

al-Baroud, Dalal Saleh (2022)  
Reflections on Dialogue with The Divine: A Comparative Study  
PhD thesis. SOAS University of London  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25501/SOAS.00036820>  
<https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/36820/>

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◦ **Reflections on Dialogue with The Divine**

**A Comparative Study**

**Dalal Saleh al-Baroud**

**Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD in Cultural, Literary and  
Postcolonial Studies**

**2021**

**Department of the Cultural, Literary and Postcolonial Studies**

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## Abstract

Reflections on Dialogue with The Divine: A Comparative Study

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This thesis tackles the controversial concept of dialogue with the Divine in Sufi literature and its use as an indirect vehicle to transmit a mystically camouflaged social message. The in-depth study offers a modern theoretical framework that examines hidden signs and unspoken messages masked by the gentle and winding arabesques of Sufi literary works, in an effort to explore their relation to power, authority and politics. The writing of certain mystical authors who have rarely been studied is explored, in particular the oeuvre of al-Suhrawardi and al-Niffari, whose work is introduced through a linguistic, literary and theological analysis and whose philosophical and mystical views are examined comprehensively through their special usage of language.

The paper explores three different genres: a poem by al-Suhrawardi, two of al-Niffari's *Mawāqif* and a play by Salah 'Abd al-Sabur. It is a comparative study and the mystical texts involved are examined under the light of multiple Western theoretical frameworks for the first time. The milestone of the research study is its daring probing of the direct dialogue with the Divine, its forms, stylistics, implications and indications of how it could be viewed as a political text. The paper concludes that beyond being a devotional path, mysticism in literature can also be a spiritual and narrative revolution that threatens the legitimate authorities, as well as an approach to redefining the meaning of power, disguised in emotional expressions and intentionally complicated language.

## **Dedication**

To those who traced the glimmer of light and sacrificed their life for its sake,

I dedicate this thesis to you.

## **Acknowledgements**

It is a great bliss and privilege to witness the completion of my project, for I faced many emotional, physical and academic struggles that significantly slowed the process of achieving this dream. However, with the miracles of Allah's Kindness, I am submitting the fruit of six years of continuous work.

Reaching this point would have been impossible without the love and support of many people who helped me along the way.

To Afaf al-Omani and Saleh al-Baroud, my parents, who constantly drown me in an endless sea of love and support, from the depth of my heart, Thank You! I am only too aware that words could never suffice to express my eternal gratitude for any of the sacrifices you have made, or for the light you illuminate my life with, however, my words are merely an attempt to express my appreciation and gratitude for the great gift that is your existence in my life.

To my siblings, Aisha, Fatima, Lulwa, Fahad and Hessa, your eternal love and support and those beautiful words of yours that always bring encouragement to my soul whenever I feel down, are the reason that I am able to submit my project today, so Thank you... I consider myself one of the most fortunate persons in the world for the good fortune and generosity that God has granted me by allowing me to be your sister.

I would like to dedicate my sincere appreciation and gratitude to my mentor and supervisor Dr. Stefan Sperl. Dr. Sperl taught me how to challenge my limitations and go beyond what I thought I was able to do. He was the person through whom I found peace whenever I faced any struggles in my life or my studies. I am only saddened by the fact that the time I spent finishing this project did not allow me to be his student until its full completion.

I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Marlé Hammond, who took the responsibility of supervising my work after Dr. Sperl's retirement and to thank her for her support.

It would be a shame if I ignored the efforts of my friends, who offered me countless demonstrations of kindness, help and support. I would like to thank my closest friends, the poet Maysun al-Suwaydan and the poet Worud al-Musawi for years of countless help. I would like to say thank you to Dr. 'Abbas al-Haddad, Dr. Abdulrahman al-Farhan, Hiba al-Him, Lola Awada, Muhammad 'Abdulbari, Oludamini Ogunnaike, Salim Muhammad and 'Abdullah al-'Nizi.

And Finally, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my country, Kuwait, for sponsoring my educational journey and providing me with the opportunity to continue my postgraduate studies in one of the best institutions in the field of literature.

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## Introduction

والله ما طُلَعَتْ شمسٌ ولا غَرُبَتْ  
إلا وحبُّك مقرونٌ بأنفاسي  
ولا خلوتٌ إلى قومٍ أحدثهم  
إلا وأنتَ حديثي بينَ جُـلـاسي  
ولا ذكركَ محزونًا ولا فرحًا  
إلا وأنتَ بقلبي بينَ وسواسي  
ولا هممت بشرب الماء من عطش  
إلا رأيتُ خيالاً منك في الكـاس  
ولو قدرتُ على الإتيانِ جنتكم  
سعيًا على الوجه أو مشياً على الرأس.

