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IBN ʻARABĪ'S CREATIVE IMAGINATION AND ITS ECHOES IN D.H. LAWRENCE'S *WOMEN IN LOVE*

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Abstract: *This paper employs textual analysis and comparative literary methods to examine the mystical and spiritual dimensions of D. H. Lawrence's Women in Love through the lens of sufi mysticism. It posits that Lawrence's engagement with sufi philosophy and literature significantly informed his portrayal of love as a transformative spiritual journey. By scrutinizing Lawrence's use of symbolism, imagery, and character development, particularly in the character of Birkin, the study aims to demonstrate how the novel reflects a profound resonance with sufi concepts, such as the unity of the universe and the mystical path for knowledge. This comparative approach seeks to illuminate how Women in Love can be interpreted as a modernist exploration of spiritual fulfillment within a context of societal disintegration, thereby establishing its place within Lawrence's broader "New Man" fiction. Through Birkin, Lawrence explores the complexities of the human psyche and the potential for transcendence through a passionate, yet spiritually grounded love. The paper's comparative approach seeks to illuminate how the novel contributes to Lawrence's broader "New Man" fiction, a visionary archetype striving for a harmonious integration of body, mind, and spirit. Lawrence's "New Man" embodies a radical departure from traditional masculinity that collapsed after the war. The new archetype Lawrence envisions in the light of a sufi reading is not the product of societal expectations but an individual attempt at authenticity.*

Keywords: *Ibn ʻArabī, Knowledge, Love, New Man, Sufism.*

Abstrak: Tulisan ini menggunakan analisis tekstual dan metode sastra komparatif untuk mengkaji dimensi mistik dan spiritual *Women in Love* karya D. H. Lawrence melalui kacamata mistikisme sufi. Penelitian ini berpendapat bahwa keterlibatan Lawrence dengan filsafat dan sastra sufi secara signifikan memengaruhi penggambarannya tentang cinta sebagai perjalanan spiritual yang transformatif. Dengan mengamati penggunaan simbolisme, perumpamaan, dan pengembangan karakter Lawrence, khususnya dalam karakter Birkin, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menunjukkan bagaimana novel tersebut mencerminkan resonansi yang mendalam dengan konsep-konsep sufi, seperti

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kesatuan alam semesta dan jalan mistik menuju pengetahuan. Pendekatan komparatif ini berupaya menjelaskan bagaimana Women in Love dapat diinterpretasikan sebagai eksplorasi modernis atas pemenuhan spiritual dalam konteks disintegrasi masyarakat sehingga menempatkannya dalam fiksi "*New Man*" Lawrence yang lebih luas. Melalui Birkin, Lawrence mengeksplorasi kompleksitas jiwa manusia dan potensi transendensi melalui cinta yang penuh gairah namun berlandaskan spiritual. Pendekatan komparatif artikel ini berupaya untuk menjelaskan bagaimana novel tersebut berkontribusi pada fiksi "Manusia Baru" Lawrence yang lebih luas, sebuah arketipe visioner yang berjuang untuk integrasi harmonis antara tubuh, pikiran, dan jiwa. "*New Man*" karya Lawrence mencerminkan perubahan radikal dari maskulinitas tradisional yang runtuh setelah perang. Pola dasar baru yang Lawrence bayangkan dalam sudut pandang pembacaan sufi bukanlah produk dari ekspektasi masyarakat namun merupakan upaya individu untuk mencapai keaslian.

Kata-kata Kunci: *Cinta, Ibnu 'Arabī, Manusia Baru, Pengetahuan, Tasawuf.*

Introduction

The theme of love has been portrayed in various manifestations such as romantic love, familial love, unrequited love, and spiritual love to name a few, in world literature, showcasing the complexity and universality of this powerful emotion. From ancient times and cultures to modern-day societies, the theme has captivated artists' interest in experimenting with various motifs, symbols, and structures to explore their nuanced and complex nature. These ventures with the theme of love reflected a creative skill of fanciful imagination on the one hand and a scrutiny of the development of cultures' values and morals on the other hand. Among the prominent artists of the modern day is D. H. Lawrence, who developed a profound study of the theme of love in various pieces of work.

D.H. Lawrence is Known for his insightful and deeply introspective portrayal of his character's inner thoughts and motivations. Through his vivid characterizations and intricate exploration of their spiritual, emotional, and ideological backgrounds, Lawrence delves into the complexities of human nature. His prolific work depicts a tapestry of characters who struggle with existential questions, personal issues, and ideological conflicts within the frame of love stories. By delving into the depths of his characters' minds and hearts, Lawrence reveals the intricate interplay between their spiritual beliefs, ideological perspectives, and personal experiences, creating a rich repository of human emotions, desires, and conflicts that resonate with readers on a profound level.

Due to the limited scope of this study, the paper will study *Women in Love* which, unlike *The Rainbow*, has been overlooked and underestimated in exposing the author's talent and originality. Through a close reading of the novel and a comparative analysis of Lawrence's text and the sufi doctrine, this research seeks to illuminate how *Women in Love* can be interpreted as a modernist exploration of spiritual fulfillment. This study contends that *Women in Love*, often overshadowed by *The Rainbow*, is a crucial text for

understanding Lawrence's mature artistic and philosophical vision of the "new man", a visionary archetype striving for a harmonious integration of body, mind, and spirit.

In my reading of the novel, we will focus on Birkin and his different relationships. Though some previous studies show the character as a mouthpiece for Lawrence, my study will try to show the character as a disciple, who is led through his various relationships into a cosmic truth, to grasp the world and find himself. This self-fulfillment is known in sufism as the oneness of being, a concept introduced by Ibn 'Arabī. Hence, the study will be centered around certain sufi concepts overtly identified by the character in his journey for self-realization that echoes the kind of influence Islamic sufism exercised on Lawrence's philosophy and art. While not the first paper to study the sufi influence on D.H. Lawrence, this unique study will focus on applying Ibn 'Arabī's theory of imagination.

Ibn 'Arabī and the Concept of Imagination in Sufism

The name of Ibn 'Arabī, also known as the "Greatest Master" in Islamic mysticism, is associated with many Tariqas in the Maghreb region such as Shādhiliyyah, Qādiriyyah, and Tijāniyyah orders (Cherif 2023). His influence can be explained by sufi's different travels to the region. He was also one of 'Abdel 'Azīz al-Mahdāwī's students. When he wrote *The Meccan Revelations*, he made sure he handled the first copy to his teacher by himself (Cherif 2023). His various writings, especially those about his "Ascendence" are considered the first sufi literature that highly influenced and shaped the spiritual writing of other sufi poets and thinkers such as Rumi in Turkey and Ḥassen Shādhili in Tunisia. Many of Shādhiliyyah's chants are inspired by Ibn 'Arabī's writings and sufi insights (Cherif 2023).

Ibn 'Arabī's writings are relevant not only to sufi communities but also to the understanding of sufism as a theoretical tool of analysis, offering disciples and researchers a path to spiritual, philosophical, and cultural knowledge. A prolific writer, Ibn 'Arabī authored hundreds of works in poetry, theology, and philosophy. Among his most renowned are *The Bezels of Wisdom*, a concise presentation of his core beliefs, and *The Meccan Revelations*, a multi-volume exploration of his philosophical system (ontology). His writings center around his idea of *waḥdah al-wujūd*, the Oneness of the Universe or Being. Commenting on his ascent in *The Meccan Revelations*, in Chapter 367, Ibn 'Arabī parallels his journey into the circles of the self to prophet Muhammad's ascent through the spheres, known in the Q.S. Al-Isrā, stressing the relationship of spiritual inheritance between prophets and saints ('Arabī 1999, 134). The chapter provides an insight into Ibn 'Arabī's idea that knowledge can only be acquired through direct experience with the cosmos, to which he refers (*dhawq*, taste), for it is through his encounter with these different prophets in the ascent that he obtains metaphysical knowledge ('Arabī 1999, 135).

