences, while dancing – namely the feeling of exaltation or transportation to the transcendental level of existence.

Here, as in many other incidents in Lawrence's fictional work, we become aware that his text is informed by certain kind of mysticism which promotes both sensuality and spirituality. It is my contention that in order to fully appreciate his writing, one has to be aware of the prevailing meanings of sensuality and spirituality on both these empirical and transcendental levels simultaneously. Therefore, as I have tried briefly to demonstrate here, the ideas of Sufism can be utilized both as an intellectual and spiritual guide in order to illuminate and explain some of the essential mystical dimensions of Lawrence's literary work.

<sup>10</sup> All references to *Women in Love*, hereafter quoted parenthetically in the text, are from: D.H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, eds. David Farmer et al (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979).

GEORGETA VANCEA

## Schreiben Frauen anders? Über die geschlechterbewußte Perspektive

Die Perspektivierung scheint in unserer Zeit eine immer größere Rolle zu spielen, die Perspektive selbst wird zu einem wichtigen Kriterium und beliebten Thema. Man wird sich immer mehr bewußt, daß nicht nur die Ereignisse oder Verhältnisse an sich bedeutungsvoll sind, sondern vor allem die Art und Weise, wie wir sie auffassen, der Gesichtswinkel, aus dem wir die Dinge betrachten. Der sinnlichen, mentalen und emotionalen Wahrnehmung und Bearbeitung der Erfahrungen wird vor allem in den Geisteswissenschaften erhöhte Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt. Das wirkt wie eine erfrischende Provokation an die sogenannten objektiven Wissenschaften, deren zementierte Auffassungen sich bisweilen als nur standpunktgebundene Gesichtswinkel erwiesen haben. In der Literatur und der dazugehörigen Wissenschaft ist in letzter Zeit zu der thematischen, ästhetischen, geistesgeschichtlichen und biographisch-kontextuellen Betrachtungsweise auch die Geschlechterperspektive hinzugetreten. Sie wird von den seit den 70er Jahren aufblühenden *Women's / Gender Studies* und der feministischen Literaturwissenschaft nicht nur bewußt einbezogen, sondern auch hervorgehoben und problematisiert, indem die Geschlechtszugehörigkeit als konstitutive Bedingung von Literatur und als Analyse-kategorie betrachtet wird. Mit kultur- und sprachkritischen Absichten werden Schreiben / Lektüre und Geschlecht, weibliche Ästhetik und weibliches Schreiben („*écriture féminine*“), feministische Lektüre und feministische Poetik zu Devisen herangezogen, um auf die Andersartigkeit der weiblichen Wahrnehmung aufmerksam zu machen, um dem Recht des „anderen Geschlechtes“ auf die eigene, spezifische Sicht, auf Kreativität und Genialität, Gewicht zu verleihen. Als Beispiele unlängst erschienener geschlechterorientierter Werke in deutscher Sprache seien folgende genannt: *Die schöne Leiche. Weibliche Todesbilder in der Moderne* hrsg. von Elisabeth Bronfen, *Die Schönste im ganzen Land. Frauengeschichten* von Gabriele Wohmann (1995), *Die Phantasie ist eine Frau. Sechszwanzig Originalerzählungen von Frauen* hrsg. von Ingeborg Mues (1998), und im Bereich der Literaturwissenschaft: *Dialektik und Geschlecht: Feministische Schreibpraxis in der Gegenwartsliteratur* von Sabine Wilke (1996), *Literarische Intimität. Subjekt-konstitution und Erzählstruktur in autobiographischen Texten von Frauen* von Karin Tebben (1997), *Einführung in die feministische Literaturwissenschaft* von Jutta Osinski (1998) und als eine Art Pendant zu Ruth Klügers *Frauen lesen anders* (1996) Marcel Reich-Ranickis Anthologie *Frauen dichten anders. Gedichte von Frauen mit Interpretationen* (1998).