(al-Hallaj, as cited in Khartabil 1979, 97)

By God I'm swearing the sun never sets nor rises  
Without my love for you forming part of my every breath  
And whenever I go off to sit and talk with friends  
You are the sole subject of my conversation  
And be I happy or sad, all of my thoughts are about you  
Just as you are the only dweller of my heart and mind  
And I have no care for drinking water when I thirst,  
Lest in that cup I see a reflection of you  
And if only I could meet you I would strive to do so  
Running on my face or walking on my head.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

At present, Islamic religious factions are in a state of conflict. Differing denominations are brutally assassinating each other on the premise of defending their right to existence and dominance. Each faction is convinced of divine advocacy in leading society and exclusivity in dominating the power of speaking with God and ruling by His orders. The recurrent conflict between Sunna and Shi'a in Syria and the direction taken by Daesh in Iraq are clear examples of this.

In these dark depths of hatred, I believe that it is vital and essential to show that there is a way to provide a peaceful world view of human beings and their relationship with each other, since I strongly believe that having the temerity to murder people in the name of the Divine is a delusion. The peaceful approach I refer to is the love dialogue with the Divine, which is clearly manifested in this verse from Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya:

إذا كان منك الودّ فالكلُّ هَيِّنٌ

وكلّ الذي فوق التراب ترابٌ.

(al-'Adawiyya, as cited in Gharib 2000, 6)

If you are kind, everything is easy

And all that is above the soil is soil.

The composer of the aforementioned line was the first poet to speak of love for the Divine in Arabic poetry (ibid., 68). Her mystical narrative reflected on events which inspired later Sufis and impacted the development of the mystical doctrine (Smith 1984, 45). This phenomenon of divine love created a new perspective in terms of literature and the relationship between the Divine and the worshipper that incited intellectual and political revolutions throughout the history of Arabia. Specifically when al-Hallaj faced the death penalty on several accusations, one of which was on

account of composing love poems for the Divine that alluded to unification, which was considered a crime of heresy (Nicholson 2002, 140).

As I proposed earlier, the practice of engaging in direct dialogue with the Divine might be a solution and yet, this path of love has on occasions led to executions. So how could a peaceful piece of poetry consisting of love directed towards the Divine become an issue of contention itself? In other words, how did the cure become the disease?

I argue that speaking to the Divine in literature tackles religious hegemony and threatens political authority due to its ability to provide freedom for the worshipper in terms of politics, religion and achieving peace, both personal inner peace and peace with others. This could be concluded from al-‘Adawiyya’s line, quoted above, when she says: "If you are kind, everything is easy, and all that is above the soil is soil." This indicates that receiving love from the Divine and speaking to Him are an absolute source of power.

Mystical poets such as Ibn al-Farid, Rumi, al-Hallaj and others were deeply investigated by scholars all over the world. However, on my path of searching for topics to be the main focus of my doctoral thesis, I observed that studies about dialogue in Sufi poetry were really difficult to find, particularly in Arabic, the language that produced uncountable poems and prose that express the love of the Divine. I therefore decided to opt for this topic to be the spotlight of my thesis. I furthermore aimed to examine this aspect in writers who were poorly studied academically, in order to provide an addition to this field.

The result of my extensive research was that dialogue with the Divine in al-Suhrawardi’s poetry, al-Niffari's prose and ‘Abd al-Sabur's drama had as yet never been explored. I confess that selecting this topic was a risk and I faced various difficulties in terms of the rarity of studies in this field and of finding relevant resources, which is why carrying out this project was both a struggle and a challenge.