This knowledge is triggered by the ultimate act of divine love. Among the many concepts introduced by Ibn ʻArabī, we will focus on these key notions, namely the perfect man, love, *barzakh*, and imagination.

The Perfect Man

An important concept introduced by Ibn ʻArabī is his redefinition of sainthood. He envisions the saint, the perfect man, as an intermediary who bridged the gap between the divine and cosmic realms (ʻArabī 1999, 267). One of the defining features of the perfect man is his profound connection to truth and his complete alignment with the universe, enabling him to recognize, through deep contemplation (*dhawaq*), that the diverse attributes and names of God are the essence of His Oneness (ʻArabī 1993, 400).

Ibn ʻArabī emphasizes that this quality is not exclusive to prophets but is a shared potential among all mankind, which suggests that as long as humanity nurtures this attribute, the perfect man will continue to exist, embodying the harmonious union between individual truth-seeking and cosmic understanding (ʻArabī 1993, 400). This ability to seek the truth and acquire cosmic understanding is what makes the study of Birkin even more suitable as he is introduced in the novel as a guide, a leading figure on the path towards the encounter with the cosmic, the Beloved. His journey in the novel is a journey for a love relationship that mirrors his truth.

A mystic leader, whose insights deeply marked the works of Ibn ʻArabī, is al-Hallāj who perceives the essence of the divine as love. The Truth loved Itself before creation in His absolute existence; and with love, He manifested Himself in Itself. When He loved to see love in a visible form, He brought out of nothingness an image of Himself that had all His attributes, and this divine image was Adam. What characterizes Adam, according to sufis such as al-Hallāj and Ibn ʻArabī, is his two natures: one that is divine and the other is human, which are two faces of the same coin (Nicholson 2007, 124). Ibn ʻArabī asserts that "*We did not describe Him with a description unless we were that description*" (Nicholson 2007, 125). In simpler terms, if we consider God as great is because we hold this quality in us. Ibn ʻArabī adds "*Man is the smaller world and in him the Truth reveals itself*" (Nicholson 2007, 125).

The concept of *al-insān al-kāmil* or the perfect man by Ibn ʻArabī is built on the premise that the individual embodies all of God's attributes, achieving a state of completeness and perfection. This perfect human is seen as a microcosm reflecting the universe itself. This image or understanding of man is not strange or alien to Lawrence as it can be also traced in British Romantics' advocation of the poet as a prophet-like figure, whose muse is a divine revelation that permits him/her to grasp the essence of creation. Shelley defines romantic poetry as "the finest of

words by the finest of minds" (Shelley 1841, 25). It is a fine mind as it can unveil the mysteries of the universe. It is the kind of heritage that Lawrence grew to appreciate and sought to explore through his art, the search for the perfect man, the finest of minds.

The Notion of Love in Sufism

The sufi wayfarer acquires divine attributes during his spiritual journey of ascendance. He becomes a living testament to how the infinite God manifests within the limitations of human form. This manifestation is an image, a reflection of divine love. Throughout *The Bezels of Wisdom*, Ibn 'Arabī attributes this spiritual ability to several saints and prophets including Joseph. My choice to focus on this prophet, in particular, is because his story includes both spiritual and physical love that matches the selected English text. In his collection of spiritual pearls of wisdom in *The Bezels of Wisdom*, Ibn 'Arabī uses the symbolic figures of prophets from Adam to Mohamed to explore the mysteries of divine love, among whom is Joseph. What characterizes his love is light, according to Ibn 'Arabī, which is understood as a symbol of spiritual awakening that redeems both his brothers and Zulaykha. Joseph's journey attests to divine guidance, inner wisdom, and the illumination of the soul to defeat evil and infatuation. Ibn 'Arabī shows how Joseph becomes Egypt's savior, Zulaikha's symbol of a spiritual longing for God, and his brothers' salvation. The chapter serves as a statement of the importance of spiritual awakening and the transformative power of love linked to dreams as it is through dreams that divine love is revealed to Joseph.

Ibn 'Arabī proposes a unique approach to love as a path for knowledge acquisition. He argues that true understanding comes not just from intellectual pursuit but through a direct experience of the divine love, a "tasting" (*dhawq*) of His love ('Arabī 1999, 270). This mystical experience is unlocked by acts of worship, which serve as keys to unveiling the hidden, esoteric realities for the seeker. In his own words, Ibn 'Arabī emphasizes this connection: "*For every manifestation (tajalli) there is a principle that is the dhawq (taste) of that manifestation, and that does not occur except through the divine self-disclosure in images or the Divine Names or the cosmic and nothing other than this*" ('Arabī 1999, 265). Here, Ibn 'Arabī highlights the role of divine self-revelation, whether through symbolic imagery, divine names, or cosmic reflections, to facilitate the transformative experience of tasting the divine. In the story of the prophet Joseph, it is through dreams, referred to as "*The luminous wisdom . . . the extension of His light into presence. . . as the first principle of divine revelation*" ('Arabī 1993, 100) that the prophet attains sainthood. The transformative force of love leads individuals to seek closeness to God and ultimately realize their true nature with the divine. The Sufi approach to love as a revealing force that connects the individual to his universe is

an idea that Lawrence grappled with through various artistic forms. The English author understood from a young age that only love can get the best of man. He enlivened his stories with a mystical, celestial aspect, bringing himself to the shores of a prophet who calls people for a new religion, a religion of love. Hence, both Ibn ʻArabī and Lawrence understand love as a path for knowledge acquisition, a metaphysical knowledge.

The Barzakh of Love

According to Ibn ʻArabī's sufi interpretation of the Prophet Joseph's "bezel of wisdom" is that his outward beauty is not merely an attractive physical appearance that leaves the beholder puzzled or infatuated, such as in the case of Zulaykha. Rather, Joseph's beauty is a manifestation and personification of God's divine love. The prophet's physical beauty serves as a tangible representation of the deeper spiritual truth of a divine revelation. His captivating appearance becomes a window into the underlying reality of God's love and the way it is expressed through the human form asserts Ibn ʻArabī (ʻArabī 1993, 339). This outward charm reflects the inner light and wisdom that emanates from the prophet's connection to the sacred. By perceiving Joseph in this way, the sufi tradition encourages a deeper contemplation of the relationship between the physical and the spiritual, where the material world becomes a mirror for the manifestation of the divine.

Zulaykha's love for Joseph is seen as an intermediary that intertwines human desire and celestial adoration that Ibn ʻArabī identifies as *barzakh*. Throughout the chapter devoted to prophet Joseph's wisdom, the notion of love is associated with dreams. Divine love is revealed through dreams, affirms Ibn ʻArabī, who considers that all of mankind's life is a dream (ʻArabī 1993, 339). Though not directly mentioned, characters in Women in Love are similarly associated with dreams of individuality and love. The episodic nature of the novel's structure heightens this aspect of dreaminess, made clearer through a fuzzy conclusion. In the characters' struggle to reach the real essence of love, only Ursula and Birkin manage to bring the dream of love into existence through an immersion in the cosmos. The cosmos becomes the *barzakh*.

Because the cosmic is divided into two realms, according to Islamic cosmology, the spiritual world of mystery (*ʻālam al-ghayb*) and that of witnessing (*ʻālam al-shahādah*), the *barzakh*, the intermediary, will bring both realms together, transcending opposition and asserting a better grasp of how the real, truth, God is manifested. To adequately maintain the bridge between the here and there, the real and the imaginary, the corporeal and the spiritual, affirms Ibn ʻArabī in *The Bezels of Wisdom* (ʻArabī 1993, 84).

