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REFRAMING RUMI AND SHAMS: A CRITICAL STUDY OF WESTERN INTERPRETATIONS OF MYSTICAL COMPANIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the ways in which the Western and secular interpretations often tend to misunderstand and eroticize the relationship between Rumi and Shams. By detaching this connection from its religious context, the modern interpretation fails to recognize the spiritual depth of their friendship. Through the qualitative analysis of literary and hermeneutic sources, this research aims to contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between the Sufi poet and his companion, Shams of Tabriz. This analysis includes close reading of the Divan-e-Shams as well as several early biographical and traditional commentaries on this literary heritage. It argues that the Western reception of this work tends to misinterpret Sufi vocabulary and erase Islam-specific theological nuances. This research highlights the most salient concepts of Sufism, namely 'Ishq (divine love), fanā' (annihilation), khalwa (seclusion), firāq (parting), sohbat (companionship), in order to reveal the true spiritual meaning of Rumi's verses about Shams. This study concludes that the image of Rumi and Shams's friendship is built on a spiritual foundation, while modern Western reinterpretations attempt to sexualize and decontextualize their relationship.

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Introduction

Unlike other romantic poets (**Fakhr al-Din Iraqi** and **Nizami Ganjavi**) in thirteenth-century Konya, Rumi was not a poet who lacked the bonds of orthodoxy; he was a famous Sunni scholar of Islam, a jurist (faqih), and a theologian ('ālim). Familiar with the traditional Islamic disciplines, law, and metaphysics of Sufis, Rumi was an orthodox scholar of Islam. This trend underwent a drastic change in 1244, when the arrival of Shams-i Tabrīzī, a wandering mystic Sufi, turned his scholarly thought to the state of ecstatic experience. In order to get an understanding of the relationship between these two, one should consider it from the perspective of medieval mysticism of Islam, particularly, sohbet and fanâ. The former is a relationship that takes place between two spiritual initiates or a

master and his disciple, which is a means of fanā'. In this context, the human beloved is not viewed as an end in himself, but as a source of divine manifestations and attributes.

The literature of the Persian Sufi tradition makes extensive use of tropes of ardent love (ʿishq), longing, and beauty. Terms like lover (ʿāshiq) and beloved (maʿshūq) are used as metaphors (al-majāz qanṭarat al-ḥaqīqah metaphor is a way to the Real) that attempt to show the soul's yearning towards the Divine. The practice of sohbet requires the presence of both interlocutors spiritually, dialogue, and contemplation, which renders the physical presence secondary to the spiritual one. Fanā' fi's-shaykh, it involves so deep immersion of the student in the spiritual presence of his master. In this case, he disappears into himself, thereby making fanā' fī Allāh possible.

The relationship between Rumi and Shams has been described in the biographical and hagiographical works from the closest people to the historical figures. One can find the most relevant information in the earliest texts about their meeting. In primary sources, it is stressed that Rumi and Shams spent much time in spiritual seclusion (khalwat), which was marked by heated theological discussions, meditation and esoteric conversation for discovering hidden meanings of the Qur'an. Although early biographers report the envy and misunderstanding of Rumi's disciples, caused by the impact of Shams on him, they describe their encounter as an unusual meeting of two spiritual oceans. Physical or sexual relationships between them are not mentioned in any of the primary documents since this view is seen as a misunderstanding of the process of spiritual devotion. In addition, Shams's discourses show that Shams required hard and spiritual work from Rumi to take off his scientific egoism to get the direct divine revelation.

Even in light of the evidence that can be found from historical records, there have been much reinterpretation of both the life and the literary legacy of Rumi. The translation and popularization of Rumi's poetry during the last decades of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first century, mainly in Western consumer cultures, marked a turning point in the interpretation of the poet's relations with Shams. Popular versions of Rumi's poetry, translated mainly without taking into account the syntax of the Persian originals, eliminated all Islamic terms, prayers, and references. Through translating the ecstatic love poetry of Rumi into Universalist romance, the popular literature secularized his mysticism. Therefore, the religious devotion of the two poets was stripped off its mystical religious character and reinterpreted in a contemporary humanistic way. While in Sufism there was always the allegorical use of divine language derived from the Holy Scriptures, the secular interpretations saw the erotic language as a literal expression of the attraction between the two.

This research makes use of the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and reader receptions to make sense of this interpretation. In Gadamer's seminal work "Truth and Method" (1960), he states that understanding involves "fusion of horizon," which means that an interpreter's own situation in history and presuppositions will define how he/she will understand a given text. When twentieth-century secular readers read thirteenth-century Sufi texts, an enormous hermeneutical gap becomes evident. The modern cultural perspective lacks the necessary language categories to describe passionate non-sexual intimacy between people of the same sex.

