

‘Panentheistic’ View of Divine Love in Man and Nature: A Comparative Study in Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* and Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi’s *Mathnavi*

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Abstract

This article is a part of my MA thesis *A Comparative Study of Walt Whitman and Jalal Al-Din Rumi’s Poetry in Relation to Mysticism*, in which the researcher has attempted to investigate the common mystical and transcendental tenets of Walt Whitman and Rumi despite their geographical distance, language differences and historical divisions. In this comparative study, *Leaves of Grass* and Rumi’s *Mathnavi* have been examined as the writers’ major works. This work deals with both poets’ mystical view of human beings and the image of the Divine. In order to do so, attention is paid to two common, major themes: ‘Man’s Divinity in Love’ and ‘God and the Nature-Mystics’. Moreover, the concepts of ‘pantheism’ and ‘panentheism’ as well as the Sufi expression *wahdat al-wujud* are discussed in Whitman and Rumi’s poetic works.

1. Introduction

The comparative study of Walt Whitman (1819-1892) and Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-1273) is significant for several reasons. Firstly, Rumi’s *Mathnavi* is one of the most challenging mystical literary works in Persian literature as well as the Islamic world.¹ In the same way, Whitman’s major work *Leaves of Grass* is considered one of the most challenging literary works not only in the history of American literature but in world literature. Secondly, Whitman sets forth a new concept of mysticism² in poetry as a natural reaction to the material world while Rumi, on the other hand, postulates a traditional concept of mysticism in his rhymed poems as an internal response to the universe. Rumi and Whitman both admire the body and the soul, the material as well as the spiritual, evil and good. Therefore, one can find elements from various religions, non-religious and philosophical concepts in their literary works; elements of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Rumi’s *Mathnavi* contains the roots of religion, and deals with the discovery of the mysteries of reunion and certain knowledge.³ Thirdly, Whitman applies a new form of poetry in American literature: for many it is neither epic, nor lyric, nor ode, nor verse. It is as if Whitman speaks to the readers by putting some pieces together that are irrelevant while they indirectly reveal a sublime meaning. Rumi, according to Halman, may well be the only major philosopher in history to express and formulate an entire system of thought in verse (1988, 195). Moreover, Rumi speaks of the sacred in nature and in humanity with a great confidence and assurance. Clinton believes that earlier, English Mystic poets like George Herbert and John Donne made use of a similar style, but there was no such a voice in American poetry until Walt Whitman (1999). However, such a voice is not limited to a specific time or space, as Whitman says: “the true emotional, moral, and aesthetic natures of humanity have not radically changed” (1990, 433). As Transcendentalism and Sufism both espouse the view that the Divine permeates all objects (animate/inanimate) and the purpose of human life is union with God, the researcher focuses on this aspect.

2. Man’s Divinity in Love:

Mysticism is not a religion in itself, but is rather the most vital element in all religions, rising up in revolt against cold formality and religious torpor. Moreover, it is not a philosophical

system. The aim of most mystics is to establish a conscious relation with the Absolute, in which they can find the personal object of love. They desire to know they love. Their desire for union is founded neither on curiosity nor on self-interest. Generally, religions separate the Divine from the human; Mysticism aspires to intimate union with the Divine within the soul and to a disappearance of the individuality in the Divine and goes beyond religion (Smith 1973, 5). They transcend the temporal and the material for the sake of communion, even of union, with the Abiding and the Real. They abandon the old life of the natural man, with all its limitations and desires in order to attain the freedom of a new supernatural Life or Being which is everlasting. The mystics present their real experience of what is called 'Eternity'.

The images of the Divine in Islam and Christianity are presented with certain human emotions such as kindness, affection, mercy, anger, or wrath. In other words, there are many passages in the Bible as well as in the Koran in which God is described in terms of human emotions in order to be more understandable to humanity. It is clear that the relation between human beings and God is the main concern in these holy books. Moreover, in the Koran God is given 99 names which is a classical list of Allah, the Muslim name for God; merciful, kind, compassionate, forgiving, and so on and so forth; even God refers to Himself as the *al-zahir* (Outward) and the *al-batin* (Inward) (Nasr, 1991, 16).⁴ Rumi and Whitman employ such an image of God, mostly in a transcendental and mystical way. For both poets only love is enough to qualify God in His complete image and humankind in the creation.

Therefore, the noble task of Rumi and Whitman is to transform the traditionally unknowable images of the Divine into a humanistic and mystic one; God is addressed as "the Divine Beloved" and "the Great Camerado". Rumi and Whitman, in their mystical poems, frequently use such images to show the fraternal relation between human beings and God. God is experienced as the source of love and affection in the human heart, therefore seeking the world within is considered the main task in order to be unified with Him. In their literary works, the Divine is the Compassionate Brother of the humans, their loving father, and the Companion of their soul. In other words, through realizing the divine love and seeking a supreme experience of self-realization, the human being dwells within the Supreme Being. The reason why the world lacks unity is, according to Ralph Waldo Emerson, that man is "disunited with himself" (in Ekhtiar, 1976, 95). For Whitman and Rumi, the main reason for existence is to journey from the outward, the world without, to the inward, the world within, to return to the origin; to the Transcendental Centre.