Ibn ʻArabī provides different kinds of *barzakh*, standing as such unique to other definitions of the concept. In short, the *barzakh* is the way the

corporeal connects with the spiritual, it is the intermediary that connects the exoteric and esoteric with the transcendental and immanent. Ibn ʻArabī believes that it is the space where the spirit meets the living, all of which permits the gradual self-disclosure of God as made clear in *The Meccan Revelations* (ʻArabī 1999, 370). To fathom God's self-disclosure, Ibn ʻArabī distinguishes between two types of imagination, the first is divine, the second is human. While the former constantly brings the cosmos into existence independently of the human being, the latter is limited and dependent on the human self. What Ibn ʻArabī stresses is that through imagination, the wayfarer understands God's attributes, yet not God Himself. It is with imagination that the seeker of truth witnesses the spiritual essence of God and immerses in the bounties of His love.

Imagination

To grasp the essence of and truly comprehend the Qur'an's call for love, Ibn ʻArabī underlines the pivotal role of imagination as the only faculty capable of apprehending the divine reality. The significance of imagination in his teachings is expressed in his statement in *the Meccan Revelations*: "*He who does not know the level of imagination has no true knowledge whatsoever. If this pillar of true knowledge has not been actualized by the knowers, they have not a whiff of true knowledge*" (ʻArabī 1999, 170).

The important position of imagination is derived from his association with *kashf* (unveiling), an instrumental tool in perceiving and envisioning divine attributes, contrasting with reason, which negates attributes from God to affirm His incomparability. In Ibn ʻArabī's ontology, two distinct forms of imagination are delineated: the first being the non-delimited divine imagination (*khayāl munfaṣi*l), and the second, the limited human imagination (*khayāl muttaṣil*). The divine imagination, characterized by its boundless nature, continually brings forth the cosmos into existence autonomously from human agency. The essence of imagination in the creative process lies in its unique capacity to reconcile the dichotomy between limited and absolute existence. Chittick elucidates that the non-delimited imagination is akin to a cloud, serving as the intermediary realm (*barzakh*) through which the cosmos manifests, facilitating the revelation of divine attributes in tangible forms (*zāhir*) (Chittick 1989, 249).

He adds that the folk of God can only grasp His self-disclosure through imagination, particularly in terms of *tashbīh*, while reason acknowledges His *tanzīh*. (Chittick 1989, 322). The eye of imagination experiences theophany through created entities or internal images, manifesting divine realities in forms accessible to human understanding (Chittick 1989, 115).

To grasp God's self-disclosure, the disciple is to use metaphor, and imagination, that will permit him to bridge *ẓāhir* and *tanzīh*. Imagination is therefore an ongoing creative process of knowing the

divine, of knowing what lies beyond this physical world. Similarly, in the Western world, romantic poets advocated for imagination as an escape from the chaotic and deteriorated reality of the physical world. Their faith in imagination is renewed in the importance of feelings and intuition as knowledge providers. The importance that is given to imagination is the outcome of faith in the individual to redeem the world.

Ibn 'Arabī's concept of the "eye of imagination" resonates with the Romantic poets' notion of the "eye of the mind", which serves as the poet's muse. This shared perspective highlights a profound connection between the Sufi mystic and the Romantic poets in their appreciation for the power of imagination as a transformative force. Ibn 'Arabī's emphasis on the imagination reflects a deep understanding of the spiritual and metaphysical realms, mirroring the romantics' belief in the creative and visionary capacities of the mind. Lawrence was sensitive to these similarities that resonated with him and influenced his art. Growing into the tradition of the romantics, Lawrence developed a unique relationship with nature, he valorized it not only to behold and contemplate but also to ease owes and sorrows.

Moreover, this parallel between Ibn 'Arabī and the romantics underscores a unique quality in Lawrence, the modernist, who blended modern concerns with a romantic sensibility. Lawrence's ability to utilize the eye of imagination allowed him to approach challenges with a sense of seeking solutions rather than succumbing to despair. This distinctive perspective set Lawrence apart from other modernists, showcasing his ability to infuse modern themes with the timeless essence of romanticism, thereby creating a nuanced and innovative approach to literature and thought.

D. H. Lawrence's Imagination: The Struggle of a Late Romantic

Hailed as "the greatest imaginative novelist of our generation" by E.M. Forster, D.H. Lawrence holds a significant place in English literature. Critics such as F.R. Leavis championed Lawrence's artistry and asserted his position within the esteemed "great tradition" of English novels for being a prophetic voice that critiqued societal issues (Leavis 2005, 18). Crafting a unique style that combines romanticism and modernism, Lawrence often embraces a spiritual dimension that echoes spiritual mysticism. The reading of Sufi literature and ontology met the Romantic tradition in D.H. Lawrence's writing, blending mystical themes and introspective exploration of the self with the emotional, naturalistic approach of the Romantic poets. The Romantic Movement, according to Mark Sedgwick, provides an emphasis on subjectivity, manifested as experience and self-discovery, and maintains its spiritual freedom from doctrinal faith (Sedgwick 2009, 180-197).

Self-discovery in Lawrentian work is associated with a celebration of

instinctive and primitivist freedom, through the sacrament of the sensual experience. This entails Lawrence's understanding of love as a threshold, a *barzakh*, that connects the corporeal with the spiritual. In the following, we will consider the emotional development of Birkin in light of Ibn 'Arabī's already-defined concepts of the perfect man, love, *barzakh*, and imagination.

D.H. Lawrence views art as a powerful tool for understanding the self, a path towards greater peace built on empathy and love in a social and cultural context of war. Such vision hinges on a conflict that arises from the constant tension between individual desires and societal expectations that mark the self's journey for knowledge. Through his characters' quest for self-knowledge, Lawrence passionately advocates for a return to nature, a reconnection with our primal selves. This reconnection is based on the premise of freeing our earthly desires from the chains of society. According to Robert E. Montgomery, the selected novel *Women in Love* prepares the reader for a journey through the sacred sources of life and mystery in which love is key (Montgomery 1994, 13).

Lawrence reckons that one needs to be attentive to the mystery of creation in which human life is an expression of hidden cosmic realities that are revealed in love. His belief in a cosmic reality is elaborated in two essential essays: "*The Crown" and "The Reality of Peace*", where he advocates the concept of dark reality. Lawrence believes that corruption and creation are intrinsic to human life, but there comes a time to choose one path over the other. If individuals hold to their ego and do not break its shell, then he/she will be caught up in what he describes in Women in Love "destructive creation" (Lawrence 1999, 172). Said differently, holding to the urges of reason and logic over feelings and emotions, the individual is doomed to a corrupt existence.

Since there is a similar study by Fresheteh Zangenehpour's, "*Sufism and the Quest for Spiritual Fulfilment in D. H. Lawrence's The Rainbow*", we will rather focus on Women in Love. While another study focuses on female characters by Dolat Khan (Khan 2016), the central idea of this paper will be Birkin's journey for self-knowledge. These previous studies rest on the premise that the kind of psychological transformations that the Lawrentian characters undergo is essentially a spiritual, mystical kind, known among Sufis as "the mystical path". Much of Lawrence's mystical rhetoric, essentially for celebrating sensual love, echoes Ibn 'Arabī's consideration of love as a high state of being.

Women in Love: A Mystical Experience

Through a careful analysis of the text, this exploration will examine how Lawrence's mystical vision shapes the narrative, characters, and overall themes of *Women in Love*, revealing the profound influence of sufi mysticism.