Under the influence of modern psychoanalysis, modern culture usually sees emotional closeness of two people as necessarily either romantic or sexual. However, medieval Sufis drew a definite line between sexuality and spiritual sohbet.

When modern readers interpret the works of Rumi without considering their own historical biases, the horizon fusion becomes such that the interpretations become a projection of contemporary concepts of romantic and erotic identity on a medieval text. Allegories of love get taken literally, and spirituality gets transformed into eroticism. Although modern literature tends to define the relationship between Rumi and Shams through a dichotomy of metaphor versus romanticism, the historical significance of sacred and non-erotic spiritual companionship is sometimes not considered at all. This study bridges that gap through analysis of primary Sufi texts using Gadamerian hermeneutics and reader receptions.

Research Questions

1. What do early biographical and Sufi sources say about the companionship of Rumi and Shams?
2. To what extent does "fusion of horizon" between 13th century spiritual companionship and 21st century secular framework reinterpret the physical intimacy as physical sexuality?
3. How do Western writers and readers, interpreted Rumi and Shams through secular or sexual frameworks?

Literature Review

Scholars studying the modern reception of Rumi emphasize that Western translations and adaptations often perform an act of "de-Islamization". As Franklin D. Lewis documents, popular adaptations most notably free-verse renderings by figures like Coleman Barks frequently strip away the explicit Quranic, Islamic, and legalistic frameworks of Rumi's poetry to accommodate modern secular or New Age sensibilities. In these popular contexts, Rumi is reframed not as an orthodox Sunni scholar who underwent mystical transformation, but as a non-religious, universal guru of personal empowerment.

In Sufism in Contemporary Fiction in English, Billy Gray details how Anglophone writers act as "cultural translators" who adapt Islamic mysticism for commercial audiences through specific mechanisms:

- De-Islamization & Universalization: A primary means of the modern reception of Rumi's work is the de-Islamization and universalization of his message – the separation of his teaching from the Islamic Sharia and the doctrine of Tasawwuf. In other words, by removing the specific religious weight from his words and actions, modern recipients deprive him of his Islamic spirituality, turning it into an ethereal "spirituality of love." This de-contextualization serves both to make him palatable to Western secularism and to make his spiritual message marketable and consumable by everyone. As the Western press and media want to present Rumi as an equal-opportunity mystic, his Islam is "exorcised" and turned into abstract

metaphysics. This way, he is no longer a respected (and highly conservative) Islamic scholar and theologian – a Sunni ʿālim – but a universal "lover of God," not bound by any particular religion.

- Psychologization The modern interpretation of Sufism also involves Psychologization, which means that the traditional esoteric teachings are related to contemporary self-help doctrines. The stages of the mystical experience are described as the process of individual therapy, which aims to overcome the emotional barriers and achieve harmony. The main idea is that the mystical annihilation of the ego (Fana) is no longer necessary for the modern believer and can be replaced by a psychological struggle against the mental and emotional barriers. Therefore, such a therapy can be considered as a part of a self-help program
- Literary Fictionalization: In modern literature, this process is further facilitated by fictionalization, as can be seen, for example, in Elif Shafak's The Forty Rules of Love, where the author tells the story of a modern-day wife and mother who finds herself involved in a love affair between Persian philosophers of the thirteenth century in Konya. In this way, such books help bridge the gap between esoteric metaphysics and modern readers' perceptions, yet in my opinion, they conflate ideas of 'Ishq or other mystic concepts with the modern idea of love, thus diluting the message of Sufism to some extent.

In contrast to modern commercial reframing, early historical sources and scholarly biographies such as those by Annemarie Schimmel and Franklin D. Lewis ground the bond between Rumi and Shams firmly within 13th-century Seljuk Anatolia and classical Sufi metaphysics.

The way Rumi and Shams met was not like a relationship or a typical teacher and student relationship. Instead they had a spiritual connection, which is called sohbet. Shams were a smart and spiritual person who was looking for someone who could understand him. He wanted someone who could receive the things he was saying. Shams helped Rumi to go beyond thinking about spiritual things and to actually feel the love of God.

B. The Archetype of the Perfect Man (Insan-i Kamil)

Some scholars think that Shams was like the example of a good person, which is called Insan-i Kamil. This idea comes from the thoughts of Ibn Arabi. The Perfect Man is like a mirror that reflects all the things about God. Rumi loved Shams. Not just because of whom Shams was as a person. He loved the light that was shining through Shams.

