

THE CONCEPT OF “LOVE” ACCORDING TO RUMI AND SHAKESPEARE:

A comparative study of *Mathnawi* and *Antony and Cleopatra*

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ABSTRACT

The main motif behind most of Shakespeare’s tragedies is the concept of Love. This concept may also be seen as the major theme in many of the stories of Rumi’s *Mathnawi* and *Dīvân-e Shams*. The fate of this love is usually the death of the lovers by the end of the story. This common theme, along with the common ending of such stories, is the main topic of this article. In this work, the definitions of love are briefly provided according to Sufism and Rumi’s ideas, and then 11 common items with respect to the concept of love are studied in the works of these two great literary figures. The data for this research have been collected based on Shakespeare’s tragedies, and Rumi’s verses, and the concept of love has been studied in two levels of Form and content.

The idea of love forms the basis of Shakespeare’s tragedies, and leads to the death of the lovers. Therefore, death is also studied within this framework along with love. The ultimate goal of this article is to provide an analysis of the common features of love in Shakespeare’s work from the eye of an oriental, Persian-speaking reader, who is more acquainted with Rumi’s works. Among Shakespeare’s tragedies, *Antony and Cleopatra* has been chosen as the main source, however, the other great tragedies of his have not been neglected.

KEY WORDS

Rumi, Shakespeare, love, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Mathnawi*.

Introduction: Love and its meaning among the Sufis

Defining love enjoys a long history with the Sufis. ‘Ayn-ul-quzât-e Hamedânî speaks of it as an intense emotional experience so far beyond definition and description that no wording can help non-lovers reach a perception of it (Hâmedanî, 125). Jâhiz (d. 255 Hijra), the Arab literary figure, was the first to use the word muhabbat (meaning "affection") to define love, as the relationship between God and His servant. Later, Abul-Hassan Deylamî (d. 391 Hijra) used love and affection in the same meaning. In his work *Kîmîyâ-ye Sa'âdat* (The Elixir of Prosperity), Qazzâlî uses "friendship" instead of "affection," and states that "friendship is the natural tendency toward what is nice. If the tendency is strong, it is called love." (Qazzâlî) All of Sheikh Ahmad Qazzâlî’s *Sawâneh* also concerns love: "The beginning of love is so that the lover wants the beloved all for himself; he is in fact in love with

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himself with the beloved acting as a go-between, even if he does not know that he tends to use the beloved in his own favor... at the least radiation of the perfection of love, he wants himself for his beloved's sake, and is willing to sacrifice his life for his beloved. That is what true love is. The rest is all whims and lust." (Qazzâlî) Love is "like a pyramid; on top is the sense and realized beauty of love, and the other faces are the lover, the beloved and love itself." (Purnâmdarian) Love makes the lover ready for any form of sacrifice for his beloved, far beyond any pleasure or need for satisfaction. Among all the various, and at times contradictory, definitions given for love, there is one point in common: no language, explanation or expression would meet love's meaning. "Hence, most definitions existing for love describe the effects of love and affection and the functions of lovers, and fail to touch on the real nature and entity of love." (ibid).

All of Rumi's Mathnavi and Dîvân-e Shams are "his efforts to explain and elaborate on love, a love that cut him away from ordinary life and transformed him into a poet whose words are an endless interpretation of this divine mystery" (Schimmel) – the concept he admits is like "a donkey stuck in mud" and no pen can muster the wording to describe it. More important than the definition of love, as Rumi sees it, is the exasperating experience of love:

Someone asked: "What is love"?

I said: "Do not ask of such concepts.

You will understand when you become like me

When it invites you to its feast". (Dîvân-e Shams, 2733, our translation)

It is like an entity apart from human love, and it sits and watches and experiences humans – an experience, however, far different from any other.

Earthly Love, Divine Love

Qazals (sonnets) form the most significant way of expressing love in Persian literature. "Not only does the word qazal itself convey the romantic contexts and themes in poetry, but it also depicts a certain form used for poems on love." (Purnâmdârîân) Considering the type of love presented in qazals, they can be categorized into two groups – romantic and mystical.

As it was already mentioned, Qazzâlî has defined affection as the tendency toward "what is nice," which may be physical objects or intellectual items. From Qazzâlî's point of view, mystic knowledge – based mostly on intuition – is what man distinguishes "nice" from "not nice," and is thus preferred to affection. In the three-face pyramid of love – consisting of the lover, the beloved and love – the beloved, referred to be the poet using second-person or third-person pronouns, is the main distinctive point between mystical and romantic *qazals*. In romantic sonnets, the beloved, male or female, is a worldly existence, and despite the distance there may be between him/her and the poet, the beloved can be somehow reached, whereas in mystical sonnets, "the beloved has infinite knowledge and power, and controls not only the whole existence of the lover, but even the whole universe. He influences all Creation, and the entire universe is dependent upon Him. The lover-beloved

relationship is one of the Creator-servant kind, void of any form of lust or physical aspect. Yet, the mystic finds himself indescribably in love with Him, a mere drop compared to His perfection, beauty and power, and his only wish is to meet his eternal, heavenly beloved." (ibid) Due to the common vocabulary used in the types of qazals mentioned above, there are many similarities between them, so that many romantic *qazals* may also be regarded as mystical, for we use the same wording to describe the beauty of the beloved, the feelings of the lover and the qualities of love at mystical levels that we do for worldly experiences and the knowledge acquired by it. When language, with all its lexical combinations, functions and grammatical rules, is applied to the expression of experiences that are not common and general for users of the language to distinguish the similar meanings, things turn symbolic and rhetoric, no matter how the same it may look. Thus, the distinctive tool to make mystical sonnets from romantic lies not in language as an indicator over which certain rules govern, but the reader of the poem.

It is noteworthy that in mysticism, worldly love and loving "another" – allegorical love – is not disapproved of; in fact, in some cases, it can help enhance one's familiarity with the idea of love, and in higher levels, become a guide toward cutting away from worldly attachments and reaching true love and the immortal beloved.

"To the rules of love, it makes no difference whether the beloved is visible or not... paralleling love to visible creatures make the emotion spiritual, deeper and more delicate, even ethereal; it is elevated from the animal-physical level and finds such vigor that the tradition-obedient worshipper cannot even fathom." (Ritter 1374/1995:76). The relative sameness existing in worldly and divine love experiences helps mystics convey the feelings of true love in a language comprehensible to all. In Rumi's works, Šams-e Tabrīzī is the most evident example of expressing a divine love in an earthly form. Leili and Majnun, Mahmūd and Ayâz, etc, are all cases where the most elevated of mystical concepts are illustrated through earthly loves, human characters and a language usable for any reader. In such stories, it is the audience's background understanding of worldly love that serves to help him learn mystical concepts and also help the poet get his message through.

