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## The Mania of Language: Robert Vivian's Dervish Essay

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### The History

When Robert Vivian spent a semester teaching in Turkey, he encountered something he says “made more sense to me than anything else I have encountered/studied/happened upon in literary studies”: whirling dervishes (“Re: Dervish Essay”). A dervish is a member of a Sufi fraternity who practices a dance ritual, an active sort of meditation, where participants whirl, their long white skirts suspended in air. Dervishes tip their heads back and open their arms wide as they seek to lose their personal identities and find union with the Almighty. Their turns are gentle and controlled, gradually increasing in intensity. Rumi first practiced this type of meditation in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and the method spread among his followers. When Vivian was on his trip, a dervish shared these words with him: “We can whirl for hours because, if you are in your head, you get dizzy. If you are in your stomach, you get nauseous. So you have to stay in the heart. Then you can whirl for hours” (“Re: Dervish Essay”). Inspired by these whirling dervishes, Vivian created a wholly unique essay form which he named the dervish essay. The dervish essay has its own sort of whirling, its own sort of immersion into the heart.

Two decades of writing in different genres inform his dervish essays. At the age of twenty-one, Vivian began writing plays, several of which were performed in New York City. His monologues appear in *The Best Women's/Men's Stage Monologues of 1995, 1996, 1997, and 1998*. In these monologues, Vivian fleshes out characters who are filled with disquietude and longing, including a young woman whose husband is

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newly disabled, a woman accused of having killed her husband by enabling his drinking, and a middle-aged man who is prosperous yet unfulfilled in his personal life. Their emotional expression is authentic and moving. The scenes increase in intensity, revealing Vivian's aptitude for pacing.

His first two nonfiction books, *Cold Snap as Yearning* and *The Least Cricket of Evening*, reveal the influence of mystics such as Rumi who find beauty in the mundane and the unexpected. In "Hereafter in Fields," the narrator finds hope in the monotonous Nebraska highway where the sun "hovers in every reed and dust mote, rippling out into the tiny eyes of grain that burn with winter's fire, an ember so small and subtle you know something is burning inside you, too" ("Cold Snap" 3). Besides lovely sketches of nature, Vivian compassionately renders people in essays like "Taxonomy of Garbage" where the narrator contemplates the life of a woman who rifles through dumpsters: "What did it mean, this collecting of garbage? Was she trying to tell us something we could not quite make out?" ("Cold Snap" 56).

Across genres, Vivian's writing is saturated with imagery, reflection, and musicality, but his novels lean into darkness. In the following excerpt from *Water and Abandon*, main character Hank returns to the river from which his daughter's body was recovered and remembers the moment divers lifted her from the current:

And sometimes he secretly wondered why she didn't just keep on going, keep rising from the water all the way into the sky, shedding the plastic bag on her foot maybe but otherwise keeping everything intact, going higher and higher at the same deliberate speed with which they had brought her to the surface. (2)

His interest in the current, in movement, spans genres and becomes one of the most recognizable features of the dervish essay.

## **The Creation of the Dervish Essay**

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A middle-age awakening led to the creation of Vivian's new hybrid writing form. In a lecture, Vivian expressed his promise to himself as a writer: "I agree to play radically and joyfully with language the rest of my life" ("Feral Feeling"). This statement expresses a philosophy of writing essential to the spirit of the dervish essay—one of openness and abandon. In fact, Vivian says that he does not know where dervish essays originate:

I'm at their complete mercy. And I've wondered about this because writing novels, for instance, has involved for me a greater measure of control. I have no control whatever in the writing of a dervish essay. And more and more, I'm beginning to think that lyrical writing is a form of chemical urgency—it's not a feeling that can be forced or faked. But when it happens, when I feel it, it's unmistakable. It's a mania of language. (Earle and Martino)

In the following excerpt from his UNP blog article, he identifies the catalysts:

About ten years ago something strange, urgent, and newly born kicked in and over inside of me so deeply that I still have not recovered, though the truth is I don't really want to recover, ever: the beautiful, odd convergence of recent trips to Turkey and immersion in the works of Mevlana (or Rumi as we call him in the states) under the tutelage of my dear friend Yavuz, manic bouts of fly fishing, and a new form of writing called the dervish essay ended up catapulting me into a different kind of writer altogether, the fruits of which eventually became *All I Feel Is Rivers*. Call it ecstasy and sorrow, call it sudden desire to embrace everything around me—I still don't know what to call it. But I could no longer—nor no longer wanted—to write the dark novels I had been writing up to this time; didn't want to write on darkness at all unless it was somehow touched or grazed by some other beaming ray or wire light of tender hope. Somehow the mysterious alchemy of putting the words *dervish* and *essay* together led to an explosion of creative energy that prompted this artistic upheaval, which is changing even now so that I truly have no clue what is coming next. ("Be Willing")