C. Fana, Baqa and Poetic Catalyst

Some people like Schimmel and Lewis say that Rumi's meeting with Shams changed him completely. Shams helped Rumi to let go of his desires and to be reborn in a spiritual way. When Shams disappeared Rumi was very sad. This sadness was like a fire that helped create the poetry in the Divan-i Shams-i Tabrizi and the Masnavi. It turned Rumi into a poet who wrote about the love of God. Rumi and Shams and their relationship were the reason for this change, in Rumi. Rumi and Shams will always be remembered because of the things Rumi wrote after meeting Shams.

o evaluate why 21st-century secular frameworks frequently reinterpret the intense physical and spiritual proximity of Rumi and Shams as physical sexuality, literary theory offers key insights through Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and Hans Robert Jauss's reception theory.

A. Gadamer's Vorurteil and the Horizon Collision

Gadamer posits that all understanding requires a starting "pre-understanding" or prejudice (Vorurteil), shaped by the interpreter's historical background. A modern reader brings a secular, psychological horizon wherein deep emotional intimacy between two human bodies is almost exclusively categorized through romance or physical sexuality. When this modern horizon encounters the 13th-century horizon of Sufi mysticism where intense physical proximity, hand-holding, seclusion (khalwat), and weeping are vehicles for non-bodily, divine communion a "fusion of horizons" (Horizontverschmelzung) takes place. Lacking the medieval Sufi vocabulary of Fana and sohbet, these modern framework maps physical sexuality onto spiritual intimacy.

B. Jauss "Horizon of Expectations" is a concept that helps us understand how people think about literature and history. Jauss takes the ideas of Gadamer. Makes them more concrete by saying that the way we understand a text or a historical event changes over time as our expectations change.

This is what happens with the concept of "Horizon of Expectations" as it changes from one era to another:

In the 13th Century people thought that being with someone spiritually was about giving up your desires and becoming one with something bigger.

Now in the 21st Century people want to read stories about finding yourself and being happy about breaking rules and being free to love whoever you want.

Gray says that modern stories often use ideas, from Sufism as a way to make their stories more interesting. So when old ideas meet new expectations it can be a problem. This is why many authors and readers take the idea of giving up you for something and then turn it into a romantic love story, which is not really what it was meant to be. The idea of a spiritual connection is now often used to sell books to people who want to read about love and relationships.

The scholarly consensus across historical biography and literary theory demonstrates that Western representations of Rumi and Shams often reframe sacred companionship into secular or romantic categories. While classical sources define their relationship through esoteric Sufi concepts like sohbet, Fana, and the Perfect Man, modern commercial translations adapt these themes to fit contemporary ideals of individual romance and self-discovery. Through the theoretical lenses of Gadamer and Jauss, this transformation is understood not merely as an error in translation, but as a systematic "fusion of horizons" where modern secular assumptions reinterpret historical spiritual intimacy through the lens of physical sexuality.

Data Analysis

Jalal-Ud-Din Muhammad Rumi (1207-1273)

Jalal ud din Rumi was born in Balkh on 30 September 1207, known as present day Afghanistan. He founded the Order of the Whirling Dervishes, bears out in his career the Eastern saying, 'Giants come forth from Afghanistan and influence the world. 'His father Baha walad was a great Preacher and shaykh. Shaykh is an Arabic word and it means teacher or mentor but in Sufism, it is associated with Murshid, the spiritual guide. So Baha Walad was a shaykh in both inward and outward sciences such as symbolic discourse and spiritual psychology associated with Sufism and inward science including Koran, hadith, jurisprudence and theology. During the Mongol invention in Balkh sultan walad took his family and settled down in Anatolia. Later in Konya Until recently, Konya had been a province of the Eastern Roman Empire, hence Jalal-ud-din name, Rumi, i.e. "the Roman". Although he was exposed to Sufi thought from his early childhood, he was expected to follow his father's footsteps as an Islamic scholar so he studied both inward and outward sciences under the supervision of his father and later he was teaching in Konya. He was known as the best shaykh in city despite the fact that he was still in his twenties.

Rumi's works are widely read today across his native greater Iran as well as in Turkey, where the Sufi brotherhood he founded is based. His poems have been translated into many of the world's languages, and Rumi has been described as the "world's most popular poet." In the United States, he has become the bestselling poet in recent years.

Shams Tabrizi (1185-1248)

He was a Persian Dervish, Sufi, and well known companion of Rumi. He is the center of the Rumi's poetry and one of his books Divan-e-Shamsi. Shams-i Tabrizi was born into the household of the Imam Ala al-Din. It has also been stated in the book, Manāqib al-'arifīn (Eulogies of the Gnostics), written by Aflaki, that the father of Shams-i Tabrīzī was 'Ali while his grandfather was Malikdad. Taking into consideration the book, Maqālāt (Conversations) by Haji Bektash Veli, Aflaki has estimated that Shams had come to Konya at the age of sixty.

