From Rumi to William IX and Eleanor of Aquitaine: The Muslim – Arabic and Sufi Origins of Courtly Love and the Troubadours!

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A major Muslim Esoteric branch that influenced the troubadours and thus courtly love was Sufism as the path of Muslim mysticism. This is quite known in the research. However, the ties, the link and the direct relationship with Rumi was less known and it is this connection that I want to explore and address here. Here, it was specifically Jalal al-Din Rumi, the great Arabic Sufi poet, master and sage that played a main role in building the chivalric concept of the forbidden love especially that of infidelity where the Knight expresses his love to a married and unattainable lady. The same aspect of infidelity appears also in the secular Jewish art and music that was the other main route to influence the troubadours in the Mosarabic Spain and its courts of the Iberian Peninsula. This connection will be explored in another discourse dedicated exclusively to the Jewish origins of courtly love and the troubadour's gynocentrism. Born in Afghanistan, Rumi later emigrated to Quniya in Rum, Anatolia (hence his name) to further his education and to expand his wisdom and awareness of Sufism, a major religious and philosophical movement in Islamic thought. His relevance in general but especially for the troubadour's courtly love is found in his belief in Sufism and its central focus of love and intimacy for one’s soul and for God, especially through the model of infidelity as a powerful metaphor which serves as the ultimate expression of the divine love and the unity of God and man. Hence, the Sufi movement in Islam celebrated love and the inner thoughts and feelings of the individual. As standing opposed to the German expression of courtly love that is the "Minnesang" which adopted an all-embracing and formal worship of womanhood, the Sufi attitude is completely in sync and harmony with the French expression of courtly love which understood the concept as a personal issue between the courtly lover, the knight and troubadour, and his lady. Those who practiced Sufism believed in “a love that disregards rites and formulas and concentrates on inner feelings”. His poetry is similar to the motivation of the troubadours – a celebration of feelings of love and romance, as well as a focus on the individual. "TWO WAYS OF RUNNING" is a very well-known poem by Rumi that maybe expresses all of the above concepts that lie underneath the models described overhead especially those at the very basis of courtly love even more so in the context of infidelity as a powerful expression of the divine love in a human being. First, let's read the poem itself:

**TWO WAYS OF RUNNING**

"A certain man had a jealous wife and a very appealing maidservant. The wife was careful not to leave them alone, ever.

For six years they were never left in a room together.

But then, one day at the public bath the wife remembered she’d left her silver basin at home.

“Please, go get the basin,” she told her maid.

The girl jumped to the task knowing she would finally get to be alone with the master. She ran joyfully. She flew.

Desire took them both so quickly they didn’t latch the door. With great speed they joined. When bodies blend in copulation, spirits also merge.

Meanwhile, the wife back at the bathhouse is washing her hair. “What have I done! I’ve set cotton wool on fire! I’ve put the ram in with the ewe!”

She washed the clay soap off and ran, fixing her chador about her as she went.

The maid ran for love. The wife ran out of jealousy and fear.

There is a great difference.

A mystic lover flies moment to moment! The fearful ascetic drags along month to month.

The length of a day for a lover may be fifty thousand years! There’s no way to understand this with your mind. You must burst open!

Love is a quality of God. Fear is an attribute of those who think they serve God, but actually they’re preoccupied with penis and vagina.

Rule-keepers run on foot along the surface. Lovers move like lightning and wind. No contest.

Theologians mumble, rumble-dumble, necessity and free will, while lover and beloved pull themselves into each other.

The worried wife reaches the door and opens it. The maid is disheveled, flushed, unable to speak.

The husband begins his five-times prayer. As though experimenting with clothes, he holds up some flaps and edges.

She sees his testicles and penis so wet, semen still dribbling out, spurts of jism and vaginal juices drenching the thighs of the maid.

The wife slaps him on the side of the head, “Is this the way a man prays, with his balls? Does your penis long for union like this? Is that why her legs are so covered with this stuff?”

These are good questions. People who repress desires often turn, suddenly, into hypocrites.