Hence, in this paper, I examine the aspect of direct dialogue with the Divine in the works of the three writers: al-Suhrawardi, al-Niffari and ‘Abd al-Sabur, in a bid to explore their power and political effect, to conclude that the dialogue with the Divine in these literary works creates a rebellious discourse that challenges the authorities. The first premise of this thesis argues that the tender love poem of al-Suhrawardi is actually a potent instrument confronting the powers that be. I suggest that the poet utilised certain methods to attain this purpose, such as the meter and rhyme of the poem, which I analyse via al-Tayeb's approach; the dramatic scenes, which I examine through Gruendler's method of dramatic discourse; and obtaining the stance of power by addressing the Divine in the poem, which I explore via Bakhtin's dialogism theory. I present these elements as being responsible for turning al-Suhrawadi's poem into a threatening weapon. I then move on to demonstrate that the *Mawāqif* of al-Niffari are texts created to tackle the dominance of the spiritual school system by creating an individual mystical path that I believe is religiously and politically challenging. In order to do so, I maintain that it is crucial to deconstruct al-Niffari's theology and explore its relation to literary tradition, since it is the key to examining his writing. I argue that the texts are political by affirming that the Divine's voice in them is actually al-Niffari's, by presenting a detailed discussion of the concept of revelation and inspiration in addition to an analysis based on Gruendler's application of speech act theory. To expand more on the powerful aspect in al-Niffari's *Mawāqif*, I also use Foucault's analysis on the relationship between spirituality and power. My final argument in this thesis is that the figure of al-Hallaj in ‘Abd al-Sabur's play was created as a rebellious hero who had a direct dialogue with the Divine, in a bid to rebel against the Egyptian authorities in the twentieth century. I drew the argument based on the protagonist's construction anatomy as per Joseph Campbell's hero's journey and by comparing scenes in the play with prophetic figures in the Qur'an, to uphold the challenging factor in al-Hallaj's character. I suggest

that ‘Abd al-Sabur intended to tackle the political authorities by means of the Sufi figure, due to the deep connection between secularism and spirituality.

Because of the different nature of the work of each of the three authors I chose to explore, I found it imperative to apply different genres and theoretical frameworks to carry out my analysis in each case, depending on the individuality of each respective author’s writing. This is why my thesis is divided into three chapters, one for each author, with a separate conclusion drawn at the end of each chapter in support of my argument and the demonstration of my main argument – i.e. that speaking to the Divine in literature can be an indirect form of protest against the authorities and an incitement to rebel – coming together in the final conclusion of this thesis.

### **Literature review**

Amidst the large number of resources my research depended on, many were specific to each author and his work and are reviewed in the relevant chapter. However, a number of sources were also used as general reference throughout the thread of this paper and it therefore seemed more appropriate to present the most pertinent ones at this stage. Having said this and as mentioned above, in addition to this literature review, there will be another one in each chapter related to the sources reviewed in support of the points and argument each presents. In every case, I chose to distribute the literature in the following order: general resources, including those related to mysticism and dialogism, followed by specific resources relative to each individual writer the chapter discusses. The reason for this division is to reduce the distance between the literature review evaluation and the writer under investigation in order to effectuate a direct comparison between the previous studies and the difference that this thesis attempts to prove.

I begin with *al-Jamil wa-l-Muqaddas* (The Beautiful and The Holy) by Annemarie Schimmel (2008), a book subtitled *Essays about non-traditional studies in the Islamic civilisation* and

translated by ‘Aqil ‘Idan, in which the author offers three different essays about non-traditional studies in the Islamic civilisation, as the subtitle states. In this work, the researcher divides these three poetical mystical phenomena into three chapters: *The Garden*, *Simile in Letters in Islamic Literature* and *The Bald Falcon*. I consider this book as a significant study in the field of mysticism because it not only explores the analysis of symbols from this perspective, but also goes through mystical traditions such as Persian Sufism, which gives an expanded dimension to the symbols’ allusion. In the first chapter, the author mentions the occurrence of the rose and the garden in Islamic mystical poetry, since Islam, as a religion, was born in a sterile rural area (ibid., 38). Moreover, she presents several poetic examples where a poet describes the figure of a flower mystically or illustrates his preferences for a certain type of plant, such as al-Suyuti when he speaks of the wild viola:

سماوية اللباس، مسكية الأنفاس، واضعة رأسها على ركبتيها كعاشق مهجور، تنطوي على قلب مسجور.

(al-Suyuti, as cited in Schimmel 2008, 45)

Of celestial dress and musky breath

Her head on her knee resting such as an abandoned lover

She arches over an overflowing heart.