Walt Whitman considers man and God the major theme of his verse. The American poet chants the "great pride of man in himself" which is a motif of nearly all of his verses. Whitman addresses God as the original source of love in his "Passage to India": "Thou mightier centre of the true, the good, the loving,/ The mortal ... affection's source..." (1990, 321). Rumi also refers to God as his Beloved, when he dies and leaves the world he joins with his Beloved. This Beloved gives him another life. This is his beloved that is immortalized (In Star and Shiva 1992, 19 and 82):

You call me an Infidel.
You call me old, young, a newborn.
When I leave this world, don't call me Dead.
Say rather, he was dead, then suddenly he came to life and ran off with the Beloved.
...
So you want Union?
Union is not something found on the ground or purchased at the marketplace.

Union comes only at the cost of life.
Otherwise, everyone and his brother would have this union.

God as the source of love is for the mystic a perfect image that can justify this concept of universal unity. In many religious sources, rationalistically God may be Reason, but for the mystic He is Love. In addition, love, as mystic experience, is the divine nature of humankind. Whitman celebrates in his *Leaves of Grass* his “Song of Love,” as Rumi does in his *Mathnavi* and *Divan-e-Shams*. One of the main guides for Rumi and Whitman to move on their upward path as mystics is love. To them, whatever they find and to whatever type of religion they attach themselves, their object is conceived as the Beloved. They regard themselves as the lover, yearning for the consummation of their love in union with the One they love.

Therefore, mystics can explain the nature of the universe, or the unitive nature of the universe, in a more acceptable manner than cosmologists or philosophers. Rumi and Whitman explain their best understanding and perception on how love acts as a cosmic force in the universe (in Nicholson 1975, 117): “The motion of every atom is inwards its origin; / A man comes to be the thing on which he is bent. By the attraction of fondness and yearning, the soul and heart/ Assume the qualities of the Beloved, who is the Soul of souls”. While for Whitman (1990, 419) it is the central urging in every atom: “(Often unconscious, often evil, downfallen,) / To return to its divine source and origin, however distant, / Latent the same in subject and in object, without one exception”. Rumi, as well as Whitman, links both his soul and the heart to his “Beloved”, “the Soul of souls”, as if without the existence of the Beloved nothing existed. For them, it is central in every “atom”.

Both poets also refer to the images of the sea as the primeval source of life in which man seeks to be submerged in order to be immortal. Their source of love is presented by boundless and immortal images of the sea. For them this is the love that gives humankind an immortal soul:

Rumi:

The Fount of Immortality
In love is found
The come, and in His boundless sea
Of love be drowned. (In Arberry 1949, 25)

And in Whitman (1990, 321):

Bathe me O God in thee, mounting to thee,
I and my soul to range in range of thee.

O Thou transcendent,
Nameless, the fiber and the breath,
Light of the light, shedding forth universes, thou center of them,
Thou mightier center of true, the good, the loving,
Thou moral, spiritual fountain—affection’s sources—thou reservoir,
(O pensive soul of me—O thirst unsatisfied—waitest not there?
Waitest not haply for us somewhere there the Comrad perfect?)

For many, the God of wrath may have His place in a universe tainted with sin and evil, but He has no relevance to a universe envisioned by the mystic; a universe overflowing with love and unity. Although the mystic adores the same Biblical and Koranic anthropomorphic God, all his anthropomorphism is transformed into love (Fayez 1979, 150). Accordingly, it is through divine love that God becomes incarnated in humanity and humankind becomes divine, as Rumi says (in Nicholson 1989, 51): “Be drunken in love for Love in all that exists; / Without the dealing of love there is no entrance to be [sic] Beloved”. Through these lines, readers can see Rumi’s non-traditional view of the Divine. It is clear that his mystic views are beyond religion and his love is an eternal one. All of these elements, according to the poet, are because of the divine nature of human beings. Moreover, for Walt Whitman, the human soul is both holy inside and outside. The

divinity of human nature is beyond all religions. Whitman, also, in section 24 of “Song of Myself” calls himself a “kosmos” and “Divine”:

Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,
....
Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touch'd from,
The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer,
This head more than churches, bibles, and all the creeds. (1990, 48-9)