Among literary figures around the world, Shakespeare is the closest to Rumi in ideas and concepts of love. In several of his prominent tragedies (Romeo and Juliet, Antony and Cleopatra, Othello, etc.), Shakespeare presents love as an abstract entity and a factor in perfecting his characters, which conveys an intimate correlation with the Eastern mystics' idea of love.

Lings (1998:193-4) in his *The Sacred Art of Shakespeare* compares Shakespeare's works belonging to the late Elizabethan time, with Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and states that:

"Shakespeare unlike Milton, had no illusions about his scope of reason. He knew that since reason is limited to this world it is powerless to "justify the way of God" Milton may have known this in theory, but in practice he was very much a son of the Renaissance, very deeply under the spell of humanism. *Paradise Lost*

cannot be called an intellectual poem. Milton portrays the next world by sheer force of human imagination. His God the Father, like Michelangelo's, is fabricated in the image of man; and the purely logical arguments that he put into the mouth of God to justify His ways inevitably fail to convince us. Now Shakespeare also seeks to justify the ways of God to man. That is, beyond doubt, the essence of his purpose in writing. But his justification is on an intellectual plane, where alone it is possible; and this brings us back to the theme of his plays, for the intellect is none other than the lost faculty of vision that symbolized by the Holy Grail and by the Elixir of Life".

A love which, like those depicted in Rumi's work, "is a symbol of God's Great Beauty, and hence can convey divine beauty into the mind... in fact, any form of love deserving to be labeled as love always includes the element of worship. Love always has a dual aspect to it. The beloved is loved for its own sake; more important than that, it is loved because of God, like whom man has been created. This is a love that ends with death, though Shakespeare processes it with more reason, whereas Rumi adds a touch of charisma and vigor when writing his poetry. As we have already mentioned, the definition of love falls into a great deal of dispute when it comes to the question of wording, and that is what makes a comparative study of Rumi and Shakespeare's poetry concerning the issue of love quite difficult. Instead of searching for a definition for love, perhaps we had better, as Rumi also admits:

This speech was not explained,

Express the repeated (Tarji')

Talk about the benefits of love, and head towards the consequences (Tarji'ât, 41, our translation)

base our research upon the consequences of such an abstract experience in man, and make that our starting point. Among Shakespeare's works concerned with the core meaning of love, Antony and Cleopatra, also chronologically later than other plays of his, is of more significance. In this article, instead of dealing with various definitions of love in different works of literature, we will consider 11 assumptions significant to processing the concept of love in both Rumi and Shakespeare's work and also applicable to a comparison of their poetry.

1. Failure to Comprehend Love, and the Incompetence of Words in Conveying What It Means

Rumi and other Sufis agree on the issue that love is impossible to comprehend and to describe verbally:

This is not my speech, it is love's,

In this issue, I am one of the ignorant (Dīvân-e Shams, 1520, our translation)

"Language is something of this world, and whatever there is in this world is unable to get through to the other... language lacks the capacity to reveal secrets... where the heart is heaven, language is hell, and fails to express the truth" (Fotuhi 1385:343). Rumi calls himself an unknowing, claiming that it

was love that made him write these verses. He writes for love without knowing anything about love:

Like a pen between the fingers of love;

Selfless, forced to move about

On rolls and rolls of paper,

Unaware of what I write (Dīvâne Shams, 1487, Trans. By Dashti, p. 220)

Language is not alone in its failure toward solving the mysteries of love; a true amazement, love even washes away thoughts and intellect:

A (mystical) bewilderment is needed to sweep (such) thought away: bewilderment devours (all) thought and recollection.

Like Rumi, Shakespeare has also pointed out, on various occasions, the incapability of language in telling the truth about love. An interesting point of similarity between them lies in the initial verses of the *Mathnavi* and the first dialogs in *Antony and Cleopatra*, both conveying how inefficient language is in paying homage to the meaning of love:

CLEOPATRA: *If it be love indeed, tell me how much.*

MARK ANTONY: *There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd.*

CLEOPATRA: *I'll set a bourn how far to be beloved.*

MARK ANTONY: *Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth.*
(Act 1, scene 1)

Rumi conveys the same notion in the first part of the *Mathnavi*:

whatsoever I say in exposition explanation of love, when

I come to Love (itself) I am ashamed of that (explanation)

Although the commentary of the tongue makes (all) clear, yet tongueless love is clear.

Whilst the pen was making haste in writing, it split upon itself as soon as it came to Love. In expounding it (Love), the intellect lay down (helplessly) like an ass in the mire: it was Love (alone) that uttered the explanation of love and loverhood. (Mathnavi I:112–115)

Rumi believes reason trying to explain love is as futile as "a donkey stuck in mud," and Shakespeare also calls a love measurable and limitable with language and speech quite poor; he states that the limit of love cannot be determined using language, and even abiding to lingual rules is pure insanity:

CLEOPATRA: *... Riotous madness, To be entangled with those mouth-made vows, Which break themselves in swearing!* (Act 1, scene 3)

There is even a difference between how the tongue defines it and how the heart and soul do:

MARK ANTONY: *...Spoke scantily of me: when perforce he could not But pay me terms of honor, cold and sickly...* (Act 3, scene 4)

Love belongs in human hearts and souls, and as the play points out how weak the spoken treaties are, and how distant the definitions made by language are from that made by the heart and soul, therefore, the main place for love is a safe place such as heart, rather than weak place, such as tongue.

2. Lovers Are Ethereal and Beyond-the-worldly

In mystical love, the lover seems quite ethereal. Even though in some poems the nature of love seems similar in virtual and mystical forms of love, and there also appear to be similarities among worldly and eternal beloveds, the earthly beloved – the symbol of God, the eternal beloved in mystical poems, in fact – also displays ultra-worldly qualities. In Rumi’s poetry, the beloved (mostly meant Shams Tabrīzī) has a divine and ethereal appearance, but in human shape. “The profound love of Rumi towards Shams, who resembles God on the earth, draws Rumi to such a mental and emotional ecstasy and tumult, which is not familiar to those mystics who have never experienced their main beloved in the shape of a human being besides them. This rare experience, places Rumi in a spiritual situation which is unique to him” (Purnâmdarian:103). His poems have most been created during such spiritual conditions. He “does not versify other people’s experiences, neither provides us with his own wisdom or knowledge, but expresses his internal tumults and spontaneous feelings” (Fotuhi 1385: 345)

It is also noticed that the characters of *Antony and Cleopatra* (especially the beloved: Cleopatra), also displays ultra-worldly qualities. In the play, Cleopatra has an ethereal appearance rather than a worldly one.