In one of autobiographical book name "me and Rumi by William C.Chittick" it is stated that Shams arrived Konya on 11 October 1244 at the age of sixty and Rumi would have been thirty-seven. Encountering Rumi in the market, Shams asked him about the spiritual station of great Sufi Abu Yazid Bastami, who famously declared "Glory to be me! There is none in my cloak but God" How is It, said Shams, that the Prophet Muhammad simply referred to himself as God "servant"? Having heard the question, Rumi went into a "state" in other words; he was overcome by an influx of knowledge and awareness from the spiritual world.

Relationship Between Them

The friendship between Jalal al-Din Rumi and Shams of Tabriz is really something. It is one of the powerful spiritual relationships in Islamic history. Jalal al-Din Rumi and Shams of Tabriz changed each other. Before Jalal al-Din Rumi was a jurist. Then he became a poet who wrote about love and God. People around the world love to read his poetry. Jalal al-Din Rumi and Shams of Tabriz had a

strong bond. They used language that was like lovers talking to each other. They wrote about longing and wanting to be with God. People today do not always understand what Jalal al-Din Rumi and Shams of Tabriz meant.

Nowadays Jalal al-Din Rumi's poetry is over the internet and in self-help books. People read Jalal al-Din Rumi's poetry. Think it is just about love and feelings. They do not see the side of it. They think it is about being in love, with someone or something. Jalal al-Din Rumi and Shams of Tabriz were talking about something much deeper. The friendship between Jalal al-Din Rumi and Shams of Tabriz is still talked about a lot. It changed Rumi from a lawyer to a poet who wrote about love and God.

Some people in the West think Rumi and Shams were lovers. They say this because they think close friendships between men must be about romance or sex. There's another way to understand their friendship. In Sufism a mystical type of Islam people often talk about their love for God in a way that sounds romantic. Rumi and Shams were two men who loved God and each other in a way. Their bonds were strong. Rumi wrote a lot about love and God after meeting Shams. People still read his poems today. The question is often asked: Were Rumi and Shams gay lovers? Some say yes. That might not be the whole story. Their friendship was special. It helped Rumi become a poet.

Rumi and Shams showed that men can be friends without it being about romance or sex. They were friends. Their story is still interesting, to people today. Rumi's poems are still read by many. He wrote about love, God and life. The story of Rumi and Shams is different when look at biographies and Sufi stories. They say Rumi and Shams were connected in a way that changed Rumi's life. This change was because of their teacher and student relationship because; they both were trying to be close to God.

These old stories talk about how Shams helped Rumi by breaking down the wall around his heart. Shams made Rumi see that there was more to life than being smart. Rumi started to feel things and this changed him. When these old stories talk about "love" they are not just talking about love between people. They are talking about Rumi and Shams and how their love for each other was a way to understand God's love. The idea is that when we love someone it can help us love God more.

We need to understand what these old stories are saying about Rumi and Shams. This helps us see the difference between what they meant and how people think about them today. Rumi and Shams were, about love, not just physical love. This tension between Sufi meanings and new interpretations is seen in Elif Shafak's popular novel The Forty Rules of Love. The novel tells the story of Rumi and Shams relationship in a way that compares their journey in the 7th century to people personal searches today. This helps readers understand both time periods in the way using the same feelings and relationships.

Shafak's portrayal of love is romantic and easy to understand and with her audience it creates a situation where people can mix old and new ideas. This mixing often changes the meaning of closeness to physical love even when the book is not clear or is mysterious. The book brings together

the 13th-century idea of friends with today's ideas of psychology and sex. Shafak's writing makes it possible for readers to connect with both new ideas about love and relationships.

The Forty Rules of Love invites readers to think about love and relationships in a way that it compares the past and present making it easy to understand ideas, about love. This study looks at how people understand Rumi and Shams today. It asks three questions. How do Western writers and readers think about Rumi and Shams in terms of sexual ideas and. What do old biographies and Sufi writings say about Rumi and Shams being friends and how do they describe the love between Rumi and Shams? How much does combining the ideas of the thirteenth century with modern secular ideas change how people think about spiritual closeness as physical attraction?

This research uses ideas from hermeneutics and reader-reception theory to look at what Rumi and Shams relationship meant in the past and what it means to people especially when reading The Forty Rules of Love which is a book where old and new ideas, about Rumi and Shams often meet and sometimes disagree. This research will clearly show that how modern readers and writers misinterpreted dialogues and texts according to their understandings.