Since, for the mystic, God is incarnated in humanity, the mystic poets' spiritual love for humankind can be elevated to symbolize it in love for the Divine Beloved. Whitman and Rumi also believe in such a divine nature in human beings. “When Rumi”, says Halman, “found Shams Tabrizi [his spiritual teacher and real friend]⁵ symbolically his God again ... he wrote a poetic celebration of reunion”. Nobody can forget that this love leads to the reunion of man and his Beloved, as Rumi says (in Halman 1988, 193): “Blessed moment, Here we sit in this palace of love, you and I. / We have two shapes, two bodies, but a single soul, you and I”. Whitman also seeks his appointed “rendezvous” with his “Lord”, the great “Camerado”, in these lines of “Song of Myself”:

My rendezvous is appointed, it is certain,
The Lord will be there and wait till I come on perfect terms,
The great Camerado, the lover true of whom I pine will be there. (1990, 73)

Moreover, Fredrick Schyberg, in 1951, gave a clear understanding of both poets' symbolic beloved; Rumi's symbolic merges with the “Beloved” by embracing his spiritual friend Shams Tabrizi and Whitman's relationship to his “Great Camerado”:

At the end of the road [in “Song of Myself”], as the conclusion of all the wandering, the transformations and visions, there stands the Great Camerado whom Whitman mentioned in Section 45. We cannot fail to recall the Persian Rumi who also described his reunion with a friend (his real friend Shamsi Tabriz) as symbolic of his union with God. By coincidence in world literature, the result of a similarity in disposition and way of thinking which is extremely noteworthy in the ‘connecting links of literary history’, Whitman used as conclusion for his pantheistic vision the very same lyrical imagery as the Persian poet, that of a friend into whose arms he falls to be united finally and completely with Infinite and Whole (Schyberg 1951, 93).

Such a realization of the unity of the Divine in terms of love, comradeship, and brotherhood prevents the mysticism of Rumi and Whitman from becoming a dogmatic one. There is nothing more poetic and mystical than to name all men and women lovers and God the “Beloved”, as Jalal al-Din Rumi does, or to call all men and women brothers or comrades and God the “Elder Brother” and “Great Camerado”, as Whitman does. Such a fraternal relationship between man and God makes the world of the mystic poet full of peace, beauty, love, ecstasy, tenderness, and unity. The mystic poets, like Whitman and Rumi, find no barrier in the universe for they always want to touch life and feel it.

Whitman, like the Persian Sufi poets, sees God in the “faces of men and women”. The American poet sees something of God each moment everywhere. Therefore, he is not curious about Him. He clearly chants his vision of God:

And I say to mankind, Be not curious about God,
For I who am curious about each am not curious about God,
(No array of terms can say how much I am at peace about God and about death.)

I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least,
 Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself.
 Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
 I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then,
 In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass,
 I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is sign'd by God's name,
 And I leave them where they are, for I know that wheresoe'er I go,
 Others will punctually come for ever and ever. (1990, 76)

Since these poets believe in the divine nature of the human and the presence of the Divine not only in humankind but also in all creatures and nature, they see and hear His signs everywhere. Whitman, like a Persian poet, reaches to *Shohud*, one of the Sufi stages, where he can see the Absolute. He knows that the Divine essential nature is not fully comprehensible to humankind; however, it brings his soul to such a level that it can experience its divine nature by being in love with Him.

It appears that neither Rumi nor Whitman see a dualism between the universe and its creative soul. For Whitman, "Santa Spirita" is both form and essence, the body and the soul; it is the universe in its absolute material and spiritual being, as he describes in "Chanting the Square Deifice":

Santa Spirita, breather, life,
 Beyond the light, lighter than light,
 Beyond the flames of hell, joyous, leaping easily above hell,
 Beyond Paradise, perfumed solely with mine own perfume,
 Including all life on earth, touching, including God, including Saviour and Satan,
 Ethereal, pervading all, (for without me what were all? What were God?)
 Essence of forms, life of the real identities, permanent, positive, (namely the unseen).
 (1990, 340)

Each poet presents the "self" moving back and forth, between the conscious and the unconscious, between the real and the ideal, life and death in spiritual rebirth, between itself and its immortal source; the Over-soul or the Higher Self. Therefore, the "self" celebrated in the poems of Rumi and Whitman is a representative universal one. This imaginative, creative, and universal "self" provides the key to most of the fundamental affinities. To compare the mystic idea and images of both poets in this matter one can consider how Whitman's "Song of Myself" begins with an "I" and "thou" duality: "I celebrate myself, and sing myself, / And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (1990, 90).

Whitman looks for "Me myself". In his "Song of Myself" there are many people and things around him, even his "dinner, dress....", that "comes of him" days and nights, "[b]ut they are not," as the poet says, "the Me myself" (1990, 31-2). Whitman's "Me myself" is the Over-soul, the Higher self and the Divine. Rumi speaks of the same concept as he boldly addresses his Beloved: "Thou didst continue this 'I' and 'we' in order to play the game of worship with Thyself, / That all 'I's' and 'thou's' might become one soul and at last be submerged in the Beloved" (in Nicholson 1925, *Mathnavi*, I. 1776).