Lings (1998:140) believes that: "There is also a cosmic, “collective” quality about Cleopatra that bursts out beyond the bounds that limit the sphere of an ordinary single human individual, so that she is in some respects more a macrocosm than a virtual in other kings and queens is a actualized in Cleopatra to an outstanding degree, With her it is not merely a question of function. We are made to feel that her very psychic substance is macrocosmic".

As Agrippa and Enobarbus refer to her as a “Royal Wench”, and a “goddess of love” respectively. There are some other descriptions of her, which denote her ultra-worldly features:

DOMITIUS ENOBARBUS: *Never; he will not:*

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale

Her infinite variety: other women cloy

The appetites they feed: but she makes hungry

Where most she satisfies; for vilest things

Become themselves in her: that the holy priests Bless her when she is riggish.

(Act 2, Scene 2)

In these sentences, Enobarbus gives Cleopatra a divine nature. In his eyes, she has the ability to make the kings and the Caesars do whatever she wishes:

AGRIPPA: *Royal wench!*

She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed: He plough'd her, and she cropp'd. (Act 2, scene2)

She is a collection of contradictions, and contradictory entities make her more attractive and add to her grace:

MARK ANTONY: *Fie, wrangling queen!*

Whom every thing becomes, to chide, to laugh,

To weep; whose every passion fully strives

To make itself, in thee, fair and admired! (Act 1, scene 1)

Also Rumi in his *Dīvân-e Shams*, describes Shams Tabrîzî as a collection of contradictions, in the form of an absolutely complete human:

The shadow of kindness has got together with the sun of wisdom,

It is from the glory of his love that this collection of contradictions has been possible (Dīvâne Shams, 131, our translation)

And it is the perfection of existent love that justifies such contrasts, like Cleopatra, whose opposite features seem beautiful in her existence. Like a goddess in control of her own created world of nature, she can even lure and catch the fish out of the Nile. A Queen self-aware of her attributes:

ALEXAS: *Good majesty,*

Herod of Jewry dare not look upon you

But when you are well pleased.

CLEOPATRA: *That Herod's head*

I'll have: but how, when Antony is gone

Through whom I might command it? (Act 3, scene 3)

In spite of her awareness of her half-goddess-half-human character, she seeks out Antony as her lost half, attempting to complete and eternalize herself through finding him.

It is noticed that Antony can also display some ultra-human characteristics, although he is more earthly in comparison with Cleopatra (As he doubts Cleopatra's fidelity, leaves her, and marries Octavia). Agrippa describes him this way:

AGRIPPA: *A rarer spirit never*

Did steer humanity: but you, gods, will give us

Some faults to make us men. Caesar is touch'd. (Act 5, scene 1)

As a matter of fact, Antony's earthly qualities are bestowed to him by the gods, while he was able to share nature with them. Cleopatra is aware of this:

CLEOPATRA: *... nature wants stuff*

To vie strange forms with fancy; yet, to imagine

And Antony, were nature's piece 'gainst fancy,

Condemning shadows quite. (Act 5, scene 2)

The Characters of Antony and Cleopatra have ultra-earthly and ultra-human manifestations, which are reminiscent of the divine and eternal lover in Rumi's poetry.

Shams-e Tabrîzî is frequently referred to in the *Dīvân-e Shams* as "the king of the world." Antony and Cleopatra also have similar titles (Cleopatra is the Queen of Egypt and Antony is one of the world's greatest commanders). Eros calls Antony a great leader, and Agrippa describes him as a great king. Cleopatra also dreams of being a unique empress, a quality even Caesar admits to at the end of the play, telling her that she "had royal character." (Act 2)

Common Pictures: The Sun, the Moon, Stars, Jewels

Another point Rumi and Shakespeare have in common is using metaphors like the sun, the moon, the stars and jewels. Rumi refers to the sun as Shams-e Tabrīzī's equivalent.

To the shadows and the sun of Shams-e Tabrīzī,

Who is a loyal sun, without respect to time or place. (Dīvân-e Shams, 948, our translation)

"This is the most comprehensive and most appropriate symbol of love. At times, Rumi's descriptions of love and his prayers to this sun of love reach such a pinnacle that it seems to cut through the heavens." (Schimmel)

In *Antony and Cleopatra* we also notice that they are compared with the sun, especially after Antony's suicide:

CLEOPATRA: *His face was as the heavens; and therein stuck*

A sun and moon, which kept their course, and

Lighted The little O, the earth. (Act 2, scene 2)

As it is seen above, Antony and Cleopatra also refer to each other as "the moon", which is also very similar of Rumi's imagery. Moon, in Rumi's poetry, represents God, His saints, and His manifestations:

The body is earth; and when God gave it a spark (of his Light) it became adept, like themoon, in taking possession of the world.

(*Mathnavi* IV:3491)

Or:

Thou becomest without (any) share in that great light; thou art window-shut to the bounteous moon.(*Mathnavi* II:2829)

Another common in Rumi and Shakespeare's poetry in Antony and Cleopatra, is their comparison with "star" and "pearl":

MARK ANTONY: *...To this great fairy I'll commend thy acts,*

Make her thanks bless thee.

[To CLEOPATRA.]

O thou day of the world (Act 4, scene 8)

In Rumi's poetry, "the light shed by the star in the sky to lead the travelers, reminds him of the stars of the sky of intellect (Tâjeddīnī, 534). "Pearl" is also a symbol for the complete human beings, along with the sun, the moon and the stars:

(If) a drop of water gain the favour of God, it becomes a pearl and bears away the palm from gold. (*Mathnavi* IV:3490)

This is a symbol also used by Shakespeare in *Antony and Cleopatra*, when Antony is referred to, on two occasions, as a "unique gem."

3. Criticizing Reason, Canonizing Love

Reason and intellect are the main point of difference between human beings and animals. According to Qazzâlī: "The sixth sense is something in the heart which is called reason, light, or whatever you may wish. It is something based on which humans are distinguished from animals" (Qazzâlī, 572). In Rumi's ideas, there are two types of reason. Nicholson names them as --- ('Aql-e mamduh/ 'Aql-e ma'âd) and ---- ('Aql-e mazmum/ 'Aql-e ma'âš). Schimmel names them as 'Aql-e joz'ī and 'Aql-e kollī respectively. 'Aql-e joz'ī is

human's leader in his earthly activities. It may engage him in the inferior worldly activities and "make (his) books entirely black" (*Mathnavi* III:2531). In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Caesar is a clear symbol of intellect. Within all the actions and dialogues of the play, he is handling his worldly activities, in the hopes of gaining more wealth and power. He loves power because of its own sake, as his power lets him remain the Caesar. Even when two kings out of the three great kings of the world (Pompey and Antony) are drinking excessively, he prefers to follow his intellect. In Act 2, scene 7, Caesar prefers to abstain from everything for four days rather than drinking too much in one, single day.