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The synopsis of *All I Feel is Rivers* describes the collection as “a new hybrid writing that, though spiritually akin to prose poems, retains an essayistic form.” Since there are no line breaks in the dervish essay, at first glance, it resembles the paragraphic structure of a prose poem. Prose poems, however, use standard punctuation. Dervish essays are characterized by a single sentence (occasionally two), stretching from one to three pages with only commas and em dashes for punctuation. Though semi-colons and colons may conveniently extend these sentences, they would interrupt the flow, and it is this tumbling momentum that signifies a dervish essay and separates it from a prose poem. In a lecture, Vivian admits that when he started writing poetry, he was intimidated by line breaks:

I thought there was some secret code I was unaware of, some trick or hidden knowledge that completely escaped me. And then after Turkey, the answer came back to me so straightforwardly that I laugh to think of it now: just keep going and don't worry about line breaks or stanzas or anything else for that matter. Just keep going. (“Writing Across Countries”)

Vivian seems to sidestep the traditional structure of poetry; however, his strategy to *just keep going* creates a stream of consciousness effect that takes the shape of human thought. The mind does not break like poetry breaks. It keeps going. As one thought evokes another thought, the mind invites the thinker to make sense of the connections. By allowing images to spill out this way, Vivian provides the connections but does not spell them out as in this excerpt from the beginning of “Ordering a Book of Poems”:

And waiting for its deliverance, the slender leaf-bound kind thin as any sigh after lovemaking or planting a flower, frond of poem and page of a poem and so much white space to wander and to wonder, oh book of poems on its way even now that I have never read . . . (“All I Feel” 19)

When it comes to the merits of the single-sentence form, Jason Thayer had a similar epiphany when he launched *Complete Sentences*, an online magazine of single-sentence prose. In his article for *Brevity's* blog, “The Case for Single-Sentence Prose in the Age of Insecurity,” Thayer describes how when he

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wanted to write about his neighbor's loss, he found he did not have the attention span for an essay in this Covid-taxed world. He could, however, manage a sentence, and the stirring result follows:

I did not know our neighbor died until his wife knocked to offer a box of food she wouldn't eat: pancake mix, diet 7-up, Pepperidge Farm white bread her husband had stomached during a 3-month-long losing-battle to cancer, a box I took gratefully, offering condolences—no hugs, because the virus was already spreading, and because I didn't know these neighbors well enough to provide this comfort, in fact, had no idea that the jolly guy I'd bantered with under the black walnut tree we shared, had cancer—and now I try not to watch her, absorb her loneliness, take it as my own, the widow social distancing in that big house, leaving briefly for daily walks past our kitchen window as I wash dishes, griddle my partner a breakfast of pancakes. (Thayer)

Thayer's piece approaches the dervish essay in its single-sentence structure and its punctuation style (minus the colon), but it employs a more traditional narrative style.

Diane Seuss's single-sentence piece, "I hoisted them, two drug dealers, I guess that's what they were," is also written in a narrative style, but like the dervish essay, Seuss's piece has a stream of consciousness flow. Seuss's narrator makes two bold and seemingly contradictory choices to help her son. First, she *hoists* drug dealers out of her son's apartment, then she *hoists* her son out of her house:

. . . I ordered them out, I threw their stuff out in the yard, in the rain, dog shit was everywhere, like pinecones or apples in an abandoned orchard at the end of summer, they rode away on bikes like children, like my sister and me when we were kids after a big storm and the drains were clogged on the streets so the water was up to our knees, riding our bikes through that water which must have been full of shit, my son, he was nowhere to be found . . . (Seuss 7)

The longer length and rambling style allows more time for intensity to mount. In Thayer's words, "The long-winded, tangent-laden single sentence mimics the breathless adrenaline of the speaker in that moment, trying to make sense of what she has just done . . . This form wouldn't work for a plodding story

without that charged immediacy” (Thayer). In part, the nature of the narrator’s actions creates the “charged immediacy,” but the single-sentence structure contributes to the pacing. Overall, Seuss and Thayer’s pieces are similar to the dervish essay in their “long-winded, tangent-laden” style. They all have forward movement, yet they differ in the nature of their movement. Thayer’s piece advances tentatively. Seuss’s piece charges. The dervish essay, in contrast, tumbles gently like children rolling down a hill. Though this tumbling sounds simple, it requires more unpacking.