For Rumi, as Nicholson believes, God essentially is both the object of worship and the worshipper. The illusion of individuality, "I" and "we", arises from the interplay of two opposite aspects, essence and form, under which the one Reality may be regarded (Nicholson 1966, 34). For the Persian poet all phenomena are individualized modes of Real Being or Self; when stripped of their individuality, they become one with each other and with Real Being. Therefore, God reveals Himself in every union of loving souls. Rumi says the same in his poetic language in *Mathnavi*:

Where are threshold and dais in reality? Where the Beloved is, where are “we” and “I”?
O Thou whose soul is free from “we” and “I”, O Thou who are the essence of the spirit in
men and women,
When men and women become one, Thou art that One; when the unites are wiped out, lo,
Thou art that Unity. (in Nicholson 1925, *Mathnavi*, I. 1784)

According to Whitman, human is both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it; the “father” who is also the “brother”. Whitman addresses God as a big brother that is always approachable: “Listener up here! What have you to confide to me? / Look in my face while I snuff the sidle of evening, / (Talk honestly, no one else hears you, and I stay only a minute longer.)” (1990, 78). Moreover, Loving refers to Whitman as a mystic poet in celebrating himself, “a person, a human being ... in the later half of the Nineteenth Century”, who speaks to all humankind as emblems of God (1990, ix). The poet believes each man is the fruit of the past and the promise of the future:

I am an acme of things accomplish'd, and I an encloser of things to be.

....

Before I was born out of my mother generations guided me,
My embryo has never been torpid, nothing could overlay it.

For it the nebula cohered to an orb,
The long slow strata piled to rest it on,
Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,
Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths and deposited it with care.

All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and delight me,
Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul. (1990, 72)

Finding Whitman's God is a matter of which he himself is an immortal part, the poet as a man asserts a feeling of equality with his deity (Keenan 1965, 135). His God is the “great Camerado” whose spirit is the “brother” of his own. For both poets, undoubtedly, their Beloved has a power that contains every object; every phenomena and every creature originated from Him and returns to Him. Mystic poets like Whitman make a journey inside to raise humanity up toward “Me Myself”. This is the task of the mystic. Neither Rumi nor Whitman is a pantheist;⁶ for they know human beings have a different nature and the world is not illusion. They transcend humankind to experience and taste the eternal nature of the human soul by being in love with the One.

3. God and the Nature-Mystics:

Mystic poets, like Whitman and Rumi, often claim that nature, humankind and also the whole universe are images or attributes of God; signs of God the Divine Unity. They see humanity and nature as diverse images of one unifying force. Rumi describes such a unifying universal force as an archetypal force and Whitman as an “eidolon” and “the seed perfection” (1982, 160). Such a cosmic and universal force has different terms in different creeds and schools, in Hinduism *Brahman*, in Sufism *Al-Haq* and in Transcendentalism (for Whitman and Emerson) *Santa Spirita* or *Over-soul*. Rumi says: “All this multiformity is one; whoever sees double is a squint-eyed mankind” (in Nicholson 1966, 152). In Whitman's “A Persian Lesson”, “the greybeard Sufi” gives his “last lesson” to “the young priests and students” (1990, 419). He teaches God is everything, “Allah is all, all, all”, and Allah is “immanent” in every object, animate and inanimate:

Finally my children, to envelop each word, each part of the rest,
Allah is all, all, all—is immanent in every life and object,
May-be at many and many-a-more removes—yet Allah, Allah, Allah is there.

...
It is the central urge in every atom.... (1990, 419)

These lines recall Rumi's concept of unity in his *Mathnavi*. In other words, these lines indicate how Whitman was familiar with Persian Sufism.⁷ Fayeze reminds us that this is the Sufi voice of Whitman at the age of sixty-nine, three years before his death in 1892 (1980, 33). One may say, in its primary judgment, it shows the impact of Rumi's mysticism. In the following lines, Rumi explains how every atom is moving toward its origin. His philosophical idealism is based on the idea that God is everywhere in Humankind and Nature; in other words, God has an omnipresent reality:

The motion of every atom is towards its origin;
A man comes to be the thing on which he is bent
By the attraction of fondness and yearning, the soul and the heart
Assume the qualities of the Beloved, who is the Soul of souls. (In Nicholson, 1989, 152)

For Whitman it is the “central urge” in everything, as he says in “Song of Myself”:

It is the central urge in every atom,
(Often unconscious, often evil, downfallen,)
To return to its divine source and origin, however distant,
Latent the same in subject and in object, without one exception. (1990, 419)

Moreover, he suggests that the signs of God are everywhere. As has been seen, the poet considers that the Divinity permeates and spreads through all objects.