It is clear that with the required adaptation and adjustments the troubadours’ themes and motivation are Arabic in origin and certainly evolving from the Sufi sect of Islam. After all, both Ibn al -‘Arabi (another poet of this genre) and Ibn Hazm travelled and lived on the Iberian Peninsula, just over the Pyrenees from France where the troubadours were writing and where William IX has learned the art and brought it back over to France. Rumi’s poetry appears to be a source of the themes of the forbidden and thwarted love as “he used language of romance […] for many of his poems are songs of sexual love, infidelity and drunkenness and often reveal a sense of ambiguity and the excitement of the forbidden common to much Sufi poetry”. Although as all Eastern courtly love, for example also seen in Modern Bollywood movies (early Sufism and Hinduism are tightly interconnected) where man and woman express co-mutual love and desire, this passage undoubtedly illustrates a passionate love that could not stand to be separated from the object of sexual desire – exactly in the same way as it appears in Cathar troubadour poetry. This is the sort of ambiguous, but vital, love that interested the Arabic poets as well as the troubadours. Additionally, Rumi writes that “life without [his beloved] is a torture and an agony to [him]”. Although this poem appears to be in worship to God, the language of desperation to be reunited and not separated from an object of desire is not only a link the other Arabic poets use, but the troubadours as well. In Rumi's poetry the beloved is the divine or God but at the same time the earthly love, the lover and the beloved, are simultaneously the expression of the divinity. Again, a clear resmnlance with courtly love and especially the German version of the Minnesinger. On the other hand, and as standing opposed to the Cathars, Rumi deals here with the question of evil from a slightly different angle which resembles and reminds us more of the Buddhist Dharma via the root and connection to the Dharmic religions like Hinduism which is also mirrored in the later Indian poetry of the Hindu sage and poet Qabir. The question is answered in two parts: first creation is necessarily differentiated into various qualities and attributes, including joy and sorrow and good and evil, because of the infinity of the Divine Nature, and because, in becoming "other than God," manifestation necessarily takes on particularized and opposing forms. Second even the cruelty of the world is in fact a divine Mercy, for, the cruelty of time (fortune) and every affliction that exists are lighter than farness from God and forgetfulness of Him. Because these afflictions will pass, but that forgetfulness will not. Only he that brings his spirit to God awake and mindful of Him is possessed of felicity.

In that sense and from the point of view of God, all creation is performing but one task namely that of revealing the "Hidden Treasure"; thus, by the very fact that a being exists, whether it does good or evil, it is worshipping God. However, such statement and poems above infidelity, of course, do not mean that Sufis advocate it whereas they are merely powerful metaphor that guide us in the spiritual path. Man is privileged among beings in that he has intelligence and free-will and therefore can disobey the commandments of God as well as obey them. Sufism as well as the Dharma advocates rather a path of awareness, of wisdom, of integrity, of courage, even if going against the stream, rather than the hypocrite path of doing this from a place of blindness, stupidity, fear and spite stating that such a path does not necessarily leads to better outcome. In Sufism "Man rides on the steed of 'We have honored (the sons of Adam)': the reins of free-will are in the hand of his intelligence". If he disobeys God's commands as set down by the prophets, he is revealing certain aspects of God but he is wronging himself, for although "all things in relation to God are good and perfect, in relation to us it is not so". "God most High wills both good and evil, but only approves the good". By doing what is good, man makes use of his divine gifts and derives benefit from them in that he increases his nearness to God. Other beings gain no benefit from following the laws of God, for they cannot do otherwise. Choice (free-will) is the salt of devotion; otherwise (there would be no merit): this celestial sphere revolves involuntarily, hence, its revolution has neither reward nor punishment. All created beings indeed are glorifiers of God, but that compulsory glorification is not wage-earning. While there is a big difference between Sufism as well as Buddhist Dharma which advocated the cessation of suffering through wisdom, awareness, integrity and many more as a way of freedom, the troubadours and Cathars based on their Christian heretical theology took it to the realm of subjugation to women which inflicts more pain rather than freeing the man from it. Anyway, with a clear interest in forbidden and deceptive romance, Rumi certainly wrote about themes that interested the troubadours: an individual’s love for another and the repercussions that often result from love, such as deception, heartbreak, jealousy, and longing. The troubadours were also interested in all of the conflict that arises when one individual loves another – the other person being of a different class or social standing or even promised to someone else. Moreover, the love stories that the Arabic poets and the troubadours were telling were ones of an individual’s struggle. It is the expression of one’s feelings that is the root of the genre that would develop into the modern romance genre through which the classical gynocentrism of Eleanor's of Aquitaine, the granddaughter if William IX, was spread all over Europe via the route of Italy, Austria, Germany and from there to other countries. Especially Arabic (but also Jewish) love poets sparked the fire of this movement.