### A Bursting Jubilation

Dervish essays whirl around a particular subject, whether concrete or abstract. This aligns with Phillip Lopate’s view of the essay found in *The Art of the Personal Essay*: “The essayist attempts to surround a something—a subject, a mood, a problematic irritation—by coming at it from all angles, wheeling and diving like a hawk, each seemingly digressive spiral actually taking us closer to the heart of the matter” (xxxviii). For the dervish essay, I would suggest an alteration to this definition. Instead of *a problematic irritation*, a more accurate description for the dervish essay would be *a bursting jubilation*. Vivian often explores subjects that bring him joy. Here are five of the most common found in *All I Feel Is Rivers*:

1. *The ordinary*. Water, a pen, and a windowsill become openings for a plethora of associations. This attention to objects of everyday life mirrors the focus of Rumi who in “Chickpea to Cook,” as just one example, uses a chickpea and a chef to explore the relationship between disciple and teacher (132-133). Divinity is found in the mundane.
2. *The earth*. In an interview with *Eastern Iowa Review*, Vivian says, “writing has become a way to celebrate the earth and my brief time on it. I can’t believe how beautiful the planet is” (Woychik). Dervish essays read, in part, like an ode to the Earth and the ways it manifests itself to him. He expresses fondness

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for rain, birds, flowers, rivers, wild animals, sun, and moon with the specificity of one who has spent half a lifetime outdoors.

3. *Relationships*. For Vivian, relationships serve as both a precursor to the development of the dervish essay and subject matter. I would submit that it is because of close relationships that Vivian found his way to the form. During his visit to Turkey, he received a warm reception, and friends became family. “Dear Friend,” Yavuz wrote to him, “This is your home. You are welcome whenever you wish. We love you so much” (“Writing Across Countries”). Perhaps the love of his hosts played a role in engendering the ambiance of love in his essays. Yet love also manifests as a challenge. It was Yavuz who challenged Vivian’s pre-suppositions of what a novel could be and, consequently, the value in moving beyond emulation (“Writing Across Countries”). Formally, Vivian devoted himself to imitating the writers he loved. Because of Yavuz, he allowed his own authentic voice freer rein. Relationships also play a role in the subject matter of the dervish essay as Vivian describes human interactions with intimacy and tenderness: the sound of the narrator’s wife laughing on the phone, the joy of reading to another, the gaze of a child.
  
4. *Fly fishing*. On his website, Vivian says, “The only person I envy is the one who fishes more than I do.” Fishing appears in many of Vivian’s essays and I felt anticipation as I looked for the next reference, a sort of play like *Where’s Waldo*. Vivian goes so far as to describe fly fishing as a form of whirling dervishes (“Re: Dervish Essay”). In fact, the two physical activities that helped him into the dervish essay were whirling dervishes and fly casting. Norman Maclean’s description of the art of fly fishing in *A River Runs Through It* gives context to Vivian’s experience:

The four-count rhythm, of course, is functional. The one count takes the line, leader, and fly off the water; the two count tosses them seemingly straight into the sky; the three count was my

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father's way of saying that at the top the leader and fly have to be given a little beat of time to get behind the line as it is starting forward; the four count means put on the power and throw the line into the rod until you reach ten o'clock—then check-cast, let the fly and leader get ahead of the line, and coast to a soft and perfect landing. (4)

Like the whirling dervishes, the act of fly fishing is a progression of movement that when mastered allows fishermen to rest in that liminal space between head and stomach—the heart. Their self-consciousness fades, their overthinking disappears, and they live in the moment.