This is the intellect with which the world is defined to him, a world which, according to Cleopatra, belongs to Caesar:

CLEOPATRA: *And may, through all the world: 'tis yours;* (Act 5, scene 2)

However, in spite of all his power, Cleopatra regards him as an "ass Unpoliced". (Act 5, scene 2)

The basic challenge between Antony and Caesar from the beginning (when Antony refuses to accept Caesar's messenger and makes fun of Rome) up to the pick of their clash (when Antony leaves Octavia, Caesar's sister, in favor of Cleopatra), takes its roots to the inner natures of these two people: Antony's spiritual nature, as opposed to Caesar's intellectual, earthly one. All during the play, Antony seeks only one objective: Reaching his beloved and loving her. The passion which delves inside him is clearly in contrast with Caesar's intellect.

One of the significant dualities in *Antony and Cleopatra* is the Egypt-Rome – or East-West – duality.

From the beginning of the play, Philo notes this contrast:

PHILO: ... *The triple pillar of the world transform'd Into a strumpet's fool: behold and see.* (Act 1, scene 1)

We know that "Outwardly Rome stands for duty, sobriety and mortality in general; it also stands for reason, and the dialogue abounds in powerful arguments why Antony should leave Egypt altogether Egypt which spells neglect of duty, lack of sobriety, lack of moral principles and also the vanity of unreason"(Lings, 1998: 138). The intellectual characters of the play, who keep accusing Antony of Carelessness, are mostly Roman; Caesar as a clear example. Cleopatra is the symbol of Egypt, and Antony is something in between the two worlds – he is like a plant with roots in the earth (his Roman origins) and his stem reaching for the sky (toward Egypt; he even sometimes uses "Egypt" to refer to Cleopatra). But why does Shakespeare so clearly give Egypt the lion's share?

Lings (ibid, 139) notes that: "One of the first things that comes to mind is the symbolism of East and West which correspond to Heaven and Earth; and it is certainly not Rome that stands at the celestial point of the compass. Rome is this world, and nothing but this world-a down –to-earth well being... In other words the Roman Empire is a mere stretch of land. All that Rome stands for is

that aspect of man wherein he merely has the virtue of being and animal rather than a vegetable or a mineral. But the noblest aspect of life is love that is felt between two perfectly matched lovers".

As opposed to the Roman ethics and intellect, there is Egypt, with all the spirituality of its own, a spirituality which is referred to as "Vices" by the Romans of the play.

Conversely, the "vices" of Egypt amount to a breaking down of the barriers of human limitations. In Shakespeare's other representations of "the pearl of great price," the divine Qualities of the Spirit are symbolized by outstanding human virtues. But in this play the stress is on the Spirit's incomparability, the lack of any common measure between this world and the next; and as a symbol of the celestial, it is the function of Egypt to convey to us something of the next World's elusive mysteriousness that passes human comprehension, its infinite riches, its marvelous variety, and its boundless freedom. Everything that Egypt stands for is personified by Cleopatra (Lings, 1998: 139), And the Egyptian queen is described "In the habiliments of the goddess Isis" (Act 3, scene 6).

In Antony and Cleopatra, the East symbolizes a spiritual world. The East vs. West contrasts in Rumi's work is much like those of Shakespeare's: "By the East, Rumi implies the dawn of the truth, and by the West, he refers to the down going of the truth... East and West are based upon senses which are the origins of light and darkness." (Tâjdîni, 253)

Sense-perceptions are possessed by Easterner and Westerner, (but) the function of sight belongs to the ocular sense (alone). (Mathnavi IV:2018)

The eastern person represents the rising place of the sun of intellect, as opposed to the western person, who stands further from this light (Akbarâbâdî, 91). By Intellect, it is meant the MAJOR intellect, which leads the human towards his God. In Mathnawi we may also read that Shams (the sun) is the greatest representative of the east:

If thou art an Alexander, come to the Sun's rising-place: after that, wheresoever thou goest, thou art possessed of goodly splendor.

After that, wheresoever thou goest, 'twill become the place of sunrise: (all) the places of sunrise will be in love with thy place of sunset. (Mathnavi II:45-6)

An interesting point in Antony and Cleopatra which resembles this symbolism of intellectual west and mystical east, is the time when Antony leaves Cleopatra (Act 2), and turns towards the earthly world. With this shift, his nature becomes the same as Caesar's, and they reach a peace agreement, which paves the way for their victory against Pompey.

It is in such a situation that the "soothsayer" of the play asks Antony to do away with the Caesar (the material world), and head towards Egypt (where Antony's soul longs for) (Act 2, scene 3). His reason for telling so is quite mental, he says:

Soothsayer: *I see it in My motion, have it not in my tongue (Act 2, scene 3)*

In this struggle, the angel of Antony finally loses to Caesar. It is the story in which Antony loses his life as he does act upon the soothsayer's advice. Naturally, in a struggle which takes place in the material world, the intellect of Caesar would work better.

4. Mystical Poverty and Avoiding Worldly Pleasures

The world and its earthly enjoyments tie up the Sâlik's (the seeker for truth) feet and prevent his advancement towards perfection. Although Rumi does not prescribe a total disconnection from the world, he praises those who have not been trapped in the earthly pleasures. In his idea, the real mystic lover should abandon the world through self-refinement, and get totally free from it. This is the stage which is referred to as faqr (poverty) in the Sufi literature, and is greatly favored by Rumi. However, it should be noted that poverty does not mean a life in misery, but it is a feeling through which the human finds himself totally poor in the presence of his God, as it is also noted in the Qorân that "You (creatures) are poor before your God, and He is rich and kind instead" (Chapter 35, verse 15). So poverty in Rumi's idea means trusting oneself totally to God, and sacrifice whatever he has in favor of God's will.

Criticizing the world and its pleasures is a major theme in the works of Shakespeare as well. For example, in *King Lear*, Britain as a symbol of the world is no longer the home to the people, but it is a banishment place and those who seek liberty, should leave it:

KING LEAR: ... *Thou must be patient; we came crying hither:*

Thou know'st, the first time that we smell the air,

We wawl and cry. I will preach to thee: mark. (Act 4, scene 6)

In another part of the play, Lear summarizes the earthly life and death as follows:

KING LEAR: ... *and we'll wear out,*

In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones,

That ebb and flow by the moon.

And the time of this "ebb and flow" is perhaps the time of death, when the captivity in the great prison (of the world) is over.

Such rejections of all the worldly items of life also exist in *Hamlet*. "To be or not to be" is Hamlet's main concern, and in the end, after a great deal of ups and downs, it is through death and inexistence that he is cleansed of sins.

