**Overview of Four Themes in *Lamya’s Poem***

**THEME ONE: Rumi’s Place in the Islamic Tradition**

Rumi is a poet who lived and wrote thousands of verses more than 800 years ago. He wrote in the Persian and Arabic languages, and his work has been translated into many languages. Today, he is the most popular poet in the U.S. [[1]](#footnote-1) People quote the lines he wrote on posters, greeting cards, and weddings, births and funerals, because they find meaning in his beautiful ideas. However popular Rumi’s poetry is, many people don’t realize that his ideas and images are rooted in his identity as a Muslim, and in the Islamic religious tradition. The film *Lamya’s Poem* explores this identity and heritage, in an effort to bring out a more authentic understanding of Rumi as a poet and a person, as a teacher and a seeker of God. The images and concepts in Rumi’s poetry drew upon verses of the Qur’an and sayings and deeds from the life of the Prophet Muhammad.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Rumi’s work and example of spiritual leadership has influenced the literature, culture and education of Muslims across the world for centuries. Poems in the *Masnavi* are still memorized and shared by travelers in regions as diverse from India, Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey, and are recited by refugees seeking the strength against hardships on the roads between a war-torn Middle East and Western Europe. The story of the film *Lamya’s Poem* was inspired by seeing a video of refugees reciting poetry at night in a park in Athens, Greece. Rumi’s words have long provided guidance and inspiration for the spirit based upon Islamic teachings, communicating its ideals through the prism of his imagination.

Scholar of Rumi’s work, Dr. Omid Safi says: “In many parts of the world, Rumi’s poetry is among the most frequently copied Muslim texts, second only to the Qur’an. So, it is certainly a text that has shaped the poetic imagination, the religious and moral imagination of Muslims. . .”

In this way, Rumi’s work unites diverse cultures across the world.

**THEME TWO: Rumi’s Concept of Social Love**

A central theme in Rumi’s work is the way he expressed the concept of love. This concept goes beyond the hearts and flowers of romantic love to embrace love for humanity, for fellow human beings with whom we share the spaces in which we all move. There are different ideas of love in different languages: in Persian and Arabic, the word *ishq* means Social Love or Civic Love. In Greek, the word *agape* has a similar meaning—the love, or compassion, that brings people together in peaceful, constructive community relations, supporting each other and working together in harmony. *Ishq* is the social glue that binds people together in solidarity; this kind of love is a source of human relations. *Ishq* is a reflection of universal or divine love, Compassion, and Mercy whose source is Divine love. It helps people see beyond our ethnic, racial, or religious differences, beyond the narrow group with whom we identify.

*Ishq* is at the center of the action of *Lamya’s Poem.* All of the story’s central characters are on a journey, seeking peace, safety and well-being. Lamya is moving away from the violence of her homeland toward an unknown future; Rumi and his father are on a journey away from the chaos of the Mongol invasions and armies. They are refugees fleeing danger, and become pilgrims journeying toward a Sacred City, and toward the spiritual goals to learn and to teach others. Both seek *ishq*, or love that heals the human community torn apart by violence and war. Their parallel stories intertwine, as Lamya and Jalal (the young Rumi) seek protection, peace and stability, and find ways to unite the people they encounter along the way.

Teaching and guiding youth is another theme in the parallel stories. Lamya’s teacher, who gave her the gift of Rumi’s poems, remains behind in Aleppo to teach students what is important in and beautiful in their tradition even after war has closed the schools. Teaching is an act of love, of *ishq*. Lamya shares her book of Rumi poems children in the dismal circumstances of the refugee camps. She clings to this book as a precious possession of love and spiritual strength. She teaches the refugee children to marvel at their own imagination, inspired by Rumi’s verse. *Ishq* is everywhere in *Lamya’s Poem*.

Love is revealed through effort and struggle, in the two worlds of Rumi and Lamya—centuries apart, yet similar. Love is found in the human ties we can develop by allowing room for our imagination. Love (*ishq*) is expressed with Lamya’s teacher, and her book, which holds the art and poetry of Rumi. From Aleppo to Turkey to Greece and on, Lamya carries her teacher’s gift, which step-by-step becomes the tool for her discovery that she can meet the challenges they face. Rumi’s own struggles to overcome the trauma of uncertainty and fear with the guidance of his father reveals his own discovery of the power of expressing himself in poetry, and sharing this form of Social Love with the world. He may not have realized that the power of his words and ideas would reach across the centuries and around the world! Perhaps this young man who saw visions did realize its power after all.

**THEME THREE:** **Two Forms of Myth: Individual and Shared**

Myths are stories that help to explain mysterious forces in human life and natural surroundings. They often involve supernatural beings and imaginary events that carry symbolic meanings. In the journeys of Lamya and young Rumi, we see how imagination and mythmaking is a way to cope with hardship and conquer fear. “Individual Myth,” which Lamya’s imagination creates an “Individual Myth” positive fantasy of a dreamlike park with fireflies to give her hope in the midst of a grim situation. Her imagination develops images that signal danger and chaos that she must overcome. The monster that she sees is a way of taming a threat by naming it. Many people experience dreams that are like myths we conquer or flee in response to the horror of traumatic experiences. By creating an image what we fear in symbolic form, a myth creates a “breathing space” that helps us understand and master threats in order to survive them without psychological damage.[[3]](#footnote-3) Poetry like Rumi’s creates narratives that rearrange reality by creating metaphors and myths to reflect meanings below the surface. The poet transforms existing myths and an invents new ones. The film shows young Rumi struggling to compose poems that Lamya reads “on the other side of time,” to transform her understanding of the world she has to navigate alone.