Fusion of Horizon

In The Forty Rules of Love page 235 the passage where Shams and Rumi are talking "I had a glimpse of a vision. I saw Rumi, a much older and frailer version of him, clad in a dark green robe and sitting in exactly the same spot, looking more compassionate and generous than ever, but with a permanent scar on his heart in the shape of me. I understood two things at once: That Rumi would spend his old age here in this house. And that the wound left by my absence would never heal. Tears pricked in my eyes.

'Are you all right? You look pale,' said Rumi.

I forced myself to smile, but the burden of what I was planning to say next weighed heavily on my shoulders. My voice came out a bit cranky and less forceful than I intended. 'Not really. I am very thirsty, and there is nothing in this house to quench my thirst."

In hermeneutics theory, according to Hans-George Gadamer, the concept of horizon represents the understandings and limits of reader. Before interpreting the text, there is some kind of pre-defined horizon in his mind. When a reader or an individual interact with a text, he do not simply adopt their views or ideas nor the writers force their view upon them, instead the historical horizon of text and reader's present day horizon mere to create a shared, deeper understanding of text. Western readers often approach a text about Rumi and shams expecting a traditional horizontal human love story. They expect, comfort, validation and emotional resolution.

This passage undermines that expectations shams looks at Rumi and sees "a permanent scar on his heart in the shape of me" he states that "wound left by my absence would never heal". If this passage is analyze through hermeneutics than it is embedded within a specific historical and cultural context. In Sufism, the companionship between two people is called "suhba". When two people becomes close, not because of shared emotions but to help each other grow closer to the divine, and

this sacred relationship is an important stage which is meant to purify the ego. When shams says that "I am very thirsty, and there is nothing in this house to quench my thirst". Here the writer leaves a gap and western readers might fill this gap according to their understanding.

According to Hans Robert Jauss, a text meaning is not fixed by authors, instead meaning is actually created by audience and their interpretations are shaped by their personal backgrounds, cultural context and life experiences. Western readers might assume that a sham is "thirsty" for human belongings, affection, love and romantic passion. They interpret their relation secularly, that's why they fail to see the sacred companionship.

Reframing sacred connection beyond western Misinterpretations

Ella

Dear Ella,

Shams are the person who was responsible for the transformation of Rumi from a local cleric to a world-famous poet and mystic.

Master Sameed used to say to me, "Even if there might be a Shams equivalent in some people, what matters is where the Rumis to see it are?"

Warm regards,

Aziz

Western pop culture sees Rumi as a secular, spiritual guru who stripped away his deep Islamic faith. When Western readers pick up Elif Shafak's book, The Forty Rules of Love they almost always try to emphasize the companionship between Rumi and Shams into a modern box they already understand. Usually, in a romantic relationship, a deep friendship, or a standard connection between an artist and their muse a romantic relationship plays a central role. This exact bias can be challenged on page 277 in Aziz's letter to Ella. He notes that Shams was completely "responsible for the transformation of Rumi" and brings up a great question from Master Sameed: "Even if there might be a Shams equivalent in some people, what a matter is, where are the Rumis to see it?" If we look at this through the lens of Gadamer's theory, modern texts usually interpret beyond the mind of writer. But this passage flips that idea on its head. It reframes their sacred companionship (suhba) as something much deeper than a romance: it is a spiritual mirror-game. The text is emphasizing that a powerful spiritual guide like Shams is essentially invisible unless he connects with someone like Rumi, who has the rare spiritual eyesight needed to recognize and reflect that divine energy.

Ultimately, a true breakthrough happens when a Western reader stops trying to force Shams and Rumi into comfortable secular boxes like romantic partners or rebellious free spirits and accepts them for what they actually were in 13th-century Persia. When we blend our understanding of the text with how readers process it, we realize that the radical things these companions said were never meant to validate personal egos or modern anti-religious sentiments. Instead, their sacred

companionship was a beautiful, often painful crucible designed to completely burn away the ego, leaving absolutely nothing between them but a pure, selfless love for the Divine.

"I don't care about haram or halal. I'd rather extinguish the fire in hell and burn heaven, so that people could start loving God for no other reason than love".

By utilizing Gadamer's concept of hermeneutics; text interpretations and Iser's reader-reception framework, this passage demonstrates that how western misinterpretation of Rumi and Shams in The Forty Rules of Love, mistakes the esortic relationship between them without knowing their Sufi background. Gadamer argues that interpretation is never objective; it is based on reader's culture, language and personal biases. When a modern reader reads Sham's line "I don't care about haram or halal" they commonly equated it with secular liberation, rebellion against dogma and new age view that everyone can live their life on their own terms. While with in classical Sufism this independence from fear-based religion is called "Tasawwuf".it is commonly known in Sufism is inner, mystical and spiritual dimension of Islam. Its main purpose is the purification of heart and soul. Tasawwuf nurture a person to let go of ego in front of humans, worldly desires and attachments in order to develop a direct, loving relation and connection with divine. It also defines that moving away from negative manners like pride, greed, envy and adopting virtues like humility patience and sincerity. However there is a whole journey behind this Tasawwuf and it is usually undertaken the guidance of a qualified spiritual teacher and in Sufism these teachers are usually called Sheikh and Murshid. That is how Shams is a way of loving and knowing God more for Rumi.