The author continues to list several examples followed by a brief analysis of what the condition of a rose alludes to; she maintains that it is symbolic of the state of Jesus because its perfume revives the dead, as his breath did (ibid., 50). Schimmel covers specific aspects such as the ability of the passionate *bulbul* (nightingale) to read the rose’s fragrance, an inherited symbolic story of absolute yearning, or *Bustān al-Wiṣal* (The Garden of Reunion), where she cites Rumi’s thought, which claims that each rose wears a perfume from heaven (ibid., 52). However, these scenes are not

presented from an analytical point of study. When a poet expresses the beauty of plants or uses a flower to symbolise a beloved, Schimmel simply mentions the allusions of their description without examining the layered relations between the poet, the garden and the flower through rising tones of dialogue. Additionally, the author examines each symbol individually without demonstrating how these symbols could create a particular pattern, which not only a poet might speak of, but also the symbols themselves could create a certain dialogue between the elements of the garden that could tell more about the poem, poet and the mystical thoughts, an analysis that I intend to provide by examining the mystical symbols in al-Suhrawardi's poetry through a theoretical structure.

### **Dialogical studies**

For obvious reasons, given that my research is centred on dialogue in Sufi literature, I naturally searched for as many studies as possible that examine the dialogical aspect in mystical poetry, however, this turned out to be like looking for a needle in a haystack. Therefore, I widened my quest to look for similar materials relating to the Qur'an, since it is the primary source of inspiration for Sufi poets and documents the Prophet's mutual dialogue with the Divine. In his study *al-Hiwar fi al-Qur'an* (Dialogue in the Qur'an), Fadl Allah explains the reason behind the use of dialogue in Islam by stating:

لجأ الإسلام إلى الجدل القائم على الحوار المباشر [...] من أجل إشغال الساحات بعلامات الاستفهام، التي يطرحها [...] كل ذلك من أجل أن تدخل الفكرة في وعي الإنسان بعمق [...] ولهذا طرح الإسلام في القرآن الكريم جدال الإنسان وحواره الذاتي مع نفسه، إلى جانب جداله مع مجتمعه ومع الفئات التي كانت تمثل القوة المعارضة آنذاك.

(Fadl Allah 1996, 51)

Islam has adopted a dialectic based on direct dialogue [...] in order to fill the public sphere with question marks, which it suggests [...] so as to raise a deep awareness of human

consciousness [...]. This is why, in the Qur'an, Islam has introduced dialectic and dialogue of the human being with himself, as well as with his society and the groups that represented the opposition force at that time.

Fadl Allah divides the dialogue in the Qur'an into three types: direct, indirect and dialectic (ibid., 52–53). The first type, direct dialogue, can be clearly noted in verses that mention a conversation between the Divine and the Prophet, for instance in the dialogue between Abraham and the Divine in *Sūrat al-Baqara* (Qur'an 2: 260). Indirect dialogue, as the author states, remains in false claims that the Qur'an disproves (Fadl Allah 1996, 53). As the Divine says in *Sūrat Yūnus*:

قالوا اتخذ الله ولدا سبحانه هو الغني له ما في السموات و ما في الأرض إن عندكم من سلطان بهذا أتقولون على الله ما لا تعلمون. (Qur'an 10: 68)

They say, 'God has children!' May He be exalted! He is the Self-Sufficient One; everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him. You have no authority to say this. How dare you say things about God without any knowledge? (Abdel Haleem 2005, 133)

The third type or dialectic dialogue, the author maintains, is to be included in the first one. This is due to two reasons: firstly, the word *jadal* (dialectic) takes a new interpretation that could insinuate the action that is practiced by two people in what is called a debate. Secondly, he considers the word *hiwār* (dialogue) to have a meaning beyond the dialectic (ibid., 52). Although I find this criterion in distinguishing between types of dialogue worth following, my own method will differ concerning the application, where I suggest that indirect dialogue does not lie in arguing with interlocutors, but is an exchange between mystical symbols, such as when tears are seen to speak.

I consider this book useful in the matter of collecting the dialogical verses in the Qur'an. However, it tends to be more explanatory than analytical, as the author makes use of Qur'anic verses that include dialogue, as examples to address his thoughts to the reader in order to follow the dialogical Qur'anic method in arguing with others (ibid., 165). The explanations beneath each Qur'anic example are also informative. The author speaks of the *āya* (verse) content without adding a methodological dimension to his annotations. There are some illuminating notes that are worthy of consideration, such as the emotional impact of the divine dialogue on the speaker and the reader (ibid., 161), the role of dialogue in the Qur'an in detecting the addressee's situation (ibid., 163) and the use of tenderness in the dialogical style between Moses, Aaron and Pharaoh (ibid., 275), when the Divine says:

"اذهبا إلى فرعون إنه طغى، فقولا له قولا لينا لعله يتذكر أو يخشى" (Qur'an 20: 43–44)

(Go, both of you, to Pharaoh, for he has exceeded all bounds. Speak to him gently so that he may take heed, or show respect [Abdel Haleem 2005, 197]). These observations, though interesting, are however only mentioned in passing and are not addressed in an in-depth analytical manner, in my opinion.