5. *Ecstasies*. Vivian shared that he prefers dervish essays to be classified first and foremost as ecstatic writing (“Re: Dervish Essay”). D. J. Moores defines *ecstatic* in his anthology of ecstatic verse, *Wild Poets of Ecstasy*, as “an experience of standing outside of self accompanied or at least immediately followed by an intense degree of positive affect” (6). To many, the term *ecstatic* implies a positive experience followed by a positive emotion, but Vivian and Moores would agree that ecstatic writing includes sorrow. Moores lists common subjects of ecstatic poetry, subjects that appear in the dervish essay:

Ecstatic poets affirm the value of happiness, human connections, festivities, sexuality, and relatedness to the divine; they praise the goodness of life, the abundance of nature, and the intimate interrelation of the whole cosmos; and they configure in their verse peak states of being and positive, life-affirming emotions, such as serenity, awe, hope, wonder, rapture, gratitude, and love. (49)

Although sorrow is sometimes found in the dervish essay, it is more often the occasion of other forms of nonfiction. Memoirists typically work their way through trauma to find “the goodness of life,” illustrated by the opening scene of Tobias Wolff’s *This Boy’s Life* where a truck goes over a cliff after its brakes malfunction, and Jennifer Sinor’s *Ordinary Trauma* that begins with a traumatic childbirth. Dervish essays, on the other hand, often begin with joy and dwell in joy. Joy is the occasion.

Besides his list of common subjects, Moores lists twenty-two characteristics of ecstatic poetry. Although many of the characteristics apply to dervish essays, I have highlighted eight (retaining Moores' numeration) to illustrate the sophistication and nuance of ecstatic writing, and, therefore, the dervish essay:

1. configures peak experiences, spiritual “illuminations,” states of flow, and ecstasies
2. configures moments of growth and clarity, epiphanies, and consciousness expansion
4. configures intense positive affect, such as bliss, overpowering joy, intense happiness, awe, rapture, love, and the like
9. affirms the interconnectedness of all life
11. takes delight in the abundance and goodness of the natural world and its flora and fauna
12. expands the self (through ekstasis) beyond its normal bounds, often into unconscious depths, in constructive ways
14. mimics in form and/or content the “trance” states, or poetics of ekstasis, out of which it is born
17. lends itself to speaking, chanting, incantation, music, and/or singing (50-51)

### **Seeking the Highest Elevation**

In the dervish essay, “Yes,” the subject is the abstract concept of consent. The piece sets off in a gentle stream of consciousness mode as the narrator explores things worth saying yes to in life, following the above elements of the form: ordinary life, joy, the mania of language. Vivian writes,

Yes, I dive deeply into words and yes, they somehow hold me even as they are passing away, and yes to the window and the doorknob, yes to all the humble implements, pan and dish and saucer, coffee pot and teaspoon of honey—yes to the beating of my heart and every heart, yes to the vibrant roundness of every living creature and the fragrance of lilacs blossoming here in

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early June, Yes, I say, and yes again to the spider on a north-facing wall and yes to the woods beyond and yes to the very word north . . . (5)

In this excerpt, the narrator begins with words on the page and moves on to the objects we can imagine him seeing as he looks up from his desk: the window, the doorknob. This panning across the room creates the sensation of looking through a camera so that the reader's perspective zooms in on smaller things and out on larger things—from a spider, to a wall, to the larger concept of “north.” The zooming and panning create a whirling effect.

In a tender stretch of the essay, the narrator says yes to relationships: “...yes to this very pen jotting these words and other words like I love you, like We are out of eggs, like I have this intense feeling that everything is brief and unspeakably precious...” By sandwiching a mundane grocery request between the lofty statements, “I love you” and “everything is brief and unspeakably precious,” the form elevates routine interactions. Eggs become a way to show love and a reminder of how things run out. Thus, the whirling extends from the material world to the mind as everyday objects and experiences are surrounded by deeper implications.

In essence, the dervish essay whirls around the beauty of the subject, progressing to the most moving or sensual images:

The green buds are reaching out to touch my breath, my tongue, they want me to grow with them—and yes even to loneliness and to dying, yes to the last time you say goodbye, yes to the first two people on earth who ever held hands and yes to the touch of another, whoever he or she may be, yes to the long kiss and short peck on the cheek and yes to the period at the end of every sentence...(5)

The intensity is followed by a soft landing as the narrator finishes writing his book and turns “once more in an open field to gaze up at the night sky of stars wheeling in the wake of so much dark silence” (5).

Upon completion of this dervish essay, the reader is left with the feeling of having cycled through an

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entire novel with its rising action, climax/highest tension, falling action, and denouement; however, in the dervish essay, climax is more accurately worded as *highest elevation*.