Lawrence and Sufi Mysticism

Mystical elements found their way to Lawrence's readings through his German relative, his aunt's husband, Fritz Krenkow, who was an orientalist. He not only put his library at the disposal of Lawrence but also assigned some books and translations he deemed important. During his long visits to his Aunt Ada, Lawrence immersed body and soul in these books that influenced both his fiction and non-fiction writing (Boulton 1993, 7). Other than romantic poetry and Biblical sermons, Lawrence found in Persian literature and sufi writing a vision that corresponds to his religious sensibility based on a living relatedness to the cosmos (Sagar 1978, 196).

This search for an intimate relationship with the cosmos influenced his post-war writing which filled him with a hope of a better future. Most biographical studies reveal the emotional and intellectual crisis Lawrence went through as a young man, experiencing the Great War, his letters show a great deal of anxiety about home and life. While he found Western ideals and values inadequate, his exposure to Omar Khayyam's poetry brought him solace and vision that manifested during the writing of *Women in Love*, as a deeply mystical experience. Lawrence's friend and reading partner Jessie Chambers, explains Lawrence's understanding of the crisis of modernity that was brought about by the war as essentially a spiritual crisis: "*The cry for a new religion sounds the deepest note in all the Labour struggles, for why does the democracy crave greater freedom from the animal burden of existence except from the inborn and immortal desire to find expression for its spiritual part in life! [...] But the only satisfying thing in life is an impersonal aim*" (Chambers 1980, 32).

Lawrence perceives the impact of modernity that culminated in the Great War as a profound spiritual crisis rather than a political and social dilemma. Lawrence's cry for a new religion that resonates with a call for greater freedom from the burdens of existence stems from an innate and enduring need to connect beyond the material and mundane. This belief centers around the individual's ability to transcend egoistic desires, pointing towards a more profound human existence and fulfillment.

The Notion of Rebirth

Lawrence understands the fading away of spirituality in the Western world as an ultimate consequence of the latter's struggle to impose a unifying theory, vision, and perception that explains everything in a single equation (Sardar 1998, 215). As an artist, he advocates difference, opposition, and duality. Unlike his disillusioned modernist peers, Lawrence *"aimed to go beyond mere repudiation and put something in the place of this mechanistic modern order. . . He incessantly shunned meek acceptance of what was and insisted on the possibility of transformation and*

a new beginning". (Miller 2007, 48). In "*Hymns in a Man's Life*," Lawrence writes "*Son of my soul, thou Saviour dear, / It is not night if Thou be near". In the poem, Lawrence asserts that knowledge of the soul "penetrated me with wonder and the mystery of twilight*" (Lawrence 1993, 599).

The sufi influence is evident in the association between knowledge and mystical light. Concepts of light, darkness, savior, and love come to mark his fiction and non-fiction writing, all of which are inspired by the Sufi poetry, prose, and theological writings he immersed in body and soul. In a letter to Mabel Limb about his séjour in Germany Lawrence affirms *"My friends here are [sufi—books—nothing but books, except I go out with my aunt. Uncle is always away at his Arabic"* (Boulton 1993, 260). In a nutshell, sufism inspired Lawrence and provided him with ideas and motifs to make the world anew through his art that does not stand as a mere reflection of reality.

After Lawrence's death, Carter published a work elucidating Lawrence's mysticism, explaining that "*the great urgency, the call, the appeal, the peculiar penetration in D. H. Lawrence's writing came from its mysticism, and mysticism is the means through which man seeks within himself the secret springs of life that are common to all things alive, existing in the greatest as in the least*" (Carter 1932, 7). One way of achieving oneness with the universe is through love. Lawrence believes that the salvation of modern man and hence the world lies in his return to the primal, his oneness with the universe in a circle act of love as developed in *Apocalypse and the Writings of Revelations* (Lawrence 1980, 97).

Giving premise to love over logic and reason attests to the romantic legacy of Wordsworth and Blake who prioritized emotions as mirrors to the self. Romantics believed that emotions were the truest expression of human experience and gave them great importance in art and literature. Wordsworth defined poetry "as the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" to illustrate the spiritual quest for self-fulfillment. Lawrence writes in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and *Psychanalysis of the Unconscious*: "*The attaining to the infinite, about which the mystics have rhapsodized, is a definite process in the developing unconscious, a process in the development naturally. . .*" (Lawrence 1977, 240). The notion of process entails stages and so Lawrence frames his characters' spiritual development, understood as a process, a sequel of stages that Lawrence frames following the rhythm of life and death.

Interestingly, sufis also observed the fulfillment of the self as an inner journey marked by different stages yet under the same calling of a circle of annihilation and subsistence, *fanā'* and *baqā'*, to reach the ultimate destination, the Beloved, God. Sufis cultivated spiritually elevated states that manifest a divine love, viewed as a gift (Nicholson 2007, 25). In these various stages, the sufi disciple undergoes a state of non-existence, losing

his human self to gain another cosmic awareness. An important question at this level arises: How would Lawrence, the modern, western man, brought up in the tradition of free will accept sufis' annihilation into the divine? In an essay entitled, "*Love Was Once a Little Boy*," Lawrence called "*Let your heart stay open to receive the mysterious inflow of power from the unknown, know that this power comes to you from beyond, it is not generated by your own will therefore all the time, be watchful and reverential towards the mysterious coming of power into you*" (Lawrence 1980, 100-101). This awakening is a perpetual rebirth, a cycle of destruction and creation that leads to a new and empowered self.

Many modernists were concerned with the issue of rebirth. Characterized by its fragmented, multifaceted nature to reflect the dissonance and cultural decay of the modern world, "*The Waste Land*", by T.S. Eliot, centers around the theme of rebirth, yet it is a rebirth in the void:

> April is the cruelest month, breeding Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing Memory and desire, stirring Dull roots with spring rain (Eliot 1922, 1-4).

The classical images of spring and water are subverted by Eliot to mean a useless coming of life, an empty existence, and a drained hope for revival. The various sections of the long poem accentuate Eliot's belief that the modern man is caught in a vicious circle of disintegrated and disillusioned existence, devoid of any meaning. It is what Lawrence refuses to adhere to or accept. Instead, he finds in the sufis' circles of annihilation and subsistence an alternative, a meaningful rebirth. Unlike Eliot's wasteland devoid of spirituality, connectivity, and coherence, Lawrence aimed to fill the very emptiness of his world resulting from the blind pursuit of a single, all-encompassing truth.

Through a path akin to Sufi ascendance, Lawrence creates in *Women in Love* a world that celebrates life, mysticism, and self. In the narrative world of Beldover, Lawrence echoes Ibn 'Arabī's belief in divine love, spiritual journey, and cosmic unity. Lawrence's perspective on spirituality diverges from that of Ibn 'Arabī and the romantics. While Lawrence does not share the same beliefs as Ibn 'Arabī regarding God, nor does he hold the image of Jesus in the same reverence as the romantics or even sufis as the perfect man and the savior of humanity, he does ascribe a sense of religious sanctity to sensual love. His interpretation of love's principles aligns with his critique of contemporary societal norms, marked by rigidity and orthodoxy.

Birkin's Journey into the Cosmos: The Liberating Force of Love

Ibn 'Arabī's concept of "*the unity of all being*" posits that God is present in all living things, which therefore marks the search for His love. Put briefly, the world is an expression of God's desire to be known, He places

this divine reality in the heart of mankind in the form of intense feelings that guide the seeker in the search for his creator, lover. These feelings are a catalyst for a higher state of consciousness that paves the way for a profound shift in the individual's personality (Chittick 1989, 56). Ibn 'Arabī's ontological insight on the unity of being and therefore universe provides the theoretical foundation for Birkin's quest for an ideal love relationship. The character is driven by the desire to attain unity with a perfect beloved that culminates in a unified state with the universe. His journey for ideal love is rooted in the sufi tradition of exploring the transformative potential of love, already highlighted.

