

## **D. H. Lawrence's "Shadows"**

**By Prof. Hamdi H. Yousif**

The speaker is the poet himself. The poem is an expression of an intensive mystical experience.

The poem opens abruptly with "and" which suggests that something is deleted. From the beginning of the poem one feels the influence of John of the Cross's mystical poem "The Dark Night of the Soul" and the influence of Indian and Islamic mystical writings. In the darkness of the night the soul finds peace because the physical senses of the body are almost dead. That is why the soul becomes closer to God because it is not hindered by the animal desires. The speaker, therefore, feels as if he is dipped in God. This recalls to mind many Islamic mystical writings that say that we live in God as fish live in water. The word "again" suggests that this is not the first time that the speaker achieves oneness with God because the soul, originally, is the breath of God.

In the second passage, night is still pervading the speaker and in this darkness his soul goes out. In this dark night of the soul, he feels close to God; he is walking with God as long as it is dark. Darkness in many mystical writings means the death of the senses and animal desires.

The poet then identifies himself with autumn and with the fall of the dry tree leaves. Like trees in autumn he undergoes a state of mortification and after this mortification or death of the bodily faculties, he enjoys a state of blessedness. He feels deep and sweet shadows folding round his soul like the sweetness of a low sad song. It is a state of spiritual regeneration, renewal and rebirth.

In the fourth passage, the poet uses sickness to suggest the annihilation of the body. He is like a dry tree with broken wrists and dead heart. However, strange flowers blossom on the withered branches of the dead tree symbolizing the spiritual rebirth and regeneration: "new blossoms of me".

Amid this spiritual regeneration, he feels that he is still close to God. God is breaking him down physically for the sake of spiritual rebirth.

The sixth passage consists of two questions addressed either to the speaker himself or to the reader. Are you willing to be annihilated i. e. change into nothing? The answer should be YES because without this mortification of the physical desires and senses it is impossible to achieve spiritual regeneration and rebirth.

The poet explains this in the last passage by using the image of the phoenix. The phoenix is a legendary sexless bird and therefore it burns itself to death and then a new bird is born from its ashes. This explains the meaning of the whole poem.

### **Themes:**

The first theme is the mystical union with God which dominates the first passages of the poem. This union is to be achieved annihilation. The poet uses darkness, oblivion, shadows, darkness of the moon, dry tree to suggest this state of annihilation which is the first requirement for mystical union with God symbolized by dipping in water (God) and walking with God.

The second theme is spiritual rebirth and regeneration which also cannot be achieved without the mortification of the body. The poet also uses the image of the dry tree for mortification and the green leaves on the dead branches for rebirth. He then uses the symbol of the phoenix death and rebirth for both.

### **Form:**

The poem is written in free verse (unrhymed lines of variable length) and in passages of variable length also.