Though the form is not a narrative, it has a journey-like quality. The reader finishes the piece with that happy sort of fatigue of having read a larger work. Sophronia Scott's "Honoring Autumn" elicits this fatigue, this feeling of completion, after it cycles through associations the narrator makes with a season, an ordinary occurrence of life. The narrator sits on a rock as a "patient audience to each leaf tumbling," keeping them company because "no one wants to die alone" (202). As she considers the life span of the leaves, she hears "the bell tolls of my own death gentle approaching" even as she is reminded of the hope of resurrection that is her son. Though she takes hot baths to soothe her aging body, she retains a childlike quality: "I am once more Red Riding Hood with my basket of light and smiles traipsing through the tangled neverwood of a beloved friend's dream to deliver autumn's message that we are eternal despite the falling all around us" (203). The narrator learns to release her "ego and essence" as the trees release leaves. She foresees herself falling "into the softness of the loam returning to the first bed of my being to await the precious breath of the divine drawing me into life again" (203).

In Lindsey Novak's "Sapiosexual: A Dervish Essay," the narrator begins by recalling a boyfriend:

He played guitar—but not like my acoustic blonde wood Ibanez, on which I'd clumsily fretted and fingered Stairway to Heaven, sort of, since my May birthday, 14, blonde like his bowl-cut hair swept back in late-90s grunge cool—like a real guitar, Marshall amp fuzz pedal, loud, loud like my want for anything anywhere different than home...

The essay swirls around the longing the relationship represents for the narrator, its origins embedded in a childhood where the narrator was repeatedly shamed. Tragic images spiral and then peak at the highest tension:

and it's no wonder I want a mind full of bees, take what I can get, lap up love spilled by my bedside with the bruises of cirrhosis liver, gaze longer into your face if it's an abyss, that I want the old man who said no, the fat boy who took up space...

The denouement reveals the long-term duration of longing as the narrator seeks solace in nature. The sound of cicadas hearken back to the guitar, and, thus, Novak artfully and poignantly pulls the theme through to the end:

it's no wonder the cicadas call to me, a buzz nothing hum, fuzz amplified across all dimensions and all space and all time, I want it so loud it beats my heart for me, thumps over my rage, static snow through a wah pedal buzzy strains of forget, forget, forget.

Novak's piece shares in the tumbling momentum of Vivian's writing while its darker theme proves the dervish essay can accommodate sorrow as well as joy.

Brian Doyle calls his prose poems *proems* and they provide an interesting contrast to the dervish essay. Both proems and dervish essays appear as a single paragraph; however, proems use traditional punctuation and the beginning to each line is capitalized. In "Oilean Acla," the narrator describes a funeral ritual in Ireland. When the casket is lifted off its supports, the men kick out the chairs. The narrator circles around this simple tradition, searching for its significance:

. . . and that is how it has always been done; to  
 Do a thing in a certain way in a certain place is a very fine thing,  
 It seems to me. That is what partly what places are made of, yes?  
 Things done in that way? Which is to say people saying that this  
 Is how we are who we are. Things change, sure they do, and yes,  
 Someday men will not kick over the chairs as they carry a friend  
 To his grave. But they did and they do and that is a very fine thing. (14)

Doyle uses a question/answer format to find deeper meaning in the ritual. This placid, lingering pace serves as a contrast to the dervish essay and its tumbling momentum. And since the proem is conversational in style, it is more like prose and less like poetry.

Pronouncedly rhythmic, dervish essays teem with internal rhyme, slant rhyme, assonance, consonance, repetends, and refrains. These poetic qualities contribute to the essays' whirling by creating a rhythmic trancelike state. Consider the opening lines of Vivian's "Fish Me":

When I wake I whisper rain, rain, as it falls and I feel as if it is happening to me slowly soaking the whole earth and rain, I whisper, rain come again good now, the good and simple rain, the mysterious rain that allows us to live on this precious besieged earth, cherish the rain and bless the rain as it blesses every one of us, every blade of grass, the rain falling in pellucid roundness . . .

(23)

There is consonance with *when/wake/whisper* and *falls/feel*, both assonance and consonance with *slowly/soaking*, and slant rhyme with *grass/roundness*. Throughout the entire essay, the repetend *rain/raining* is repeated twenty times. The reader comes to expect the word, and when it doesn't appear in the first few lines after the essay's halfway point, the reader's anticipation builds, creating a rising action:

. . . and how many times I have waded in a river when it was raining and I felt myself turning back into water beneath my eyes and how rain in the air and water up to my hips I felt most connected and all primordial relationships humming a tender song in my veins which are themselves spring-fed streams with brook trout in every artery and I hope someone will fish my body one day as it rains . . . (23)

Though repetition is not a requirement of a dervish essay, Sophronia Scott, author of "Honoring Autumn: A Dervish Essay," thinks of it as a spotting point, "like how a figure skater maintains his/her orientation when in a spin" ("Messenger"). Vivian's narrator makes many connections between rain and the world: "rain clearest ink of all writing poems," "my body, which was conceived and birthed in rain,"

“rain touching rivers the most sacred caress,” and “my veins which are themselves spring-fed streams.”