The spiritual and mystic seeing in both poets' vision includes identifying with things, becoming the thing; which is different from ordinary seeing. Such a mystic seeing is the same as a transcendental one. For Whitman it is nothing more than the all-seeing dynamic transcendent self. He is like William Wordsworth, the nature-mystic poet, who in his contemplation of creation feels his oneness with its Creator. Wordsworth's poetry is full of the mystic sense of the Presence of the Divine. In the *Prelude* he writes of it: “It was only then/ Contented when with bliss ineffable/ I felt the sentiment of Being spread/ O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still;/ O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of thought/ And human knowledge, to human eye/ Invisible, yet liveth to the heart....” (1993, 230-1). In his “Salut au Monde!”, Whitman sees all things and feels them, embraces them as a part of a whole:

What do you hear Walt Whitman?
I hear the workman singing and the farmer's wife singing,
...
I hear the Arab muezzin calling from the top of the mosque,
I hear the Christian priests at the altars of their churches, I hear the responsive base and soprano,
...
What do you see Walt Whitman?
...
I see distant lands, as real and near to the inhabitants of them as my land is to me ...
I see the cities of the earth and make myself at random a part of them,
I am a real Parisian,
I am a habitant of Vienna, St. Petersburg, Berlin, Constantinople,

...
And I salute all the inhabitants of the earth.
You whoever you are!

...
Health to you! good will to you all, from me and America sent!
Each of us inevitable,
Each of us limitless—each of us with his or her right upon the earth,
Each of us allow'd the eternal purports of the earth,
Each of us here as divinely as any is here...
Salut au monde!

The mystic gives his “Salut” to everybody. His poetic voice has a boundless energy and capacity to see and be all things. One must keep in mind the poet’s idea of material and spiritual unity in the world (Keenan 1965, 31). However, the drama of self-performance and self-identification is completed by experiencing both the world within and the world without. One may think Whitman contradicted the transcendentalist or American romantic concept of nature as the ‘Not-me’, that is, he believes in the Neo-platonic sense of nature as the emblem of God. In this connection, the fact that Whitman, in “Song of Myself”, sees God in everybody should once more be remembered.

Both poets see beyond the external facts of every natural image, for they use a kind of symbolic language. They see a spirit, or an “archetype”, or an “Eidolon”, “Beloved”, primordial image, “the seed perfection”—which are all merely different terms for the same Universal, Unifying and higher Creative force.

The “Divine Essence” in Rumi and “Santa Spirita” in Whitman are proper names for various creative aspects of such a Universal soul or force. All mystic and transcendentalist experience intuit the same unifying primeval power.

Rumi, in his poetry and non-poetry works, often speaks of the Unity of Spirit in humankind and nature, the unity that is gained through the imminence and omnipresence of the Divine. Rumi, for example, chants in his Sufi ecstatic terms: “Know that phenomenal forms are pitches: with draught of the Ideal, / Like a pitcher, we all are being filled with an emptied continually” (In Nicholson 1989, 215). Or here:

What is this fountain...
The Soul whence issue all created things
Doubtless the river shall not cease to flow.
Till silenced are the everlasting spirings [sic]. (In Nicholson 1966, 109)

Or even here: “ Everything you see has its roots in the Unseen world. / The forms may change, yet the essence remains the same (in Star and Shiva 1992, 148).

On the other hand, there is Whitman with similar ideas, his “Eidolon” (1990, 12-14) is that unifying force, “everlasting”, the “true realities”, the “entities of entities”, the “permanent life of life”. Favez compares the poets from this viewpoint:

Whitman has a similar expression in ‘Eidolons’ in which phenomenal forms are seen to be filled with eidolons (spiritual effluxes) of the one Cosmic Unifying Eidolon permeating everything in the Universe. Rumi considers nature a phenomenal form, but it should be remembered that phenomenality for him is life in everlasting renewing process, for it is the nature of the soul to continue the cycle of life-death-rebirth. (1979, 147)

For both Whitman and Rumi, as mystic poets the world or the universe is not illusion or maya,⁸ as in Indian thought. It should be remembered the mystic poets like Rumi and Whitman never view the material world as an illusion. For them, Nature or the material world plays the

role of a veil through which man can see God. As Rumi says, “I have put duality away, I have seen that the two worlds are one ... He is the Outward, He is the Inward”. For Rumi the material world itself is not illusion. This physical world manifests the eternal truths, because “God hath mingled the dusty earth / A draught of Beauty from His choicest cup” (in Nicholson 1966, 45). The poet concludes that there is no death and that all life exists within a more comprehensive spiritual development moving ever “onward and outward” (in Nicholson 1966, 45).

They are the mystics who never think about discrimination and division. They always think about One, *vahid*.⁹ Rumi, as well as Whitman, often seeks unity. According to their artistic vision, that unity is love. They never allow any fragmentation in the God-omnipresent and God-imminent earth. All parts of the earth are experienced in such a way to be interconnected, flowing into one another, becoming one another, living one another and renewing the life-death-rebirth evolutionary cycle.