Reader-Reception theory shifted the focus from what the text means and how the readers consume it. Gadamer states that writers never tell 100% of details in a text. Instead, they leave gaps and it is up to reader's imagination and their own biases to fill that gap. In Shafak's passage this gap lies between the direct statement "I don't care about haram or halal" and the theological justification "so that people could start loving God for no other reason than love". A secular western reader fills that gap according to their cultural biases; including, individualistic, liberal values. They believe that an individual do not owe their identity to their family, tribe or their religion. They are independent agents. They interpret these lines as a rejection of Islamic identity entirely. They misread Shams words by using their modern western psychology instead of Islamic history. The modern western community highly values these things; universalism, therapeutic healings, and individualized spiritualties. Therefore, when these readers pick up the novels like The Forty Rules of love, they are looking for comfort, self-love and universal peace.

In another line when Shams says "I'd rather extinguish the fire in hell and burn heaven" it sounds incredibly shocking. To make sense of it readers subconsciously interpret it through their cultural lenses. Shakespeare's sonnets are frequently addressed to a beautiful young man known as Shakespearean form. A reader from a different culture may literally interpret a text where two men share a close companionship. They might think that the love between them is based on physical intimacy rather than spiritual connection.

These examples reveal that interpretation is shaped less by authorial original meaning, alone and more by the biases, values, and frameworks readers bring to the text. Ultimately, recognizing this

process helps this research to examine that reading is not passive consumption, but an active act of cultural translation one that can either bridge understanding or produce misreading when context is ignored.

"I agreed. Until it turned dark and cold, we sat in the courtyard with a single red rose between us. There was, beneath the chill of the evening, the scent of something fresh and sweet. The Wine of Love made our heads spin gently, and I realized with glee and gratitude that the wind no longer whispered despair."

Gadamer calls the cultural background, history and assumptions, a readers carry with their "horizon" and when a readers of 21~century reads a text from past, two different horizons meet. In the world of medieval Sufism, poets used actual or physical words as a secret codes for spiritual experiences. They use this tactics because the love of divinity is so intense that normal language cannot describe it. Here the 'wine' refers not an actual alcohol but in sufism 'wine' is the overwhelming feeling of divine's love and drinking it means that an individual's ego, selfishness gets 'drunk' and disappears, leaving only God. Moreover, the 'Rose' is not a gift for lover. Here it represents ultimate divine beauty or the spiritual master like Shams, who reflects that beauty. This passage is describing a deep, soul~to~soul spiritual awakening where suffering tied to material life is washed away by divine energy.

Therefore if a reader belongs to 21~ century reads or watch in a movie red rose, wine and dim courtyard than it mean one thing; a romantic date, because the modern reader lacks knowledge and vocabulary for strong, non~physical spiritual love between two people especially, when they are men. So, their brain automatically translates it into the closet thing they understand; romantic attraction and physical sexuality.

Hereby as Gadamer's and Iser's theories when modern secular reader reads the words they subconsciously rewrite them, because modern western culture highly values romantic and sexual liberation. It emits those values onto Rumi and Shams. The deep spiritual bond between the Sufi dervish and his sheikh gets reinterpreted as a physical romance, simply because the modern readers are using a completely different pattern because of their culture.

In Sufi psychology, separation commonly known as 'firaq' is a necessary, painful fire. The 'wound 'Shams is talking is not a tragic romantic break~up, it's a destructive force meant to break Rumi's ego. Without the wound of Shams absence Rumi would never have turned inward to find God and become the legendry poet he became. This scar is a holy divine. 'The thirst that cannot be quenched' in a mystical poetry thirst represent the craving or longing for divine truth. When Shams says his time as Rumi's teacher is complete he must leave so that both of them can fulfill their higher spiritual destinies.

In the novel chapter 5, the setting was Konya, July 1246 "my father came to my room, looking like a shadow of the man he used to be. There were bags under his eyes, dark and ominous; as if he had stayed awake all night speaker is Rumi, to his son Sultan Walad he told him about the disappearance of Shams. He was physically weak and change, his beard becomes white and he has

a dark circles, he feels like emotionally crushed. Rumi says: "Shams is gone. He has left me." While his son believes that life might be easier without Shams; Rumi has made enemies because of him. Rumi insists: "He and I are one. The same moon has a bright and a dark side. Shams are my unruly side."