Furthermore, Rumi wrote that a "Woman is the radiance of God; she is not your beloved. She is the Creator—you could say that she is not created." Not only that the woman resembles in Rumi's thought God himself, quite a heretical teaching in itself, but in fact, as we have already seen in the above discussion, Rumi's concept of the lover and the beloved encapsulates also God himself. Thus, here we have another crucial link between the troubadours and Rumi namely the understanding that worshipping God means worshipping women and worshipping women means worshipping God. Hence, the above elaboration of the troubadour origins does not only suggest that courtly love was directly influenced by Islamic (as well as Jewish) mysticism specifically the Sufi tradition and in this context particularly that of Rumi but that in fact it calls the attention to an unexpected and little known fact of an immense significance in Islam: at the center of Islam stands the Sacred Feminine which makes it no less a gynocentric tradition than any other culture existing from the beginning of human history. Sufism, the path that gave birth to Rumi, treasures the esoteric secret of womanhood and in that it resembles with the troubadours that albeit sometimes different interpretations and applications followed the same gynocentric path and quest in ending their suffering through the assimilation in the divine feminine and in fact subjugation both to its cosmic energy as well as its earthly form of the human female. So, even though Sufism is the esoteric aspect of a seemingly and superstitiously patriarchal religion, in fact, it is only through later politically counter - reactionary response to external cultural influence, although still in the formation stage of the Islamic religion, that through social manipulation of the newly born religion Islam has become a mixture a gynocentric and a patriarchal system that oppresses women. Muslims pray five times a day. In their prayer the city of Makkah as do Jews to Jerusalem. Inside every Mosque is a niche, again in the same way as the Jews have the Torah shrine. This niche is called in Arabic Mihrab. It consists of a vertical rectangle curved at the top that points toward the direction of Makkah. The Sufis understand the Mihrab as the visual symbol of an abstract concept namely the transcendent representation of the vagina of the female aspect of the divine. In Sufism, woman is the ultimate secret as she is also the soul. Toshihiko Izutsu writes, 'The wife of Adam was feminine, but the first soul from which Adam was born was also feminine.' As we will immediately see it resembles a lot with some aspects of the Cathar heresy too that has its roots in the Bogomil heresy of the Balkan that on their part were not only influenced by old Eastern Gnosticism but later also unsurprisingly converted to Islam.

The above poem of Rumi must be also understood in this way namely as the most early gynocentric form of Arabic (as well as Jewish) courtly love that at this stage was more balanced and less driven by European misandry and proto-feminism. In fact, both of the women in the above poem, the jealous wife as well as the maidservant, are not only inherent good inasmuch as the Sufi (as well as Buddhist and partly Jewish) understanding of good and evil sees both sides of the coin as the same forms of the divine but in its gynocentric application they are all here not only to teach the man but in fact in that sense they excuse the abuse of men whether a man chooses the one or the other action. Those concepts are also presented in Judaism which teaches that the woman is inherently good as she comes to help the man to progress in his spiritual path thus abuse is equivalent to teaching or guiding man as well as also in the theological understanding of Heinrich Cornellius Agrippa who shares it with Judaism too and sees the divine and sacred feminine in a seemingly almost the same way as the Sufis especially both the Jewish application of the androgynous transcendental divine as well as the concept of the pre-eminence of women rooted in the Jewish Kabbalistic concept of God's name (that also sees women as being inherently superior to men). Even more, it can be especially found in the Cathars tradition that likewise understands the creation myth as a woman being the first to be sent to earth to soothe the forces of evil and thus bring solace to all living beings through her love. Thus once again despite the various differences between the two traditions the connection and relationship between Rumi's Sufism and the Cathar troubadours is not only to be found in the same quest and interest but also in many deep and profound aspect of the overlapping and mutually shared gynocentric theology.

Moreover, the Divine Feminine has always been present in Islam. This may be surprising to many people who falsely think of Islam as a pure patriarchal religion versus a cultural that in the modern world is socially a joint venture of gynocentrism and patriarchal power structures that oppress women. Possible the cause for this misapprehension is the precise nature of the sacred feminine in Islam. The Sacred Feminine in Islam displays itself metaphysically as the inner manifestation of the religion. Her centrality demonstrates her necessary and life-giving role in Islam. In Islam, there is not the same condemnation of the body as is found in many of the major Christian sects. Exactly as it is in the Jewish and Buddhist tradition and as standing to various teaching in Christianity, the body is not an obstacle in Islam, but rather it is a means to attain enlightenment. Sexual pleasure is not shunned in Islam, but rather incorporated into daily life. It is the same as the tantric paths in the Dharmic religions and spiritual paths. To begin with, the body itself is given great significance in Islam when one takes into account the bodily postures that are a necessary and essential part of the compulsory five times a day prayer or the dance of the singing Darwish – a concept that naturally resembles with the itinerary troubadours and Jewish BADHANIM. During salat (Islamic prayers) the body is metamorphosed into a manifestation of the sacred. These bodily postures are also very similar to the bodily postures one observes in Hindu Hatha Yoga, which is a branch of Tantric Yoga. Islam's unitary, holistic view of the body and spirit is evident in the alchemical saying of the Shi'ite Imams, '*arwahuna ajsaduna wa- ajsaduna arwahuna*' (our spirits are our bodies and our bodies are our spirits). One of the primary goals of the Sufi is to reawaken the body to an awareness of it being an expression of the divine. The body is not basically sinful (as in the Roman Catholic Church's conception of Original Sin) in Islam, rather the body is the seat of the highest reality created by God in the whole universe. To understand the Divine Feminine in Sufism, it is helpful to understand a few basics concepts of Tantra, Buddhism, Yoga as well as Hinduism and Judaism. Yet, one thing is clear that the main and direct source that gave rise and heavily influence the Troubadours as well as the courtly love phenomenon and later helped in establishing feminism and misandry in Europe alongside with the Judeo-Christian tradition that was the direct source that gave birth to feminism and misandry was Sufism and here especially the school of Rumi.

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