Mysticism is subtly woven into the narrative through various elements including characterization. True to his Romantic heritage, Lawrence chooses as a setting for his novel a mining village, Beldover. The contrast between the mines and the stretched valleys grants nature a powerful and spiritual force. Throughout the various chapters of the book, Lawrence uses vivid descriptions of the English landscapes to evoke an ethereal connection between characters and the surrounding natural world. For instance, Birkin finds solace and inspiration in nature, hinting at its transcendence quality. Similarly, Ursula sees things differently once in nature as exemplified in "*He stood there in his strange, whole body, that had its marvelous fountains, like the bodies of the sons of God who were in the beginning*" (Lawrence 1999, 306).

By the riverside, Birkin becomes the son of God, the promise of a sacred partnership that recalls that of Adam and Eve. Ursula's ability to understand Birkin's divine qualities is triggered by the surrounding environment and is the consequence of her spiritual journey that developed throughout *The Rainbow*. It is in nature that the characters experience intense emotions and desires that initiate their transformative process to ascend into a mystical state. Such depth seems to be not the destiny of all characters. The description of Gerald's treatment of the mare: "*He bit himself down on the mare like a keen edge biting home and forced her round. She roared as she breathed, her nostrils were two wide, hot holes, her mouth was apart, her eyes frenzied*" (Lawrence 1999, 104).

Gerald is violently forcing the horse into submission, under the fascinating gazes of the Brangwen sisters. In a highly masculine display that heightens Gerald's bodily vitality, the reader understands Lawrence's choice to disregard Gerald from the mystical experience Birkin engages with. Because he understands relations in terms of control, Gerald is the modern slave who is limited to the world here and now, unable to communicate with the cosmos.

Lawrence employs recurring natural symbols like fire, water, and birds throughout the novel to convey deeper spiritual meanings. While fire represents passion and transformation, water symbolizes purification and renewal. These symbols among others add layers of complexity to

the narrative. An example of this symbolism is seen in the quote, "*When the stream of synthetic creation lapses, we find ourselves part of the inverse process, the blood of destructive creation. Aphrodite is born in the first spasm of universal dissolution – then the snakes and swans and lotus*" (Lawrence 1999, 164). Here Lawrence refers to Aphrodite's birth, suggesting the end of one cycle and the beginning of another. Depending on the symbol of the goddess of love amidst chaos and destruction, the modernist author hints at the healing and redeeming power of love that emerges as the beacon of light in the darkest of circumstances.

The birth of Aphrodite gives birth to new forms of life such as snakes, swans, and lotus flowers. These beings refer to the very birth of Gerald and Gudrun's relationship that similarly arises from destruction. This association between the characters and nature recalls the Sufis' belief in the unity of the universe. This unity is tacitly connected to the other concept of the perfect man defined by Izutsu as "*the perfect epitome of the universe, the very spirit of the whole world of being, a being summing up and gathering together in himself all the elements that are manifested in the universe*" (Izutsu 1983, 218). Interestingly enough, Lawrence expresses a similar concern, a search for the perfect man in "*The Crown*": "*It is absurd to talk about all men being immortal, all having souls. Very few men have been at all. They perish utterly, as individuals. Their endurance afterwards in the endurance of Matter within the flux, non-individual: and spirit within the flux. Most men are just transitory natural phenomena*" (Lawrence 1980, 384).

According to Lawrence, only very few men achieve this harmonious union with the universe as the majority are chained by their self-centered cravings and rigid thought patterns. Birkin carries many of the Sufi ideals including his distinction between "intellectual" mechanical knowledge and Real knowledge, elm, and *ma'rifat*. Sufi thinkers, such as Ibn 'Arabī, reckon that intellectual knowledge is limited and imperfect to comprehend the reality of existence ('Arabī 1999, 54). Lawrence refers to this reality as "the great dark knowledge you can't have in your head," but rather in your heart (Lawrence 1999, 89).

As explained earlier, the great knowledge Lawrence refers to is love that permits individuals to re-position themselves with the cosmos. The association of dark and light with knowledge falls within the sufi influence Lawrence immersed into; they are intertwined. While light symbolizes the transcendental state the character undergoes, darkness denotes their phenomenal desires. Though there is no clear division between these concepts, at times their relations become complex which sufis refer to as "the black light" or "supreme blackness" echoing the individual transitory spiritual state between Fana and Baqa (Nicholson, 120). In the novel, the cycle of *fanā'* and *baqā'* will be studied through Birkin's various love relations. I will limit myself to the study of Birkin's struggle

with Hermione, Gerald, and Ursula to find an ideal love that turns into a mirror of the self.

Birkin and Hermione: The Struggle against Ego-Consciousness

Birkin's first love relationship is with Hermione, who stands for the modern and independent woman. Upon her introduction, the narrator displays Hermione Roddice's outward physical appearance that connotes sophistication and aura. Still, the reader is introduced to a fundamental flaw in her character. *"There was always a . . . chink in her armor, . . . she had no natural sufficiency, there was a terrible void, a lack, a deficiency of being within her"* (Lawrence 1999, 19). Despite her outside glamour, free attitude, and independent persona, Hermione suffers from an inner void. As the novel unfolds, her barren nature becomes more evident and disturbing, marking a tense relationship with Birkin. What marks Birkin's relationship with Hermione is his growing dissatisfaction with the kind of love she incarnates, a domestic partnership that proves to be fragmenting and isolating; many a time he refers to this relation as "disjoined" and "separatist" (Lawrence 1999, 205).

In an aggressive scene, Birkin confesses that Hermione is living a disgraceful life, missing a real connection with the world because she holds dear to "old ethics" (Lawrence 1999, 16). What disturbs Birkin in Hermione's presence is her lack of spirituality that suffocates him: "*What a horrible, dead prison Breadadbly was, what an intolerable confinement, the peace*" (Lawrence 1999, 99). Her lack of spirituality is the reason for her ego-consciousness that awakens Birkin to his need to follow instead his "own heart", which holds to the "simple truth of life" (Lawrence 1999, 100). Because Hermione stands for intellectual knowledge as she organizes parties for intellectuals and artists, which is limited and unfulfilling, Birkin realizes that he needs a woman who connects with his body and soul.

Reflecting on his relationship with Hermione, Birkin makes a distinction between "the silver river of life" that progresses "in and on to heaven" and the "dark river of dissolution which rolls in as just as the other" (Lawrence 1999, 201). The opposite rivers run in parallel, yet while one asserts life and rebirth, the other refers to emptiness and destruction. In the course of his relationship with Hermione, Birkin's self is drawn to destruction and dissolution. Similarly, Hermione is unable to reach for his heaven, hence, she keeps pulling him towards destruction. Her destructive nature is depicted in a letter to Birkin's friend Julius as "the desire for destruction overcomes any other desire" (Lawrence 1999, 35).

Hermione's destructive nature is essentially due to her desire for dominance, made clear through the recurrent fights they engage in, one of which culminates in her throwing a paperweight on Birkin's head. Compared to a vampire figure, "*looked at him steadily with her dark eyes*

that rested on him . . . It was rather delicious to feel her drawing his self-revelation from him, as from the very inner, most dark marrow of his body" (Lawrence 1999, 67). Birkin is convinced that Hermione is not the lover who will be the mirror to his soul. This relationship will bring the end of him by jeopardizing his journey for self-knowledge.