Another aspect of this thought in *Hamlet*, is the representation of Ophelia as a symbol of the worldly attractions. Addressing Ophelia, Hamlet clearly refers to the little worth of the world:

HAMLET: *Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?*

I am myself indifferent honest; but yet

I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me...

We are arrant knaves, all; believe none of us.

Go thy ways to a nunnery. (Act 3. Scene 1)

In *Antony and Cleopatra* also, characters display various aspects of turning against worldly affairs in their speech and behavior.

Antony once goes to Rome and marries Octavia. This way, he experiences the worldly pleasures. However, he fails very soon and returns to Cleopatra. After his return, even the news about Rome annoy him, and on the other hand, the spiritual joys of life become so important to him:

MARK ANTONY: *Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space.
Kingdoms are clay: our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man: the nobleness of life
Is to do thus; when such a mutual pair*

[Embracing.]

*And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,
On pain of punishment, the world to weet
We stand up peerless.* (Act 1, scene 1)

This belief is reminiscent of Rumi's idea:

*Worldly dominion is lawful (only) to those who indulge the body: we (lovers)
are devoted to the everlasting kingdom of Love. (Mathnavi VI:4421)*

Antony's freedom of the entire material world is realized to its best when he loses whatever he has had, and distributes his very last properties among his friends, asking them to make peace with Caesar:

MARK ANTONY: *...I am so lated in the world, that I
Have lost my way for ever: I have a ship
Laden with gold; take that, divide it; fly,
And make your peace with Caesar.* (Act 3, scene 9)

Cleopatra also has lines similar to Antony's:

CLEOPATRA: *My desolation does begin to make
A better life. 'Tis paltry to be Caesar;
Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave,
A minister of her will: and it is great
To do that thing that ends all other deeds;
Which shackles accidents and bolts up change;
Which sleeps, and never palates more the dug,
The beggar's nurse and Caesar's.* (Act 5, scene 2)

In the final scene of the play, the world loses its dignity in Cleopatra's eyes even more, to the extent that:

CLEOPATRA: *the world
It is not worth leave-taking.* (Act 5, scene 2)

The fact that Antony and Cleopatra (in their distinct sentences) refer to the world as garbage. Is clearly reminiscent of Rumi's view towards the world, in which the world is a garbage shoot, where only pigs enjoy it, while the real seekers of life look for the lovely deer of spirituality. More cases of mystical impoverishing – a poverty which is, in fact, endless wealth – can be seen in other works of Shakespeare's.

Poverty may also be realized in King Lear: The story of a king who distributes his kingdom among his nasty daughters, and deprives his best daughter, Cordellia, from this heritage. After he gets errant, he starts travelling with the

poor and the beggars, and realizes that poverty in some cases is better than kingdom. After he returns to Cordellia (who represents the perfect human), he reaches calm and perfection when he dies besides her. Another instance of doing away with the worldly intellect in *King Lear* is Gloucester, who has a life similar to Lear's. He has got blind, and can no longer see the world and its manifestation, therefore expresses the high value of poverty this way:

GLOUCESTER: ...*I stumbled when I saw* (Act 4, scene 1)

5. Love Is Totally Lust-free, and Correlated with the Heart Soul

In Rumi's poetry, love lies in man's heart and soul, and is completely void of lust:

If thou dost claim

For human lost Love's holy name,

Then know, and prove

The way is far from lust to Love. (*Rubâ'ıyyât*, 175, trans. By Arberry, p.5)

There is a great difference between lust or voluptuousness with love. And these two can never be put together. Rumi makes use of a comparison between Jesus Christ (as a representative of love) and a donkey (as a representative of lust and voluptuousness) to show this distinction better:

How love and lust can get tougher in a place, you fool?

When Jesus and donkey have drunk from the same stream? (*Dīvân-e Shams*, 1196, our translation).

Likewise, lust has a negative sense in Shakespeare's works, such as the play of our concern:

OCTAVIUS CAESAR:

...no way excuse his soils, when we do bear

So great weight in his lightness. If he fill'd

His vacancy with his voluptuousness,

Full surfeits, and the dryness of his bones, (Act 1, scene 4)

Shakespeare's use of the word "lust" in *Antony and Cleopatra* mostly refers to the negative sense of the word. In the following example, again voluptuousness comes parallel to bodily pleasures:

POMPEY: ...*But all the charms of love,*

Salt Cleopatra, soften thy waned lip!

Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both!

Tie up the libertine in a field of feasts,

Keep his brain fuming; (Act 2, scene 1)

In this sentence, lust is detached from human intellect, and receives a negative meaning when it acts as the main reason behind Antony's defeat against Pompey. As a matter of fact, all the opposing characters insist in making use of the word "lust" to refer to the relation between Antony and Cleopatra (remember Enobarbus's use of the word in Act 3, scene 11). This is while Rumi puts a clear distinction between the two terms, and believes that love resides in the hearts of people:

MARK ANTONY: *Egypt, thou knew'st too well*

My heart was to thy rudder tied by the strings,

*And thou shouldst tow me after: o'er my spirit
Thy full supremacy thou knew'st, and that
Thy beck might from the bidding of the gods
Command me (Act 3, scene 9)*

And, in another sentence:
MARK ANTONY: *...I made these wars for
Egypt: and the queen,
Whose heart I thought I had, for she had mine;
(Act 4, scene 12)*

In these sentences, Antony symbolizes the fact that the lovers act as one soul in two bodies by making use of the word del "heart". This is the notion which is repeatedly noted in the verses of Rumi.

6. Love: The Road to Perfection

Rumi believes that love is a teacher that can provide humans with eternal concepts, thus guiding him toward perfection.

Love has such a power in rescuing the human from the material world, that no other ideological or intellectual school has. Love is able to turn the most despised people to the noblest ones. Rumi resembles love to a carpenter who makes a ladder to help the followers of love ascend to the heavens. According to Schimmel, the perfect human is the one who had grown up with sufferings, and has turned into a real human. Although Rumi does not make a strong distinction between Sharī'at (religious deeds) and tarīqah (the way, in Sufism), his ideal religion is the one whose message is global, and its kindness covers everyone (Baqā'ī, 20):

*Fools venerate the mosque and endeavour to destroy them that have the
heart (in which God dwells)
That (mosque) is phenomenal, this (heart) is real, O asses! The (true)
mosque is naught but the hearts of the (spiritual) captains.
The mosque that is the inward (consciousness) of saints is the place of
worship for all: God is there. (Mathnavi II:3109–11)*

The perfect human enjoys such greatness that the universe, with all its immensity, turns into a trivial bit and is lost in him:

*Do not grieve: he will not become lost to thee; nay, but the (whole) world will
become lost in him. (Mathnavi IV:976)*

On the other hand, in many of the plays by Shakespeare, the characters display some signs of perfection. According to Lings (1998:198), "Many secondary features of Shakespeare's plays suggest that the poet had power to draw upon the transcendent. Characters like Hamlet and Cleopatra for example are not so much fabrications as "creations". There is something almost miraculously alive about them as if they had been brought down ready-made from above". Here, Like Rumi, Shakespeare looks for his ideal human in a global perspective, free from his race or nation:

HAMLET: ... *A combination and a form indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal,
To give the world assurance of a man* (Act 3, scene 4)

Clearly, love has a great role in this symbolism. "Love having here a higher significance expressive of the relationship between soul and Spirit... And the metal gold is here without doubt a symbol of the Spirit that each of the lovers represents for the other" (Lings, 1998: 134).