The second book about dialogical studies I refer to in this section is a study with a similar title to the aforementioned source, conducted by Muhammad Shadi. In his introduction, he declares that there are four purposes of dialogue in the Qur'an: it aims to educate people in the manners of discussion and exchanging dialogue and teaching preachers how to endure sarcasm from the public in order to persuade them with truth, to delineate the relations among individuals in Islamic society, to assert the concept of worshipping the Divine without polytheism, and to reassure the Prophet's concerns and to deliver exhortation (Shadi 2010, 20–22). I find this segmentation informative but it appears to be confined to the content of *āyas* and not subject to a specific framework.

The author explores the rhetorical characteristics of dialogue in the Qur'an by highlighting several such tendencies like anastrophe and interrogative style. This method is significantly beneficial in examining the dialogical stylistics in al-Suhrawardi's poetry. I nevertheless intend to integrate this approach with speech act theory due to my belief that it could be an addition to rhetorical analysis, specifically by analysing the imperatives and their indications, where the author restricts himself to traditional rhetorical allusion without relating it to the concept of the authority hierarchy, a relevance that I aim to introduce through analysing my first case study. Moreover, this analysis is considered to be more technical than literal since it probes dialogical Qur'anic verses from the angle of rhetoric without taking into account an examination of their dimensions. On the contrary, the author allocates a chapter to discussing the importance of context and its role in determining the used dialogical tone (ibid., 307). I find this observation to be crucial and worthy of exploration in the poetry analysis.

Another article that tackles the theme of dialogue in the Qur'an is a paper written by Muntasir Mir. The scholar focuses on the dramatic aspect in the Qur'anic dialogue, particularly the one used between human characters (Mir 1992, 1). He maintains that despite the fact that the Qur'an is the word of the Divine, its delivery through the verses tends to be reported in a certain form; it sometimes starts with a statement followed by a dialogue to illustrate it. This is credibly emphasised, for the sake of confirming the oneness of the Absolute and to negate any type of otherness that might relate to Him. Mir states that dialogue in the Qur'an serves the continuance of the discourse and does not interrupt it. Moreover, the writer considers dialogue in the Qur'an as a medium of understanding the character of prophets such as Joseph, Moses and Abraham. For

example, he mentions the incident of Abraham destroying idols<sup>2</sup> and states that this situation gives us the impression of satire and irony in his character (ibid., 5–6). The author presents six types of dialogues in the Qur’an, as follows:

- 1– The common, conversational type between a prophet and his people, to deliver the Divine message to them (ibid., 9).
- 2– The one through which the Divine commissions his prophets with his orders and gives them the encouragement of carrying them out throughout the nation with resolutions, such as the Divine responding to a desire in the prophets' heart.
- 3– Ordinary conversations between human characters addressing certain values that are either praised or condemned in the Qur’an.
- 4– Deliberations between mortals that examine matters that have occurred and the importance of discussing them.
- 5– Dialogues with futuristic connotations, as they would only occur in the hereafter.
- 6– “The one-sided dialogue,” in which the discourse of the Divine is addressed to a single individual (ibid., 10).

The writer then touches upon the Qur’anic dialogue structure. He observes that it has a marking start and a comment in the end. The marker might take the form of a word, like *idh* (when) or a verb, like *wadhkur* (recall) or a question, such as *hal atāk ḥadīthū* (has the story of.. come to you)

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<sup>2</sup> This story was mentioned in the Qur’an, as follows:

وتالله لأكيدن أصنامكم بعد أن تولوا مدبرين، فجعلهم جذاذا إلا كبيرا لهم لعلهم إليه يرجعون، قالوا من فعل هذا بآلهتنا إنه لمن الظالمين، قالوا سمعنا فتى يذكرهم يُقال له إبراهيم، قالوا فأتوا به على أعين الناس لعلهم يشهدون، قالوا أ أنت فعلت هذا بآلهتنا يا إبراهيم؟ قال بل فعله كبيرهم هذا فاسألوهم إن كانوا ينطقون. (Qur’an 21:57–63)