In section 6 of “Song of Myself” Whitman is armed with a new knowledge. After confronting the question “*What is the grass?*”, he gives a proper evaluation of “grass” as the “babe” of the vegetation, symbol of the external organic world (Allen and Davis 1955, 150). Western critics like Keenan believe that Whitman repeatedly weaves into his poetry notions of the equality and unity of all things against the background of the universal and eternal (1965, 32). In section 17 of “Song of Myself” the image of the “grass” symbolizes in its vastness a unity of many parts. The joining of the “grass” image with that of the “common air” identifies the commonness, equality, and universality already associated with infinite “grass”. In this section Whitman returns to the symbol of the mystical grass and couples it with an element equally as widespread and endless: “This is the grass that grows wherever the land is and the water is, / This is the common air that bathes the globe” (Whitman 1990, 43). Whitman, in discussing nature, resorts both to “grass” and “animal”, for they remind the poet of the question of nature, God and humankind in the universe. In *Leaves of Grass* the “truths” that lie in every portion of reality are accompanied by the recurring image of the “grass”. The wonders of the universe are mirrored in the meanest and the most common objects and creatures. “I believe”, says Whitman, “a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars ...” (1990, 53). Of course, there are many examples in *Leaves of Grass* that indicate the poet’s great wonder at creation and the miracles that lie behind even the lowliest flower: “That I walk up my stoop, I pause to consider if it really be” (Whitman 1990, 49).

Whitman’s belief in the equality and union of all things in creation does not exclude his awareness of man’s capability and potential. However, for a mystic poet like Whitman, man is always the perfection that forever exceeds all other perfections in creation (Keenan 1965, 48-9). Whitman often moves toward understanding of his own place in the order of things. Whitman, understanding the animals’ place in nature’s pattern, says:

I am enamour’d of growing out-doors,
Of men that live among cattle or taste of the ocean or woods,
...
I can eat and sleep with them week in and week out.
What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easiest, is Me.... (1990, 39)

Therefore, Rumi and Whitman, as true mystics, always feel united with the earth and nature, because the earth is in them and they are in the earth, as much as a child is linked to his parents. “I am ever in concord”, says Rumi, “with this father (the earth) of ours, and it ever appears a paradise” (1975, 214). Whitman, in his “A Song of the Rolling Earth” explains what it means to be “in concord” with the earth: “I swear the earth shall surely be complete to him or her who shall be complete, / The earth remains jagged and broken only to him or her who is jagged and broken” (1982, 164). Sometimes Rumi’s love for Nature and the earth is very much like that of Whitman’s:

And earth ever appears to me as a paradise.
Each moment a fresh form, a new beauty,
So that weariness vanishes at these ever-fresh sights.
I see the world filled with blessings—
Fresh water ever welling up from new fountains.
The sound of those waters reaches my ears,
My brain and senses are intoxicated there with,
Branches of trees dancing like fair damsels,
Leaves clapping hands like singers...
These glories are a mirror shining through a veil.... (1975, 214)

Walt Whitman, like Rumi, employs natural elements as a means of revealing his mystic ideas. As the “caresser of life,” the singer of “chants” and of “Omens! Omens!” the poet can not exclude the land, the sea or nature itself from his consideration. For they actually contain the endless “items” of catalogues. In section 22 of “Song of Myself” the poet chants: “Shall I make my list of things in the house and skip the house that supports them?” (1990, 46).

For Whitman earth is supposed to be His language. The material world and objects in nature are “the substantial words”. The poet believes that human bodies, as well as the things in the ground and sea, are “myriads of words” in the true Logos. The earth is “complete”, “positive and direct”, and its “greatness and power” are ideals to be praised. In “A Song of the Rolling Earth” Whitman considers that such a “divine ship sails the divine sea” for man. And finally this earth, the universal mother, is filled with the “seed perfection”:

In the broad earth of ours,
Amid the measureless grass and the slag,
Enclosed and safe within its central heart,
Nestles the seed perfection. (1982, 166)

Although things by nature are perfect and beautiful, it is love and divine joy in the heart of the mystic poet that permeate its surroundings.

A song of the rolling earth, and of words according,
Were you thinking that those were the words, those upright lines? Those curves, angles,
dots?
No, those are not the words, the *substantial words* are in the ground and sea,
They are in the air, they are in you.