Love is not an event in the daily lives of people. It resides within people, and counts for their lives and even for their death. We may clearly see in Shakespeare's works that the love between Romeo and Juliet, or between Antony and Cleopatra is tied to their fate, and finally leads to their death.

The existence of love in the nature of the characters and the changes it makes in them, can be clearly seen in the characters of Antony and Cleopatra. It is love which changes the pride and arrogance of Antony (as a powerful Roman commander) to humility and modesty.

MARK ANTONY: [To the newly arrived servants]... *Thou hast been rightly honest; so hast thou;*

Thou, and thou, and thou: you have served me well,

And kings have been your fellows...

I wish I could be made so many men,

And all of you clapp'd up together in

An Antony, that I might do you service So good as you have done. (Act 4, scene 2)

Even he praises weeping, something seemingly far from the character of a commander like him:

MARK ANTONY: ... *Grace grow where*

those drops fall!

My hearty friends, (Act 4, scene 2)

In Shakespeare's literature, just like that Rumi, Love enters the lives of people as a result of an ordinary event, but gradually turns to their greatest instructor, changes them, and leads them towards perfection. This is what Philo (one of the commanders of Antony's) also refers to:

PHILO: *Nay, but this dotage*

of our general's

O'erflows the measure: those

his goodly eyes,

That o'er the files and

musters of the war

Have glow'd like plated

Mars, now bend, now

turn,

The office and devotion of their view

Upon a tawny front: his captain's heart,

Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst

The buckles on his breast, ...

The triple pillar of the world transform'd Into a strumpet's fool (Act 1, scene 1)

Getting perfection through love, also happens to Cleopatra. Her belief in love, gradually turns to a very strong faith when we reach the end of the play. We may realize this when we notice how she abandons the manifestations of the material world:

CLEOPATRA: *No more, but e'en a woman, and commanded By such poor passion as the maid that milks And does the meanest chares.* (Act 4, scene 13)

This growth in character is not only clear for the audience, but also the other characters of the play blatantly refer to it. Eros addresses Antony this way, before he commits suicide:

EROS: *Turn from me, then, that noble countenance, Wherein the worship of the whole world lies.* (Act 4, scene 12)

Dolabella and Agrippa, two loyal warriors of the Caesar, praise him as a unique creature, who stays beyond people's imagination. On the other hand, the glory of Antony may also be realized when Cleopatra finds herself unable to move his dead body, which has got so heavy.

CLEOPATRA: *... How heavy weighs my lord! Our strength is all gone into heaviness,*

That makes the weight: had I great Juno's power, The strong-wing'd Mercury should fetch thee up, And set thee by Jove's side. (Act 4, scene 13)

The power which has turned to heaviness, gives a dramatic and theatrical shape to this idea, and perfection has been realized in a very fine form on the stage.

Another common image used by Rumi and Shakespeare to denote the perfection of people in the light of love, is comparing love with elixir, which turns the copper (of self) to gold. Also, love is like a furnace, which invites the followers of the way towards perfection to enter it, and change the copper of their lives to gold through its elixir:

This love says: "Whoever seeks me, Has to enter the furnace, like gold". (*Dīvân-e Sahms*, 601, our translation).

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, we also see that love is resembled to elixir:

CLEOPATRA: *... Yet, coming from him, that great medicine hath With his tinct gilded thee.* (Act 1, scene 5)

Love is Antony's elixir, which gives a golden image to the messenger he sends to Cleopatra. These elixir-related images denote the very same change that love makes in the characters.

7. Love Makes Lovers Go Out of Their Way and Do Any Hard Task and Undergo Any Suffering

Love, in Rumi's poetry, is continually linked with pain; bearing suffering is a must in order to reach the beloved:

O Love, yours are several names with any one,

I gave you another name: "cureless pain". (Dīvân-e Shams, 5, our translation).

This great crusade towards reaching the beloved, requires the lover to pass through the three difficult stages of Sharī'at and Tarīqat, in the hopes to gain Haqīqat (reality) . It turns the lover to a hero in this spiritual epic, because there are very few people who can stand the hardships of such a love (see Purnâmdarian, 58). Even Prophet Mohammed may face problems in enduring this suffering:

O Ahmad, here riches have no use; a breast is wanted, full of love and pain and sighs. (Mathnavi II:2079)

Also, Abu-Hanīfa and Shâfe'ī, two great figures of the Sunni cult, and symbols of intellect and religion in *Mathnavi*, are left bare-handed, and have no advice or solution to offer:

In that quarter where love was increasing (my) pain, Bū Hanīfa and Shâfe'ī gave no instruction. (Mathnavi II:3832)

The love between Antony and Cleopatra is of the same kind. It brings about pain and sorrow for them all the time, but they welcome it, and finally end up in it with pride. Cleopatra clearly states:

CLEOPATRA: ... *All strange and terrible events are welcome,*

But comforts we despise (Act 4, scene 13)

Or in this sentence by Antony:

MARK ANTONY: ... *Fortune knows*

We scorn her most when most she offers blows. (Act 3, scene 9)

Antony expresses this idea in another place too: before he sets out to fight Caesar:

MARK ANTONY: ...*Fare thee well, dame, whate'er becomes of me:*

This is a soldier's kiss: rebukeable

And worthy shameful check it were, to stand

On more mechanic compliment (Act 4, scene 4)

All these are proofs to Lings's idea that "Antony's love for Cleopatra is the richest jewel of virtue in his soul. This opposition between the outer and inner meaning is itself symbolic, for it reflects the truth that the Mysteries can only be understood by a few, or more generally, for those who know nothing of the Mysteries" (Lings, 1998: 138).

As Rumi says:

My union with the Beloved will be achieved either by this effort or by some means outside of bodily effort. (Mathnavi VI:4202)

There is no objective for all these efforts but the spiritual unity with the beloved. We may see this when Antony in his very last minutes of living asks Cleopatra for the last kiss, and asks to drink wine in her arms (a common image of Rumi and Shakespeare to denote love).