In an important scene, Birkin confesses to Ursula that he longs for a love that does not belong to death: "*There is a life which belongs to death, and there is life which isn't death. . . I want a love that is like sleep, like being born again*" (Lawrence 1999, 191). This kind of love is referred to in the novel as "the mystic conjunction, a bond" (Lawrence 1999, 156). Set against the mechanical world England grew into, epitomized by Hermione and Gerald alike, Birkin longs for the England of "Jane Austen" (Lawrence 1999, 347), when life was more careful and meaningful, untouched by the encroaching influence of machines. He grows determined to restore that past connection with the natural and primal, a journey he calls a path "towards the real unknown" (Lawrence 1999, 147).

Birkin and Gerald: Mystic Kinship

While the reader is constantly reminded that Birkin and Ursula's love is beyond "the superficial unreal world of fact" (Lawrence 1999, 405), Birkin wants to experience another kind of love. His love for Gerald is problematic. Previous studies identified this love as a homosexual love in *In Love Between Men in English Literature,* Paul Hammond describes Lawrence's work as "passionately devoted to the ideal of male comradeship which included a strong homoerotic element" (Hammond 1996, 184); however, a Sufi reading would frame their relationship as a cosmic kinship, another significant mystical theme in the novel. *Women in Love* is built on a fascinating combination of mythical and mystical visions. In terms of mythical, religious imagery, Lawrence develops a novel inspired by Celtic and Nordic mythology, where Birkin and Gerald become a leitmotif of Nordic gods such as Thor and Loki (Kortas 2015, 440).

In a critical scene, "The Gladiator Scene", Lawrence vividly portrays Birkin and Gerald as Nordic gods locked in a fierce battle, zooming in on their naked bodies that tickle as a testament to their divine power and strength, "*So the two men began to struggle together. They were very dissimilar. Birkin was tall and narrow; his bones were very thin and fine. Gerald was much heavier and more plastic. His bones were strong and round, his limbs were rounded, all his contours were beautifully and fully molded*" (Lawrence 1999, 231). The symbolic nature of the scene evokes complex concerns about the self, its desires, and power dynamics.

The chapter opens with a description of Gerald as "completely restless, utterly hollow, he had done all the work he wanted to do". Interestingly, this enigma of power is compared to "a machine that is without power".

Throughout the novel Gerald is associated with the image of the machine, yet as the novel reaches its end, this machine is drained, left with no power. Power at this level is to be understood as vitality, as essence. Similar to Hermione, Gerald is a man with no spirit, a body with no soul, and a mind with no vision, except an insatiable desire for gain and control. Lawrence asserts that "something dead within him". Seeing his friend in such a situation, Birkin suggests "sleep, drink, and travel," to which Gerald responds, "In sleep, you dream, in drink you curse, and in travel, you yell at a porter" (Lawrence 1999, 232). A Sufi understanding would consider "sleep, drink and travel" moments of tajelli, moments of ascendance that allow the disciple to become one with the cosmos, an idea adopted by Lawrence. While Birkin suggests different forms of perceptions that rest on a metaphysical premise, Gerald holds to work and love, which are to be decoded as two physical, mechanical acts that manifest power and desire for control.

Throughout the conversation, Gerald is depicted as "tense and nervous". His inability to understand Birkin and therefore control him adds to his agony. It is then that Birkin suggests fighting as he can see in his friend's agony. During the fight, the narrator uses a specific diction that can further accentuate the sufi influence Lawrence experienced during his stays in his uncle's library. The ghostly depiction of Birkin as "white and thin" accentuates his spiritual dimension, further highlighted through the use of expressions such as "came over to him". Such a description advocates the character of Birkin as a prophet-like figure who brings about a revelation. During the wrestle, Birkin "was more a presence than a visible object". He is a revelation, a call for something that remained strange and unfathomable to Gerald. What characterizes Gerald is his heightened sense of consciousness, he "was aware of him completely, but not really visually". The fact that Gerald is himself aware of Birkin yet not visually during wrestling is further proof that it is not a classical fighting scene. Gerald is fighting against a spirit that stands against "final substance". The scene can be called an extended personification where Lawrence brings to the wrestling turret substance versus spirit, the scene is therefore an imagination of the warring poles that determine human existence.

These dynamics are accentuated by a gothic description of a study room, where an old Victorian library stands, and a chimney burns wood. In the dim atmosphere of the room, the wrestling men are fusing into each other, "They seemed to drive their white flesh deeper and deeper against each other". The metaphoric quality of the scene suggests the fusion of both entities: substance and spirit to become one: "They wrestled swiftly, working into a lighter, closer oneness of struggle, with a strange octopus-like knotting and flashing of limbs in the subdued light of the room" (Lawrence 1999, 233). Notions of lightness, oneness, and struggle are what Ibn ʻArabī associates with the imaginal, it is that which

is between two given realities. In Chittick's reflection, the imaginal is that which stands between true and absolute *wujūd* and absolute non-existence (Chittick 1989, 345). Said differently, Birkin and Gerald stand between their true selves and the absolute cosmos. To refer to Ibn ʿArabī in *The Bezels of Wisdom*, where he writes:

> Hence everything that we perceive is the *wujūd* of the real within the entities of the possible things. In respect to the heness of the real, it is His *wujūd*, but in respect of the diversity of the forms within it, it is the entities of the possible things. Since the situation is as we have mentioned to you, the cosmos is imaginal. It has no true *wujūd*, which is the meaning of "imagination". (ʿArabī 1993, 255).

Then, one is to understand that the existence of real is reflected in the mirror of the entities that are themselves part of his existence. Are we to replace the true and real with man, it becomes clear that man's existence is imagined through the existence of the others that become a mirror to the self. Gerald becomes one possible mirror for Birkin. Their struggle becomes a struggle for oneness.

The characters' nakedness and the burning flames have long been associated with themes of dominance and intimacy, permitting Lawrence to delve into the intricacies of human relations and desires. However, a Sufi reading of these symbols of fire and body would rather evoke the birth of the perfect man, the man who would arise from the ashes of annihilation. The nakedness of the characters is to suggest their giving up on their individual, ego-consciousness to melt into cosmic consciousness. Clothes can be viewed as the chains that hold the individual tied to the physical world. In 1924, Lawrence published "*The Woman Who Rode Away*," a text thought to have brought Lawrence's mysticism to a higher level; he uses a similar image of a woman whose western clothes were taken off by the Indian chief when visiting the Indians in their mountains. Surprisingly, the woman feels no shame or fear. This act can be read as the first act of giving up on her Western consciousness to immerse into the mystical and mythical world of the Indians and accept to be their gods' sacrifice to free the moon (Lawrence 2002, 55-60).

Like the woman who rode away, Birkin engages in wrestling, hoping to reach a higher spiritual consciousness with Gerald. The latter, however, fails to transcend his earthly desire for control and power. He remains conscious of himself, his desires, and his needs. Gerald has always been associated with the "vision of power" (Lawrence 1999, 230). In an essay entitled "*Blessed are the Powerful*," Lawrence defines power as the "power to cause, the power to create, the power to do" (Lawrence 1999, 325).

One is to wonder if Gerald's power matches this definition. Never has Gerald been associated in the novel with creation and making, one is to remember the mare scene that emphasizes Gerald's understanding of relations in terms of the power dynamics of dominator and domineer. The scene also highlights the character's emotional detachment, modernity,

and mechanization. Gerald's primary pursuit is wealth and social status, which makes him prioritize external world possessions over inner exploration. Lacking self-reflection to question or bring under scrutiny these material values, Gerald further alienates himself into a material world, devoid of any spirituality, a world as cold as the snow that will cover him when he dies in the Apes. These features are coupled with the character's lack of spiritual dimension. Like Hermione, Gerald is devoid of any spirituality that announces the failure of his relationship with Birkin, not as lovers but as spiritual kins.