Rumi begs his son to find Shams; says "Tell him how my heart aches his absence is killing me. Through hermeneutics, it can be noted that Rumi's companionship with Shams is described here not as the kind of companionship in the physical world but as the companionship in the spiritual world. When Rumi describes Shams as his soul mate and says that he and Shams are one entity together, while comparing him to the dark side of the moon, it denotes that there is a unity of the soul and an awakening of Rumi's mysticism with Shams. Through Shams, Rumi is made to go against the social codes of conduct that he had before and is encouraged towards divinity and spirituality. It can be seen that the son reacts negatively to this relationship as well and longs for a more convenient life without Shams in it. Nevertheless, it is clear that what Rumi feels here is something that can be understood in the context of Sufism – namely, the separation from the beloved and suffering due to this separation.

According to Reader Response Theory, these lines can be interpreted sexually by today's readers because of the culture in which they are immersed and their interpretation of such concepts as love, intimacy, and companionship. The present day is marked by an open discussion of LGBTQ and sexual matters, thus readers may construe Rumi and Shams' strong relationship as a sexual one. Therefore, it becomes obvious that meaning is not contained within the text itself but rather depends on a number of other factors such as the reader's cultural background.

In The Forty Rules of Love chapter five, page 289 in last paragraph Everything Shams did was for the narrator's perfection, a fact the townspeople could never comprehend. Shams deliberately rest created scandal, touched sensitive nerves, and used words that appeared to everyone like blasphemy to the public in order to shock and provoke everyone, even his adoring fan club. He forced the narrator to forget everything he knew by throwing his books into water. Although Shams was a highly capable scholar of tafsir and had and dept. knowledge of alchemy, astrology, astronomy, theology, philosophy, and logic, he kept this hidden from the ignorant and acted as if he were a mere faqir.

Shams pushed the narrator into extreme social situations, such as opening their doors to a prostitute, sharing food with her, and sending the narrator to a tavern to talk to drunks. He even made the narrator beg across from the mosque where he used to preach, forcing him to experience the life of a leper beggar. Through these trials, Shams cut him off from his admirers, the ruling elite, and common people. Shams believed that all idols standing between an individual and God including fame, wealth, rank, and religion had to be demolished. He severed the mental boundaries and prejudices that tied the narrator to his old life, confronting every taboo head-on. Despite looking deranged to his most loyal followers, the narrator accepted these "blows" because Shams had successfully ruined his reputation to bring him closer to the divine.

By applying a hermeneutic reading, the actions Rumi performs at Shams's request can be understood as part of the Sufi path, where the seeker must gradually abandon the ego. In Sufism, this destruction of the lower self is expressed through the doctrine of fanâ, the "passing away" or annihilation of the self before God. Abu Nasr al-Sarraj defines fana as "the passing away of the attributes of the lower self (nafs) and the passing away of the repugnance to, and reliance upon, anything that may happen," while Al-Hujwiri describes it as the annihilation of all remembrance of others so that only the remembrance of God (baqa al-dhikr al-Haqq) remains. In other words, fana often glossed as "to die before one dies" involves breaking down the individual ego and recognizing the fundamental unity of God, creation, and the self. Read in this light, Shams's demands on Rumi in this passage are not arbitrary or sadistic; they aim to nurture Rumi's character by humiliating his social pride and forcing him to surrender his ego in front of people he and society consider immoral. Hermeneutically, the episode stages an inner spiritual training in fana rather than a display of cruelty or degradation.

A twenty-first-century reader brings a horizon shaped by modern psychology, social justice discourse, and contemporary ideas about power to this text. From such a perspective, what the narrator understands as Shams's spiritual discipline may instead appear as an intense and unstable power dynamic: the "deliberate fanning of gossip," the destruction of possessions, and the enforced distance from "loyal followers" and "ruling elite" can be read as emotional manipulation, boundary-breaking, or even a form of social punishment. At the same time, the narrator's willingness to stand "in the shoes of a leper beggar" can resonate positively with modern concerns for empathy, marginalized groups, and the critique of class privilege.

Contemporary frameworks around LGBTQ+ identities and same-sex intimacy further shape how "union" and "closeness" are understood by many modern readers. Expressions of total devotion to a man who "touches raw nerves," together with references to "blasphemy" and "shame," may be reinterpreted as the social stigma surrounding unconventional or non-heteronormative relationships, rather than purely spiritual scandal. In this way, the narrator's "deranged" appearance in the eyes of society can be taken as a symbol of a love that appears transgresses not only in religious terms but also in relation to contemporary norms of gender and sexuality. Such responses illustrate the core insight of reader-response theory: meaning emerges in the interaction between text and reader, and is continually reshaped by the reader's cultural and historical horizon.