8. Lovers' Infamy

From Rumi's point of view, love seems quite contradictory – while creating suffering, it is all blessing. In the path of love, the lover gets weak and thin

personally, and becomes disgraceful and infamous in the eyes of people. In *Dīvân-e Shams*, love is resembled to a strange cannibal (human eating) creature:

Since love is a cannibal, a man is required in its path

Who is ready to turn to this cannibal's food (Dīvân-e Shams, 1136, our translation).

In another case, In another place, love is resembled to a garrison from whose sword, the blood of the lovers is dripping, or it is resembled to a bandit or a thief, which takes away all the belongings of the lover. Love shatters the lover like a piece of stone. But all these sufferings are sweet to the lovers, and as long as a person has not done away with his dignity in favor of his love, is not a true lover.

Loving thee is shame,

And to court men's blame;

I pledge my fame to thee,

Loving infamy. (Rubâ'iyât, 1219, trans. By Arberry, p.142)

It is through relinquishing one's name and identity that a lover can begin a world-free life in love:

Lover has no fear from disgrace and infamy,

As love is kingdom, it is perfection and satisfaction. (Dīvân-e Shams, 3059, our translation)

Infamy removes the lover's pride and arrogance. Destroying arrogance, among the most significant of mystical steps, begins with rejecting all worldly affairs and ends with being publicly scolded, when the only thing that remains for the lover is love itself. A mystic in love, who is obsessed with his beloved and is totally fixed on his beloved due to his huge, burning love, is too exasperated to be concerned with his reputation among people, his health or the importance of being modest. Antony and Cleopatra also experience such notoriety and infamy, which eventually serves as the introduction to their perfection and deliverance. Such notoriety does not escape even those close to them:

PHILO: *...He comes too short of*

that great property

Which still should go with Antony.

(Act 1, scene 1)

In another place, Enobarbus, Antony's closest friend, blames him:

DOMITIUS ENOBARBUS: *... Sir, sir, thou art so leaky,*

That we must leave thee to thy sinking, for

Thy dearest quit thee. (Act 3, scene 11)

They both know the consequences of their love, and are aware of the disgrace they may be accused of:

MARK ANTONY: *O, whither*

hast thou led me,

Egypt? See,

How I convey my shame out of

thine eyes

*By looking back what I have
left behind*

*Stroy'd in dishonor. (Act 3,
scene 9)*

Perhaps that is the reason why Antony asks his intimate friends to leave him, as he has also left himself:

MARK ANTONY: ... *take the hint*

Which my despair proclaims; let that be left

Which leaves itself (Act 3, scene 9)

Antony seems to be fully aware of the perfection within himself:

MARK ANTONY: *I have*

offended reputation,

A most unnoble swerving.

(Act 3, scene 9)

Cleopatra also shares Antony's infamy. She consciously turns down Caesar's offer to continue her rule over Egypt while keeping her wealth. As she tells Antony about this fully self-conscious notoriety, "

CLEOPATRA: *No more, but e'en a woman, and commanded*

By such poor passion as the maid that milks

And does the meanest chares. (Act 4, scene 13)

Choosing the path of infamy and ill repute, they prepare themselves for the final phase of love and perfection – death and unity. When they reach the end, the infamy is replaced by inner serenity and bliss.

9. Perdition

Perdition and death is among the highest of mystical levels which only the greatest of mystics can achieve and experience. This level is the all-time aspiration of any mystical journeyman. Such inexistence is possible only through total rejection of the world and infamy among people. Few mystics are truly capable of achieving such a feat; it is like the thirty birds which, having become a *simurgh*, realize that its nature is but the aggregation of the thirty birds. This is also shown in one of Rumi's most vibrant verses in *Mathnavi*:

*(You will see) that the lover perished and the beloved too: they are naught
and their passion also is naught. (Mathnavi V:1205)*

One of the most exquisite descriptions of the lover's demise in Rumi's poetry – and perhaps in Persian literature – is the story of the butterfly and the candle. "The butterfly voluntarily hits the flame, sacrificing itself to reach a more elevated life." (Schimmel) The renowned phrase "die before your death" is a fine illustration of this notion – "dying prior to physical death," in which one achieves a level of elevation and eternity far beyond imagination. The story of Mansoor Hallaj, one of Rumi's favorites, is an example of death in order to reach divinity and become a part of the whole existence.

The notion of demise is exclusive to mystic love, arising out of the beloved's divine nature; as Qazali sees it, "It is inevitable: the lover and the beloved are

opposites, and cannot unite without perdition." In worldly love, where the lover and the beloved are both human beings, there is no need for death; characters like Leili and Majnoon in Persian literature, on the other hand, are meant to convey divine love in a human form.

This type of mystic thought – dying and being destroyed for love and thus achieving immortal existence in the beloved – is also quite evident in Shakespeare's work. In *Romeo and Juliet*, both lovers feel certain that they will begin an eternal life together after they die:

ROMEO: ... *dreamt my lady came and found me dead—*

Strange dream, that gives a dead man leave to think!—

And breathed such life with kisses in my lips,

That I revived, and was an emperor. (Act 5, scene 1)

It is after such a death that they seem to turn into gold – a sort of mystical symbolism with an alchemical touch. As Romeo's father says after his son dies,

MONTAGUE: ... *I will raise her statue in pure gold (Act 5, scene 3)*

To which Juliet's father responds:

CAPULET: *As rich shall Romeo's by his lady's lie... (Act 5, scene 3)*

The same richness, only in a different mould – gold.

This can also be seen in *Othello*; Othello's suicide is a symbol of achieving the truth.

Such mystical mysticism peaks in Antony and Cleopatra. When characters die and leave this world, when they cut away from the world and its creatures, leaving behind nothing but love, death in mysticism can be realized.

This death is not bitter and hard for Antony and Cleopatra, as they have chosen it themselves, and keep talking about their eternal life together, far from any pain or destruction. After their death, the ideas of all the people around them changes totally. Those who kept accusing them to disgrace and disdain, talk about them in a manner as if they had hosted all the world inside them, and has had a divine nature. It is the purposeful death of these characters which justifies the existence of a cycle, which starts with their notoriety, and ends up with their divine salvation.

10. Death

Dying for love and thus finding life again in it is one of Rumi's fundamental ideas in *Mathnavi* and *Dīvân-e Shams*. Schimmel has, in fact, considered all of *Dīvân-e Shams* as serving to expand this essential notion:

Die, die, die in this love,

As, if you die in it, you will all get (new) souls.

Die, die, do not fear this death,

As, if you ascend from this world, you will have the heavens.

Die, die, and get detached from your earthly life,

As it is like a chain and you are like slaves. (Dīvân-e Shams, 636, our translation)

Or:

The death of deathlessness is lawful to us, the provision of unprovidedness is

a bounty to us.