...
Air, soil, water, fire-those are words. (1990, 167; emphasis added)

From Whitman’s and Rumi’s viewpoint the earth or material world are not simply the signs and symbols externalizing the presence of some spiritual force. The unity of the Divine is translated, animated into both forms and ideas. Therefore, the forms are seen to be more than symbols, for each one, “from the smallest atom of dust to the largest orbs”, is a “microcosm”. For them the earth is seen to be such a macrocosm complete in itself and complete within each of its parts. It is the idea that nature stands as a veil over the Divine by which man cannot see Him physically, but can see Him metaphysically. In other words, He uses such natural and physical elements to lead man to the metaphysical world. The Divine plays with humanity’s physical percipient capability. Man also uses nature to acknowledge and understand God through self-knowledge. Therefore, the mystics, like Whitman and Rumi, consider nature to reach a higher truth. Rumi clearly describes the significance of these physical veils (*hijab* or *niqab*) in nature in his *Fihi ma fihi*:

So he [man] does not see the Master at this moment without a veil. So it is with all desires and affections, all loves and fondnesses which people have for every variety of thing—father, mother, heaven, earth, gardens, palaces, branches of knowledge, acts, things to eat and drink. The man of God realises that all these desires are the desire of God, and all those things are veils. (in Arberry 1961, 46)

When man passes out of this physical world and beholds the Divine without these veils, he will understand that all those were veils and coverings. “Their quest” says Rumi “being in reality the One Thing ... and they [‘men’] will hear in their hearts the answer to all questions and all problems, and everything will be seen face to face” (In Arberry 1961, 46). God has created nature and these veils for a “good purpose”. Men could not have the power to endure and enjoy God’s beauty, if He would appear without a veil. Rumi says: “Through the intermediary of these veils we desire succour and benefit” (In Arberry 1961, 46).¹⁰

Whitman’s view of God is not as a deity in the traditional Christian or Hebraic sense. He is not a pantheist because creation for a pantheist is not merely the handiwork of a creator; it is really the substance of the creator itself. In pantheism, the created is equal with the creator. The poet says:

I believe in you my soul...
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
...
And that the kelson of the creation is love. (1990, 32)

For him it is an exciting creed; because in it there is the great union of all created things, a oneness of matter and spirit. Whitman, as a mystic poet, seeks participation in the divine nature of all creation. As has been amply demonstrated, neither Rumi nor Whitman is a pantheist. Pantheism does not apply to Sufism either. It is true that both Sufism and pantheism say that the world is God, but the Sufi like Rumi understands that God is absolutely other than the world.

Whitman and Rumi, as world-affirming mystics, believe that the physical world of nature and the human body are essentially good. They have a positive attitude toward nature. In addition, they are not world-denying pantheists that devalue the real world and nature. Unlike many Hindu and Buddhist pantheists, they suggest that the material world and nature are not mere illusions or Maya.

4. Conclusion:

Rumi and Whitman describe God’s relation to nature and the material world both in a ‘transcendent’—ontologically as well as epistemologically—and ‘immanent’ sense.¹¹ Both poets establish some equilibrium between the two poles of transcendence and immanence in such a way that they never emphasize one pole more than the other. They have never emphasized immanence too heavily in such a way to become pantheists. Moreover, they are mystic poets who never emphasize transcendence in such a way that God becomes estranged and distant from His creation. And it is love that balances these two poles. One should be loved so as to be able to establish the equilibrium to see the transcendental power as his/her Beloved.

Accordingly, they describe nature, the world or universe, as a finite creation within the infinite being of God. One may consider Whitman and Rumi as panentheists, according to their vision toward nature and God. In their panentheistic idea, they maintain that the Divine can be both transcendent and immanent at the same time. From their viewpoint, God might be everything without being identical with everything.

They declare that everything in creation derives from God. He is the One Reality. He is the Absolute Reality. Such a mystic Unity of the Divine in His relation to the universe is the concept of *Wahdat al-wujud*,¹² especially in the later tradition of Sufism and Islamic philosophy.

It is often a synonym for *tawhid*, but in Rumi and Whitman there has been a mystical approach to express it. It seems that these mystic poets give witness that “there is no god but God”.

Consequently, Walt Whitman and Jalal al-Din Rumi both believe in a unifying force or One that is everywhere, in Nature and Humankind. For them, since God has an omnipresent reality, He is permeated and spread through all objects. Both poets see beyond the external facts of every natural image and use a symbolic language. They see a spirit, an “archetype”, an “Eidolon”, the “Beloved” or the “seed perfection”, that are the same. They are all different terms for the same Universal Unifying and Higher Creative Force.

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NOTES

¹ It is Rumi's main work with 26,000 couplets called *Seiqal-e-Ruh* (*Soul Polish*), *Dokkan-e-faqr* (*Poverty Shop*), *dokkan-e-vahdat* (*Unity Shop*). Some parts of *Mathnavi* has been translated into Spanish by Alberto Manzano (*Poemas sufies*. Madrid: Hiperión, 1988), and Antonio López Ruiz (*150 Cuentos sufies*. Barcelona: Paidós Orientalia, 1991).

² Basic to the idea of Mysticism is union, but not only are there different kinds of union, there are different understandings of the object with which union is achieved.