*Lamya’s Poem* explores how the Monster plays a role in times of loss and confusion and help her to understand and cope. Stories of monsters are a way for people to make meaning out of chaos and loss. Monsters are horrible images of danger, but the story involves a hero of great strength who finds a way to defeat them. In *Lamya’s Poem*, the main characters must defeat their imagined monsters to survive their situation and keep their spirit from damage.

From Individual Myth, Lamya, Jalal (young Rumi), and others in their situation discover the power of Collective (or Shared) Myth. In *Lamya’s Poem*, the characters transform their personal experience of trauma through poetry that helps express the horror of war and evil that they had no part in causing. The imagery of Collective Myths condenses the people’s attention around symbols of the horror and its conquest. In the film, poetry transforms reality into the fantastic shape of the Monster, giving Lamya a way to face reality and shake the shadow of war and human violence all around her. The myth of the monster joins Lamya’s and young Rumi’s experience of overcoming the violence that drove him from his homeland and finding a way to replace hate and desire for revenge with love. Lamya shares the power of Rumi’s imagery in the refugee camp, helping the children to forget their loss for a time and share powerful images of conquering that evil. The shared myth in gives the characters ready-made tools to confront the difficulty of separation from their homes and family members, to conquer fear and find hope.

**THEME FOUR: Rumi’s Concept of Separation and the Self**

The fourth theme is separation, which Rumi’s imagery transforms from a sense of loss to discovery of the self. The film highlights an image from Rumi’s poetry and the tradition of stories that teach spiritual lessons. That image is the reed, a hollow type of grass that grows in marshes along riverbeds. The reed is cut and removed from its home—the bed of reeds where it grows naturally. In the hands of the musical instrument maker, the reed is dried, trimmed, and perforated with holes to make a flute. In Islamic tradition, this flute is called a ney

In the image of the reed and the flute, separation from home and youth is a painful experience of displacement, but it is the first step toward transforming into a better self. The old life is lost, but the new self is transformed into an instrument for creating beauty and service to others.

Rumi’s poetry, as echoed in the film, explores this concept of transformation through separation and loss. Like the discovery of love, or *ishq* Rumi views separation as a necessary experience for the self to discover truth. The reed was comfortable in its natural home in the reed bed, but the single reed taken away and losing its attachment to its roots and family. In becoming transformed into a flute, the reed finds a lasting home that gives voice to glorify God with its sound and helps others to appreciate divine beauty. Losing our in this passing world, we are able to locate a more lasting home. Rumi wove this image into a universal truth of the human condition that is easily understood and

[*Iranian/Persian Ney Flute*](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/504821)*, Metropolitan Museum of Art*

appreciated as truth. In the film, the displacement that the story’s characters face as refugees as they flee the violence in their homes is symbolized in the image of the reed and the flute.

Rumi’s appeal to modern readers around the world is rooted in the way his work brings out this universal theme of separation. His poetry deals with pain, death, and separation, but it also transcends them. Dr. Safi commented, “For Rumi, the whole path of love is identified as a remedy for homesickness and separation from home, from God, from other people.”

[*Turkish Ney Music*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_0xQDCfY8TI)

The challenge of separation is explored through every character in the film. In the character of Rumi, separation is addressed through Jalal’s dream world, where his father encourages him not to give up inspiring others by writing poems. “Leave your home like a shepherd,” he advises. His father encourages his fellow refugees on the road to see themselves as pilgrims moving toward a higher goal rather than as victims fleeing in fear what is behind them. *Lamya’s Poem* documents and dramatizes the theme of physical separation from the homeland, as Lamya learns to accept her circumstances and connect with her fellow young refugees by sharing Rumi’s poetry. They experience hardship unimaginable for children but help each other to move toward a different future and a life of hope.

In the Islamic Sufi, or spiritual, tradition, Rumi’s metaphor invites his readers—his students—to separate from their lower self, which in Muslim spirituality is called the *nafs*, or soul. The journey toward consciousness of God is a journey toward union with divine love that requires separation from temporary worldly concerns to look beyond. A tradition, or saying, of Prophet Muhammad gives advice about living with separation and loss: “Be in this world as if you were a stranger or a traveler.” [Sahih Bukhari, Volume 8, Book 76, Number 425]

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1. Ciabattari, Jane. “Why is Rumi the best-selling poet in America?” BBC News, October 2014 <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20140414-americas-best-selling-poet> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ahmed, Shahab. *What is Islam: The Importance of Being Islamic,* Princeton University Press, 2016, p. 311 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Blumenberg, Hans. *Work of Myth*, MIT Press, 1985. Pg. xi [↑](#footnote-ref-3)