'Tis death outwardly but life inwardly: apparently 'tis a cutting-off (decease), in secret (in reality) 'tis permanence (life without end). (Mathnavi I:3327-8)

In some verses, Rumi praises it, like a lover embracing his beloved; the embrace, however, has a touch of humor:

I dare death to come to

me,

So I can embrace him

tight

At my side.(1326, Trans.

By Dashti, p.159)

Death is so desirable in Rumi's verses that its presence is like a banquet he joyfully looks forward to:

Dagger and sword have become my sweet basil: my death has become my banquet and narcissus-plot' (Mathnavi I:3944)

Rumi's and Shakespeare's thoughts on lovers' willingly dying for love are amazingly compatible. In three of Shakespeare's tragedies – *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* – the lovers and their beloved come together only through death.

Such death thoughts also exist in *King Lear*, where death conveys liberty and surviving means exile:

KENT: ...*Freedom lives hence, and banishment is here* (Act 1, scene 1)

At the end of the play, Lear, having gone through a great deal of suffering and reaching the truth – the truth about the existence of other people like his daughters and even himself – he freely rushes, despite himself, to embrace death:

KING LEAR: ... *'tis our fast intent*

To shake all cares and business from our age;

Conferring them on younger strengths, while we

Unburthen'd crawl toward death... (Act 1, scene 1)

Such an idea of death-believing also exists in various parts of *Antony and Cleopatra*. In order to reach their beloved, not only do lovers have no fear of love, but even challenge it due to the powerful confidence they have found in love:

MARK ANTONY: ...*The next*

time I do fight,

I'll make death love me; for I

will contend

Even with his pestilent scythe.

(Act 3, scene 11)

It is quite simple to die for love, and similar to Rumi's interpretation, Shakespeare's characters also see the sting of death as sweet and thus embrace it:

CLEOPATRA: ... *Dost fall?*

*If thou and nature can so gently part,
The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch,
Which hurts, and is desired. (Act 5, scene 2)*

It is at this stage of love where the lovers think about their death, and not fearing from it, they even describe it with very charming literary figures:

*CLEOPATRA: ... I'll not sleep neither: this mortal house
I'll ruin, ... Shall they hoist me up
And show me to the shouting varletry
Of censuring Rome? Rather a ditch in Egypt
Be gentle grave unto me! rather on Nilus' mud
Lay me stark naked, and let the water-flies
Blow me into abhorring! rather make
My country's high pyramids my gibbet,
And hang me up in chains! (Act 5, scene 2)*

It is after Antony's death that Cleopatra comes to a more complex understanding of the opposition between life and death:

*CLEOPATRA: My desolation does begin to make
A better life. 'Tis paltry to be Caesar;
Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave,
A minister of her will: and it is great
To do that thing that ends all other deeds;
Which shackles accidents and bolts up change;
Which sleeps (Act 2, scene 2)*

It is an apprehension which takes its roots in a realistic understanding and acceptance of death. A wisdom which encourages the characters to welcome death with open arms:

*CLEOPATRA: Where art thou, death?
Come hither, come! come, come, and take a queen
Worthy many babes and beggars! (Act 2, scene 2)*

Even the characters symbolize their suicide with the most charming words: “*As sweet as balm, as soft as air*” (Act 5, scene 2). We also read:

*CLEOPATRA: [Addressing the snake] Peace, peace!
Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep? (Act 5, scene 2)*

This is an interpretation which is so similar to that of Rumi's about death:

The body, like a mother, is big with the spirit-child: death is the pangs and throes of birth. (Mathnavi I:3514)

Death as seen in Shakespeare's work, like Rumi's poetry, is the last link of the chain that completes the steps toward unification with the beloved.

11. Reaching One's Beloved Is Like Achieving Unity

Love unites the lover and the beloved into one. After they burn up in their love they (which in divine love refers to the Creator and the creature) become a one being; in other words, the lover is transmuted into love and his beloved. Such a physical, bodily death is, in mystical terms, connecting to the eternal beloved, essentially in contrast with worldly love.

"In medieval times, it was believed that each human being has his/her completing part in the opposite sex. They may be so distant in time and location that they will never meet; if they do, however, their love will be incomparable to any form of worldly love. Hence, since a real symbol must be complete in its own right, the symbol for the love between two human beings will clearly have to represent the eternal relationship between the soul and the divine spirit; It is clear that in his *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare has meant a "true" and "absolute" love, not a sexual one. One should remember the fact that in Christianity, marriage is one of the clearest icons of denoting unity between the lovers. "The prototype of this symbolism in Christianity lies in Christ's own reference to himself as "the Bride-groom"; and the Middle Ages were dominated by the conception of the Church or, microcosmically, the soul as the bride of Christ" (Lings 1998: 56) One of the most amazing points Rumi and Shakespeare have in common is their interpreting one's day of death as one's wedding day. Rumi's devotees regard the anniversary of his death as a day of jubilee, and respond by doing sama dances and being merry. As Rumi himself says:

Our death is an eternal wedding,

What is the secret behind it? It is God almighty. (Dīvân-e Shams, 833, our translation)

When dying (after Eros delivers the fatal blow to Antony at Antony's own request), Antony also uses exactly the same interpretation for death:

MARK ANTONY: ... *but I will be*

A bridegroom in my death, and run into't

As to a lover's bed. (Act 4, scene 12)

As Titus Burckhardt has written on marriage and its correlation with symbols of elixir in Christianity in his work *Elixir*, which is beyond the domain of this study. However, something important in that book, is the reference to the sun and the moon; the two symbols which Antony and Cleopatra keep resembling each other to, which are closely related to this mystic symbolism. Apart from that, Antony and Cleopatra marry each other on the verge of death, an event which did not take place when they were living:

CLEOPATRA: ... *husband, I come:*

Now to that name my courage prove my title! (Act 5, scene 2)

This marriage becomes perfect in the time of death (which is reminiscent of Fanâ), and the two lovers reach a complete unity. This unity, and the fact that the lovers are never separated, is already noted in the play, as Antony says:

MARK ANTONY: ... *residing here, go'st*

yet with me,

And I, hence fleeting, here remain with thee.

(Act 1, scene 3)

Before committing suicide, Cleopatra puts on her wedding gown and wears her jewels symbolically. This symbolic preparation supports the idea of material death, and marriage as a sign of unity. The climax of this unity takes place when she is buried in Antony's grave. The final events of the play (the

death and the symbolic marriage) is clearly reminiscent of fanâ, and unity with God in Rumi’s mysticism. Here love bestows an ability to the human that no other material power can do so. In Antony and Cleopatra, something happens to ordinary and mortal people, which is normally so unlikely to happen. The unity of characters with the eternal beloved and everlasting life, is a blessing that love offers them.

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