(By God I shall certainly outwit your idols as soon as you have turned your backs!’ He broke them all into pieces but left the biggest one for them to return to. They said, ‘Who has done this to our gods? How wicked he must be! Some said, ‘We heard a youth called Abraham talking about them.’ They said, ‘Bring him before the eyes of the people, so that they may witness his trial. They asked, ‘Was it you, Abraham, who did this to our gods? He said, ‘No, it was done by the biggest of them– this one. Ask them, if they can talk.’ [Abdel Haleem 2005, 206])

(ibid., 11). Mir also presents an analytical examination of the dialogical scene between Moses and Pharaoh in *Sūrat al-Shu‘arā’* (the poets), where the Divine asks Moses to deliver his message to him. His analysis highlights crucial points regarding the speakers' characters. He notes that in this conversation, each prolocutor attempts to pull the other one to his side. In the dialogue, Pharaoh appears to be sarcastic and to underestimate Moses. On the other hand, Moses is calm, patient and responds with seriousness despite his addressee's irony (ibid., 12–14). Furthermore, the author points out that the nature of this dialogue is quickened and exchanging. Pharaoh's lines tend to be questioning, whereas Moses' are statements that are advanced relentlessly. The first appears to be in a defensive position and desperate to obtain respect, while the second is focused on the message he is delivering (ibid.,15). I find this analysis significant in terms of drawing the lines of the characteristics of each speaker by examining their dialogue. However, the paper is focused on dialogue in the Qur'an between characters and not between the Divine and his prophets.

Anthony Johns also examines dialogue in the Qur'an in a journal article, which I feel is worth mentioning too. Its particularity is that it explores the dramatic dialogue in the holy book with the aim of detecting human emotion and wisdom. The author targets dialogue in *Sūrat Yūsuf*, which he describes as a play for voices. The study concentrates on other silent elements that appear through the dialogue, such as the symbolism of Joseph's garment (Johns 1981, 38). Johns also discusses certain themes deduced from the dialogue between the characters of the story, for instance, the relationship between grieving and faith. He goes on to analyse the rest of the dialogues in the story and by means of the very dialogues, points out crucial themes layered in the conversation. An example is the uselessness of human deception, which is clearly demonstrated in the situation between Jacob and Joseph, when the first warns the second not to tell his brothers about his dream and the situation between Zulaykha and him, when she attempted to seduce him and later accused

him of harassing her, after being exposed (ibid., 36). The author emphasises the relation between the sura and Prophet Muhammad and maintains that mentioning his story in the Qur'an is a way of expressing how the Prophet's return to Mecca was a mark of reconciliation, since Muhammad said to Quraysh the same words that Joseph told his brothers (ibid., 43):

"لا تثریب علیکم الیوم" (Qur'an 12: 92)

(No reproach is held against you today)<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, he states that Jacob's grief at the loss of his son does not indicate lack of faith, as he tends to mention patience and believing in God whenever he feels sorrow for the deprivation of his child (ibid., 41). I believe that highlighting this point is significant to Sufi poetry, because it tends to use a tone of sadness and tenderness when expressing the loss of the Divine's communication. This could inculcate Sufi poetry of poverty of strength and faith, but instead, it provides a credible evidence that weeping in poetry composition does not allude to weak faith.

While all the above resources were useful in a number of ways, the most relevant study that I could find on the subject of dialogism was Martin Buber's comprehensive research on dialogical philosophy and how he related it to mysticism. His philosophy can be summarised as follows: the relationship between the human being and the other is dialogical. While the other might be a mortal or the Divine, he differentiates between them by using the term "you" for the first and "Thou" for the Divine and stresses that the entire meaning of the dialogue rests in the exchange between them and not in the One or the other or even in both of them together (Buber 2012, 101–106). Buber states that a genuine dialogue could be either silent or spoken since its genuineness actually appears when "each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them" (ibid., 116–120).

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<sup>3</sup> The translation is quoted from Johns 1981, 43.

I find these ideas credible and compelling in describing the features of indication that a dialogue with the Divine in a poem could allude to, particularly in exploring the pattern of relations between the addressee and the poet in his work. Additionally, Buber touches on the notion of love and its integration with dialogue by confirming that love is evil if it is monological. Without dialogue, love in man is derived from the awareness of otherness and eventually “the essence of all reality begins to disintegrate” (Friedman 2002, 89). This idea is likewise important to my thesis since the poems of al-Suhrawardi use love not only as a theme, but also as a language to produce what is similar to a *ghazal* (love poem), rather than being purely invocational. What is problematic in this study is that it is more philosophical than literary and, as the author of the work illustrates, Buber studied mysticism in Christianity and Judaism but not in Islam.