While sufism focuses on the soul as a conduit for divine knowledge, psychoanalysis delves into the inner drives and desires of the unconscious mind. Lawrence utilizes both modes to decode the human self and uncover its complexities. His interest in the self's pursuit of awareness, transformation, and rebirth is what marks his thematic and aesthetic concerns, reaching a peak during the wrestling scene.

Birkin and Ursula: The Seeker and the Master

Unlike these characters, Ursula stands out as a uniquely spiritual person, who has undergone her journey of spiritual awakening. In "*Sufism and the Quest for Spiritual Fulfilment in D. H. Lawrence's The Rainbow*," Zangenehpour details Ursula's enlightening journey, asserting that "*as a seeker, Ursula experiences pain and failure in her search for knowledge, (for love), but she toils for her success through various trails until finally, through a process of unveiling or reduction of the deceptive and unreal elements that exist in her path, she perceives the truth*" (Zangeherpour 2000, 142). Naming these stages, awareness, two different worlds, self-knowledge, earthly love, and ascendance, Zangenehpour duplicates Ibn 'Arabī's circles of the self. As detailed in his seminal work "*Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*," *The Bezels of Wisdom*, Ibn 'Arabī outlines the stages of progression a sufi disciple undergoes on his/her spiritual journey towards self-transcendence and union with the divine ('Arabī 1993, 33). This progression involves moving from the limited circle of the ego, bound by personal desires, needs, and worldly concerns, to the circle of the soul, which consists in understanding one's spiritual nature and surrendering to divine love.

These circles are marked by three levels of knowledge according to Ibn 'Arabī ('Arabī 1993, 58). While rational science marks the first circle as "one can attain only experientially" (58) the world they live in, the circles of soul and heart are marked by "infused knowledge of divine secrets to which only prophets and Friends of God are given access through revelation" (58). This knowledge leads to a more "authentic knowledge thanks to divine self-disclosure" (58) that defines the third circle of secrets. The knowledge of the circles of the self in its transcendence of the ego transcending to reach the ultimate circle of secret (*sirr*) is conditioned by the transcendence of earthly and worldly limitations in

favor of spiritual and divine growth. This realization is not to be confused with revelation, which is reserved for prophets, but rather refers to the Sufi investigation of spiritual realities, which Ibn ʻArabī calls "unveiling." A wayfarer who has won such a level of spiritual journey cannot see:

> Anything but Him: Shadow cannot be established when there is light. The cosmos is a shadow, and the real is a light. That is why the cosmos is annihilated from itself when self-disclosure occurs. For the self-disclosure is light, and the soul's witnessing is a shadow, since the viewer for whom the self-disclosure occurs is annihilated from the witnessing of himself during the vision of God (ʻArabī 1993, 466).

Unveiling is understood as a journey towards annihilation, or Fana, in which all earthly limitations and characteristics disappear, leaving behind the perfect and pure manifestation of Being. This process involves transcending earthly needs such as personal identity, cultural and social consciousness, and abiding by nine instructions, including seclusion, silence, vigilance, hunger, honesty, trust in God, patience, resolution, and certitude. Zangenehpour employs an analogy to Ibn ʻArabī's idea of the individual's existential journey toward truth and reality, as the protagonist undergoes a transformative journey.

In the opening of *Women in Love*, Lawrence confirms Ursula's essential flame, "She had a strange prescience, an animation of something yet to come" (Lawrence 1999, 7). Lawrence hints at Ursula's uniqueness in comparison to other characters and therefore her readiness to accompany Birkin on his journey to unveil the unknown through love. Though Lawrence's voice is considered, Birkin has not yet attained the same spiritual development acquired by Ursula. He always feels himself "a fool" (Lawrence 1999, 133), when pressed by Ursula about his understanding of love.

Two important scenes explore the role of Ursula in inciting Birkin's spiritual awakening. While there is no explicit love scene between Ursula and Birkin that showcases the role of Ursula in inciting his inward transformation, there are two major encounters amid nature that accentuate this development. The first scene is the characters' encounter in the marsh scene that foreshadows Birkin's proposal to Ursula. The scene is a vivid evocation of nature as a *barzakh* that brings the characters closer to a cosmic unveiling. In a translucent atmosphere, with the chirping of the birds, Birkin witnesses Ursula's glowing primal side that blossoms in nature. Her fusion with the natural setting awakens Birkin to a different idea of love beyond his intellectual, philosophical insight. Lawrence writes: "*Ursula seemed so peaceful and sufficient unto herself, sitting there unconsciously crooning her song, strong and unquestioned at the center of her universe*" (Lawrence 1999, 134) incites him into experiencing a deeper connection with her. Though the scene is not written in Lawrence's traditional erotic style, it suggests a shift in Birkin and Ursula's relationship; far from the confines of school and society,

Birkin and Ursula find a connection amid the mystical and peaceful natural setting.

Another scene that develops their spiritual connection is the one following Gudrun's leave. This pivotal moment was preceded by Gudrun's break with Gerald for Loerke, creating a sense of emotional disturbance and twist in the plot that led to Gerald's death in the heavy snow of the Alps: "Already a vital conflict had set in, which frightened them both. But he was alone, whilst she had begun to cast round for external resources," (Lawrence 1999, 385), writes Lawrence.

Having witnessed the destructive path of Gerald and Gudrun's relationship, Birkin undergoes another transformation that brings him closer to Ursula, "he would do things for her, nevertheless, he would see her through" (Lawrence 1999, 417). Again, the scene is not physically loaded, it is emotionally charged, suggesting a shift in his understanding of love by moving away from control and dominance to tenderness, respect, and empathy.

These moments suggest a powerful connection between Birkin and Ursula transcending the physical and mechanical while acquiring a sense of unity with the universe. Choosing nature as a setting to pen these moments is not random as amid this setting Birkin merges with a larger force that permits him to blur the boundaries between self and other, reaching for a unique sense of oneness. Additionally, during these moments, Ursula guides Birkin into experiencing this togetherness that is not only physical and emotional but also intellectual. Many are the philosophical discussions that engage both characters about life, love, and existence. During these discussions, Lawrence advocates love as a journey towards a deeper understanding of the self and its surrounding world.

In short, these scenes are marked by a deep exploration of love and its flourishing amid natural scenery. This explains the rich symbolism and emotional depth that mark Birkin-Ursula's scenes compared to other characters. Their interactions are not only physical but essentially spiritual, asserting the strong bond they share. To evoke this tacit connection, Lawrence uses the backdrop of the flooding water of the English marsh and the high mountains of the Alps to symbolize the grandeur and intensity of their feelings. Lawrence's adept at weaving together the external landscape with his characters' internal struggles and desires not only brings to the forefront the dilemma of the modern man but also provides a remedy to his worries. It all lies in love that will assert a fruitful rebirth.

The imaginative quality of these scenes matches Ibn 'Arabī's advocating of imagination to grasp God's Names and Attributes. His favoring of imagination should not devalue reason. Ibn 'Arabī calls for a balance between imagination and reason because a blind reliance on the former

would lead to shirk and an exclusive belief in reason would estrange man to himself. In his reading of Ibn ʻArabī, Chittick affirms that a balance between imagination and reason is Ibn ʻArabī's perfect knowledge of the divine:

> Like everyone else the Folk of God see God through the limits of (*hadd*) that He assumes through disclosing Himself. But they know exactly what they are seeing, and they know that no limit is God. In the midst of perceiving *tashbīh* through imagination, they acknowledge *tanzīh* through reason (Chittick1989, 55).