The loveliest connection serves as the climax or highest elevation: “my heart gladdening and lifting in this world of wet when even my tears fit into the mystery of it all” (23).

Next, the narrator lets the reader step back from the essay, unleashing the falling action: “with lightning in the distance showing us again and again how beautiful it all is . . .” (23-24). For the denouement, the narrator shows how rain fits into the collective as lightning’s illuminations of paradise “tumble us into church and hungry-most and thirsty desert seeing” (24). Vivian says he knows the moment he has finished writing a dervish essay “when the last line surprises me, when I sense the whirlwind is about to expire. Yes, it’s visceral, and yes, it’s spiritual. I less end them then they take me to a brink and I fall over into silence” (Earle and Martino). I am reminded of Moores’ definition of ecstatic experience as a *standing outside of self*. It appears that Vivian steps outside of himself during the composition of a dervish essay. Sophronia Scott relates a similar experience for her writing of “Honoring Autumn”:

I was in Missouri near the Ozarks having a conversation with Robert about the seasons. It was October and we were discussing our personal appreciations of each season. He asked me, ‘How do you honor autumn?’ I honestly don’t remember how I answered but after I returned home to Connecticut it felt like our conversation was still going on and one morning I woke up and just knew what I was going to write. It would be an answer to his question. As I wrote I realized I was writing about my own aging and the mix of humility and exultation I feel about my human nature. That mix provided the energy and the piece came together. It was simply fantastic and I felt the piece was alive (“Messenger”).

She describes the dervish essay as intuitive, like “catching a piece of love from the wind. Suddenly it’s there on the page/screen and has a life of its own.” If writing a dervish essay is an ecstatic experience, how about reading one?

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Some effects of the dervish essay upon the reader are implied by the above analyses of “Yes” and “Fish Me.” The reader experiences a happy fatigue of having cycled through its plot-like structure; the reader is pulled into the trance-like state brought about by the rhythm; and in the anticipation of the word *rain*, the reader searches. Yet the dervish essay offers an even greater impact. Sophronia Scott reports, “After I first heard Robert read a dervish essay, I walked out of the building and nearly fell down the stairs! The energy of the piece was so palpable I thought, ‘I have no idea what that was, but I want to do it!’” (“Messenger”). D.J. Moores describes the attitude necessary for a more visceral experience of literature when he challenges scholars to not only read critically, but also to “be mystified and awed by texts” (54). He explains that as a result of “the intellectual climate in Western literary studies,” professors stifle their love of the arts “because the rapturous, mystified response to beauty is seen as being uncritical and unsophisticated” (54). He further claims that if readers allow themselves to have an ecstatic experience while reading, such a response would be “immeasurably valuable and necessary to optimal human experience” (56). Speaking for myself as a reader, I had the unexpected yet pleasant experience of being brought to tears by Vivian’s dervish essays. I cannot explain it but to say it just happened. Indeed, if I had gone into the reading experience conscious of myself and my reaction, I am quite certain the experience would have had less of an impact.. Absorbed in the essay, I was suddenly outside my normal bounds, outside myself, and this was followed by feelings of joy. What made this possible was trust in the author: Vivian’s honesty and transparency allowed me to be led by the hand, and I found myself “mystified and awed.”

D. J. Moores describes this process further in the beginning of his anthology:

Ecstasy bites deeply into the soul, sometimes leaving those who experience its joys forever transformed, forever unable to return to their previous lives. The ecstatic experience, however it comes about and whatever form it takes on, quite often leaves people with radically altered

perspectives. As a result, their values, ideologies, and even conceptions of selfhood transmute, usually for the better. (3)

The ecstatic experiences of flyfishing, witnessing whirling dervishes, and receiving love and acceptance by his hosts in Turkey altered Vivian's perspective and ultimately his writing; a new form was born. For Vivian, writing dervish essays is an ecstatic experience in itself. For others, ecstatic experiences may take on different forms, such as breadmaking, marathon running, or jigsaw puzzle solving. Yet there is one whirling meant for anyone and everyone.

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