In novel page 287 the line "she memorized the poem he wrote for someone else" can be read hermeneutically as an example of how poetry in the Sufi tradition transcends private ownership and becomes a vessel for deeper spiritual and emotional truth. Although the poem is written for another person, its language of longing allows it to speak beyond its original addressee and enter a wider field of meaning. From a reader-response perspective, however, a contemporary reader may focus on the emotional tension created by this act of memorization and interpret it as a sign of jealousy, romantic attachment, or unresolved desire. Thus, the passage illustrates how modern readers often receive Rumi-like love language through secular or sexual frameworks, while a hermeneutic reading situates it within a mystical tradition of love that exceeds individual possession.

On page293, when sultan walad says shams, the line "you are the only companion he needs" highlights the extraordinary closeness between Rumi and Shams. Hermeneutically, the statement reflects the Sufi idea that the spiritual guide becomes the seeker's true companion, leading him toward self-knowledge and divine awareness. A sham is therefore not merely a friend but a transformative presence whose companionship fulfills a deeper spiritual need. From a reader-response perspective, however, the same line may be interpreted by contemporary readers as signifying emotional exclusivity or romantic intensity, since modern cultural frameworks often read such close male companionship through the lens of personal attachment or sexuality. This demonstrates how the same text can generate different meanings depending on the reader's historical and cultural position.

In page 293 second paragraph, from a hermeneutic perspective, the passage expresses mystical longing and the redirection of spiritual attention. Shams's statement that "wherever he lived, there was my qibla" suggests that Rumi becomes the center of his spiritual orientation, not in a literal religious sense, but as a symbolic expression of divine love and inward devotion. In this reading, the pain of separation reflects the Sufi experience of longing for the Beloved, where the human figure functions as a mirror of God. From a reader-response perspective, however, a twenty-first-century reader may interpret the same language through the framework of romantic attachment or queer intimacy, since modern ideas of devotion, exclusivity, and emotional dependence often shape how such intense bonds are understood. This shows how the passage can generate multiple meanings depending on the reader's cultural horizon.

In this scene, the marriage between Shams and Kimya is presented through a conflict between social appearance and deeper spiritual truth. Literally, the passage describes Shams's physical inability to complete the marriage and Kimya's fear of shame in a culture that values female virginity as proof of honor. When Shams cuts his palm to stain the bedsheet, the act can be read hermeneutically as a sacrifice made to protect Kimya from the violence of an unjust social code. His statement that "a man like me should never have gotten married" suggests his awareness that his spiritual nature does not belong to settled domestic life, but to a higher moral and mystical calling. From a reader-response perspective, however, a twenty-first-century reader may focus on the scene as evidence of patriarchy, coercive marriage norms, and the control of women's bodies. The line about failing to consummate the marriage may also be interpreted by some modern readers through the lens of psychological conflict or non-normative desire, showing how contemporary cultural assumptions shape the meaning of intimacy and obligation.

The stories about Rumi and Shams of Tabriz in books and movies show a big difference in how people think about them now compared to a long time ago. When we look at how these two're shown in stories and compare that to what Sufi people believed a long time ago we can see that modern stories leave out the parts about Islam that were important to Rumi and Shams of Tabriz. So the important spiritual things that Rumi and Shams of Tabriz experienced, like sohbet, which is like a special friendship with God and fanā' which is like letting go of yourself and khalwa which is like being alone with God are now thought about in a more modern way. Now people think about Rumi and Shams of Tabriz as having a relationship that helps them become free as individuals, which is

what people nowadays like to hear. Rumi and Shams of Tabriz are shown in a way that's very different from what they really were and that is because modern stories, about Rumi and Shams of Tabriz are written for people who do not think about God in the same way that Rumi and Shams of Tabriz did.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Mawlana Jalal ud-Din Rumi and Shams of Tabriz represent a profound example of sacred companionship (sohbet) designed a specific type of friendship amid at helping each other in shedding in egoism and reveal Divine Truth. While modern Western adaptations like Elif Shafak's the Forty Rules of Love is very effective at popularizing Rumi for global audiences, they frequently achieve this accessibility by recasting sacred spiritual devotion into the familiar language of secular romance and personal therapeutic healing. Acknowledging the hermeneutic shift between the 13th-century Sufi horizon and the 21st-century secular reader horizon restores Rumi's legacy to its true context: a soaring testament to divine love, rooted deeply in Islamic spiritual tradition.

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