As stated already, the above are sources I will be returning to several times throughout my thesis, to substantiate many of the points I will be raising on the winding road to removing one by one the veils that, to the untrained eye, obscure the final argument I will be bringing out into the light. Armed with as much supporting literature as my long and challenging quest was able to dig out, I will be exposing the various layers of understanding inherent within the texts I am using as case studies, to demonstrate how mystical poetry can be a peaceful tool of protest and rebellion.

## **Research rationale**

Based on the literature review above and the ones included in each chapter of this thesis, I found that the Arabic literature lacks the examination of dialogue, particularly in Sufi poetry, which is actually composed to address the Divine and speak of a conversation that occurred between the poet and the Absolute. Moreover, Qur’anic studies that analyse the dialogue of the prophets in the Qur’an focus on the content of that dialogue and the allusions it contains from the religious point of view. There are only a few that analyse these dialogues dramatically, yet even when they do so, they

focus on the conversations between prophets and other people and not on those conversations that engage with the Divine. I believe the role of my thesis to be the creation of a study that inspects direct conversation between the writer and the Divine, particularly in mystical texts, in order to find the correlation between them and their ability to challenge authorities, whether they be political or religious. Furthermore, the philosophy of dialogue itself is poorly discussed in the Arabic resources compared to the Western ones. If Buber and Bakhtin produced the root studies in dialogue in the West, I could not find any equivalents in Arabic to contradict or oppose them.

My thesis aims to investigate the production of Sufi writers who have rarely been studied in general and who were not examined through the lens of dialogue. I attempt to provide an academic study about them that may hopefully help any scholar who might be interested in them in the future. This research builds a specific theoretical structure for each text, in order to understand the allusions and dimensions of the writer's dialogue with the Divine in each specific text. Through the research, I found that dialogue is a factor extracted from literary analysis in Arabic Studies. Nonetheless, the Qur'anic ones tend to classify the types of conversation without touching upon their reflection on the prophets' character or on their implications. My thesis will suggest a different approach to look at dialogical mystical texts in different genres.

### **Research questions**

In this paper, I address a number of questions with the aim of finding a clear conclusion that relates to dialogue, mysticism and power. These questions can be explicitly put as follows:

- What does the structure of the dialogue reveal about the character and disposition of the speaker and the addressee?
- Can a dialogue between a mortal and the Divine occur and if so, in what manner, what allusions might be implied from an emotional conversation between them and is there a relation between submission and power?

- What is the agency of an author when he is in dialogue with the Divine?
- What role does silence play, if any, in dialogue with the Divine?
- What is the difference between revelation and inspiration and is revelation a phenomenon that is exclusive to prophets or can it also happen to poets? These questions also lead to asking what the similarities and differences are between prophets and poets.
- What is the correlation between the mystic and the hero?
- Finally, the crux of the thesis and its fundamental argument revolve around the questions of whether a conversation between a mortal and his Divine could threaten the authorities, what the relationship between secularism and spirituality is and whether speaking with the Divine could render a writer politically powerful.

## **Methodology**

Since there are no studies on dialogue in mystical poetry, as my research demonstrates, my methodological procedure relies mainly on the close reading of primary sources and direct analysis of the texts. My approach is made through the prism of various theories and by engaging in many philological aspects, as the precise meaning of words is central and crucial to my analysis, and the historical and biographical frameworks are also of critical importance to allow the pinning down of meaning.

The theoretical framework is built on multiple theories that might not be directly related, but which I attempt to integrate through the analysis, in view of reaching a method that helps to unveil the layers of each text under examination.

In the first two chapters, the theology of each mystic is delved into, as it plays a major role both in composing the text and analysing it. Furthermore, this thesis relies on and applies the following: the methodology of illumination by al-Suhrawardi, speech act theory by Austin and Searl, the philosophy of dialogue by Buber, dialogism by Bakhtin, the Arabic poetry meter study of al-

Tayyeb, dramatic discourse by Gruendler, the mystical theology of al-Niffari, the study of the relation between poetry and prophecy by Kugel, Heinrichs, Zwettler and Cooper, the study of the Qur'an and revelation by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, the relation between spirituality and power by Foucault, *iltifāt*, grammatical shifting by Abdel Haleem, the hero's journey by Campbell and the relation between secularism and Sufism by al-Masrafi. Each method mentioned is extensively explained and applied in the analysis of the related texts.