³ *Mathnavi* is the Grand Jurisprudence of God, the most glorious Law of the Deity, the most manifest Evidence of the Divine Being (Arberry 1963, 235) Likewise, Abd al-Rahman Jami (d. 1492), a Persian poet in the late fifteenth century, called *Mathnavi* "the Koran in the Persian tongue". According to Schimmel, *Mathnavi* "reflects the experience of divine love" (1994, 15).

⁴ S.H. Nasr comments that the Outward face of things is not sheer illusion; it has a reality on its own level. Nasr in his *Sufi Essays* says, "to live in the outward is to possess already the blessing of existence, to be more than nothing. But to remain satisfied solely with the outward is to reject and betray the very nature of man, whose profoundest reason for existence is to journey from the outward to the inward, to the Transcendent Center, and to return to Creation its origin" (1991,16).

⁵ Rumi is said to have taken one or two journeys to Syria; where he may have met Ibn Arabi the Andalusian, that is the leading Islamic theosophist whose interpreter and stepson Sadr al-Din Qunawi was Rumi's colleague and friend in Konya. Rumi was influenced by Ibn Arabi's theory of Unity of Existence. The important moment in Rumi's life occurred in 1244, when it is said he met Shams Tabrizi (Shams al-Din Tabrizi) in the street of Konya. Shams was a wandering Dervish whose personality revealed to Rumi the mystery of divine majesty and beauty. For months the two mystics lived together and Rumi neglected his disciples, who became angry and forced Shams to leave the town. Then, he was brought back by Rumi's eldest son, but this time the family could not tolerate the close relation of Rumi with his master and one night in 1247 Shams disappeared. This experience of love and loss turned Rumi into a poet. He composed *Divan-e Shams*; a collection of lyrical poems for his beloved.

⁶ 'Pantheism' stresses the identity between God and the universe. 'Panentheism' says that the universe is included in God but that God is more than the universe. It is used to describe the view that the world is a finite creation within the infinite being of God. Panentheism unlike pantheism, which holds to the divine immanence, maintains that the divine can be both transcendent and immanent at the same time. In other words, God might be in everything without being identical with everything. In addition, the panentheist focuses his/her worship on God in the mind and soul. The pantheist, on the other hand, focuses on Nature and the skies.

⁷ According to many there is plenty of evidence that shows Walt Whitman was familiar with Persian poetry and mysticism. It is clear that he has been influenced by Eastern mysticism, even Persian Sufism, though the writer does not prove and justify the thesis of Rumi's direct influence on Whitman. (Golkhosravi 2001, 44)

⁸ A term attached to the world that was seen to be an emanation of divine energy (maya). Maya is mysterious and attractive. Maya is mostly translated as 'illusion'.

⁹ See the definition of *Wahdat la-Wujud*.

¹⁰ Here Rumi refers to the Koran (7/ 139): "And when his Lord revealed Him to the mountain He made it crumble into dust."

¹¹ 'Transcendence' and 'Immanence': these terms describe the manner in which God is related to the world. 'Transcendence' indicates that God cannot be identified with the world but is infinitely above and beyond it. There are different forms of transcendence: Firstly, God is

ontologically transcendent, meaning that God is a self-contained reality that is not dependent on anything else for its existence. Ontological transcendence also describes the nature of God's, being unlike that of his creation, eternal and infinite. Secondly, God is epistemologically transcendent; meaning that God's essential nature remains incomprehensible to humankind, for a human's mind is simply incapable of grasping the Divine. Epistemological transcendence is expressed theologically in terms of holiness, mystery and incomprehensibility. 'Immanence' denotes God's indwelling and omnipresence in the world. Since the world is utterly dependent upon God, his constant presence is a necessity for its continued existence. Theologically, an equilibrium must be established between two poles of transcendence and immanence, for if immanence is too heavily emphasized there is a danger of pantheism, and if transcendence is emphasized God is in danger of becoming too distant from His creation.

¹² *Wahdat al-wujud* (Oneness of Being or Unity of Existence): a technical term of Sufism, which, it is said, has historical connections with the school of Ibn al-Arabi, the great Andalusian Sufi theologian. The expression is built from two words: *wahda* and *wujud*. Islamic theory and practice is grounded in the *shahada* or the giving witness that "there is no god but God" (in Arberry 1995, 54) it is the statement through which God's Unity is declared. The basic sense of *tawhid* or declaration of God's Unity is that everything in creation derives from God, who is One Reality. *Tawhid* is the same root *wahda*, *ahad*, *wahid* (one), *ahadiyya*, *wahdaniyya* (oneness, unity). *Wujud*, more specifically, refers both to God as the Absolute Reality and to the finding of God as experienced by God Himself and by the spiritual seeker. Many may classify the expression as pantheism, panentheism, existential monism or pantheistic monism. In this paper, as in the later tradition of Sufism and Islamic philosophy, *wahdat al-wujud* is often employed as a synonym for *tawhid*, but as a Sufi and mystical approach to expressing *tawhid*. (Chittick 1994)