According to Chittick, imagination allows sufi disciples to perceive the divine. Though God sets limits (*hadd*) when revealing Himself, the sufis imagination permits them to understand that no limit can truly encompass the divine (*tanzīh*). Introducing imagination as a gateway to perceiving the divine while acknowledging limitations in perception, Ibn ʻArabī asserts that an equilibrium between imagination and reason is fundamental.

Ibn ʻArabī defines *tashbīh* as the mind's eye and its creative ability to imagine God's Names, and hence similarity, and *tanzīh* as the logic's eye to understand His Attributes and therefore differences. Similarly, Lawrence propels a critic of mechanical reason yet does not exclude reason all at once from the self's journey toward its realization. Lawrence experiments with the characters' relationships and loves to explore possible harmony between the two faculties as both feelings and reason are equally important for the development of the self. Since True Knowledge of God and His creation depends on a balance, Ibn ʻArabī refers to this knowledge as the asset of the perfect man who is equipped with two eyes, "the possessor of two eyes," who can witness God as both near and far, *tashbīh* and *tanzīh*" (Chittick 1989, 502).

This awareness of balance resonates with the notion of duality elaborated by Lawrence in *Women in Love*. In the text, Lawrence delves into the mystical and spiritual aspects of love, using rich symbolic and religious language to emphasize the power of love to connect with a deeper truth, while maintaining an awareness of inherited limitations. Such limitations are evoked in Birkin's final statement "*I don't believe that*" (Lawrence 1999, 420). Though Ursula affirms that their love is complete, Birkin thinks that other alternatives still stand. Ursula's response "*It's an obstinacy, a theory, a perversity*," (Lawrence 1999, 420) is further proof that Birkin is unable to set boundaries or limitations. This attitude is what Ibn ʻArabī calls Sherik, when the wayfarer fails to set boundaries between *tashbīh* and *tanzīh*, that is to say, he fails to understand that God is similar to and incomparable with the universe.

Pushing toward one pole at the exception of the other would negate any possibility of fusing with the cosmos. The philosophy of oneness is based on the premise that the creator is not separate from creation yet is

different from it. This closeness is explained by divine love that permits the wayfarer to comprehend the mystery of the divine and his place within the cosmos. Birkin's statement exhibits an extreme perspective that leans towards *tashbīh*, expressing a desire to experience a deeper connection with Gerald, similar to his love for Ursula, which aligns with Ibn 'Arabī's warning. An exclusive focus on *tashbīh*, unbalanced with *tanzīh*, will lead to a distorted view that separates the disciple from the master, and therefore the created from the Creator.

The Text as a *Barzakh*: The Imaginative Seeker

Ibn 'Arabī's philosophy of oneness with the universe celebrates mankind's ability to embody all divine attributes and names, including writing. God is the creator/writer of the universe. Writing not only represents the doctrinal process of bringing the cosmos into existence, but it also proves to be a means to reveal divine knowledge and love as stated by Ibn 'Arabī in *The Universal Tree and the Four Birds* ('Arabī 2006, 65).

Hence, the act of writing proves to be a *barzakh*, the intermediary that gives life to the imaginal as an infinite number of meanings emerge. Writing ceases to be a mere putting of words one next to the other, recalling the founding father of English Romanticism S.T. Coleridge's definition of poetry as "the best of words in the best of order". The skillfully joined words create a world of meaning that permits the author to manifest mystical realities and bridge the gap between the material and the spiritual.

Lawrence was for sure under such a spell in writing that pushed him to experiment in terms of structure and language use. The episodic nature of the text allows the author to delve deeper into the inner psyche of the characters, creating a labyrinth of desires, worries, and wishes, expressed through a plethora of voices. The back and forth in voices assert an encompassing view of modern man's experience in the aftermath of the Great War. As for language, the blend of the mythical and philosophical grants the text a unique renewal and rebirth guaranteed with each reading. In writing *The Bezels of Wisdom*, Ibn 'Arabī provided a fresh reading of the Qur'an. In the chapter devoted to the prophet Jesus, Ibn 'Arabī understands his birth as an act of writing, he is God's Word, the imaginal, the sum of the human and divine ('Arabī 1993, 420). By deriving meaning from different angles related to the story of his birth, including the role of Gabriel, God's messenger, who breathed His Soul/Word into Myriam and the latter's fascination with and acceptance of the Word, Ibn 'Arabī emphasizes the role of imagination in understanding God's wisdom ('Arabī 1993, 422).

By delving into the depths of the Qur'anic verses of Surah Āli 'Imrān, Ibn 'Arabī attempts to reveal the hidden layers of the wisdom behind Jesus'

birth. Through fresh reading, the Qur'an is renewed, standing as a living entity. And so did Lawrence. By grasping the essence of imagination as a transformative enlightening perspective, Lawrence offers a text that cuts with the mundane expectations of realism that result in a void reading. Mixing plausibility with mystical wisdom and emotional intensity, Lawrence invites the reader not only to a spiritual contemplation but also to a psychological exercise to fathom the intricacies of the self.

D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* functions as a liminal *barzakh*, a transformative space between the mundane and the spiritual. The novel skillfully blends realistic elements with mystical imagery, creating a rich tapestry that invites readers to contemplate the relationship between the material world and the spiritual realm. For instance, when Birkin and Ursula are caught in a storm on the moor, Lawrence writes, "*They were lost in the elemental fury, and it seemed to them that they were lost in the elemental fury of their souls*" (Lawrence 1999, 173).

This encounter with nature mirrors the characters' inner turmoil and suggests a connection between the external world and the internal. Through such experiences, the characters undergo profound transformations, facilitated by the novel's imaginative quality. As Birkin reflects, "*We must go deeper, deeper, into the dark places of ourselves, where the real life is*" (Lawrence 1999, 174). By engaging in the text, readers can actively participate in this mystical journey, exploring their spiritual potential and challenging traditional notions of reality and fiction. The novel's open-ended nature allows for multiple interpretations, reflecting the Sufi concept of the unity of all existence. Lawrence's use of symbols, such as the fire that consumes the cottage or the water that surrounds the characters, further enhances the novel's mystical dimension. Through these elements, Lawrence invites readers to embark on their transformative journey through the *barzakh*, delving into the hidden depths of the self.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Ibn 'Arabī's profound and nuanced understanding of the role of imagination is relevant to studying *Women in Love* by D.H. Lawrence because the author's exploration of love and human relationships in the novel is heavily influenced by mystical ideas and religious symbolism, which can be traced in Ibn 'Arabī's writings. Furthermore, his vision of the human being as a cosmic entity has influenced modern literature, as seen in the selected text, where Lawrence's concepts of love and self-discovery are echoed in the complex relationships between the characters. Compared with Ibn 'Arabī's teachings on the relationship between love, knowledge, and creative imagination, this paper sought to explore Lawrence's transcendence of societal norms and venturing into the mystical realms of love and self-discovery. When contextualized in

post-world war, one is to understand Lawrence's hope and search for a solution to a country in decay.

By drawing parallels between Lawrence's exploration of love and Ibn ʻArabī's mystical teachings, one can uncover deeper layers of meaning and insight into the complexities of human relationships and the quest for spiritual enlightenment in the novel to reflect on the turbulent cultural context of Britain on the eve of the Great War. By examining how Lawrence's character navigates love and personal growth, one can potentially gain insights into the Sufi teachings that ruled the Maghreb region and led at some point in its history to spiritual growth and transformation. The study could be therefore said to have scrutinized the spiritual and cultural revival and premise that Ibn ʻArabī texts had on Western artists that paved the way for a prosperous future. A legitimate question to ask at this level: what could Ibn ʻArabī's ontology offer to Arabic artists, especially Maghrebi?

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