The choice of approach is made based on each text's respective structure and inferences, for example, the approach of the hero's journey is only relevant for application in the third chapter, because the text under study is a play containing different characters and hence different voices. Unlike the other chapters, the author, 'Abd al-Sabur, did not compose a text addressing the Divine, instead, he narrates a discourse where al-Hallaj is speaking to the Divine, which is why I opted for Campbell's approach in this case, due to the difference in genre.

### **Brief breakdown**

Al-Suhrawardi is the first author I examine and dedicate the first chapter of this thesis to. I begin by presenting a literature review of different types of research carried out about the author and explain how this chapter contributes in providing a new dimension in the field of his poetry's studies. I later provide a brief biography of the poet and a discussion around his philosophy of illumination in order to contribute in-depth insight into his poetry. This is followed by a presentation of my analysis of his poem with the support of different scholars' perspectives, such as Bakhtin and Gruendler, to produce a critical examination of the various stages in his poem and reach the conclusion that the direct dialogue in the poem proffers a certain type of power.

In the second chapter, I explore the texts of al-Niffari in his book *The Mawaqif and Mukhatabat*, which I selected as an example of both a direct and two-directional conversation with the Absolute.

Al-Niffari has rarely been studied academically on account of his complicated stylistics and the reflection of his philosophy in his texts. This chapter has the lion's share of the thesis due to the necessity of examining his theology through a literary dimension. I set off with a literature review that discusses certain studies about al-Niffari and the intended additions to provide by exploring the aspect of dialogue. The chapter later presents a brief biography of the mystic and a detailed section of his philosophy, as well as my subjective reflections regarding them. In the third section, I lay down my analysis by discussing certain aspects that constitute the structure of the examination, such as the concept of revelation and inspiration and the echo of prophecy via the methodology of speech act theory, *Illifāt* and Foucault. Moreover, this section provides a dissection of the dialectic of voice and a comparison of al-Niffari's texts with the concept of *mi'rāj*, which will be clarified in due course. In the conclusion, I present the link between the texts of al-Niffari and claiming power.

In the third chapter, my study is focused on *Ma'sat al-Hallaj*, a dramatic work written by the poet Salah 'Abd al-Sabur. I selected this book particularly for it presents the case of writing about a character who had a conversation with the Divine. The chapter is divided into two sections, the first one includes a literature review about the play and an explanation of the suggested dimension of examination, as well as the biographies of both the poet and the protagonist and finally, a summary of the play. The second section incorporates the methodology of examination, which is based on the hero's journey by Campbell, followed by an analysis of the play that focuses on the dialectic of life and death and the image of prophecy. At the end of this section, I attempt to touch upon the relationship between leftism and Sufism to conclude that, in modern literary works, dialogue with the Divine represents the voice of rebellion against oppression.

I end the thesis with an overall conclusion that draws the similarities and comparisons between the three works and brings the findings of all three chapters together to corroborate my main argument.

## Chapter One

### al-Suhrawardi

#### Section One

إليك إشاراتي وأنت الذي أهوى      وأنت حديثي بين أهل الهوى يُروى  
وأنت مراد العاشقين بأسرهم      فطوبى لقلب ذاب فيك من البلوى  
محبوك تاهوا في الهوى و تولّوها      وكل امرئ يصبو لنحو الذي يهوى.

(al-Suhrawardi 2005, 54)

For Thou art my beacons and Thou art the one I love  
And Thou art my narrated tale amongst the people of love  
And Thou art the desire of all the lovers  
Lucky is the heart that melted into Thou from affliction  
Your lovers are lost in admiration and bewildered  
And every being yearns for his beloved.

Falling in love, or according to the Sufi perspective, rising in love creates an endless desire to speak with or accompany the beloved, for conversations of love are the life of souls. Being away from the beloved causes yearning, suffering and the thirst to speak to the one you love. This basic human state is not limited to the secular realm but extends to spirituality as well. Al-Suhrawardi is one of those lovers who expresses this insistent need to converse with the Divine in his poems. Because studies about his poetry are rare, I felt motivated to explore his poetry and examine the aspect of dialogue with the Divine in one of his poems. In this chapter, I present a literature review of studies

about al-Suhrawardi to clarify the aspect that I attempt to tackle and offer a brief biography of the life and works of the poet. I then provide a summary of his philosophy named *ḥikmat al-ishrāq* (the wisdom of illumination), for I believe it to be crucial to understanding his philosophical perspective on account of its significant correlation with his poetry. I continue by expounding an analysis of one of al-Suhrawardi's poems to examine the element of dialogue with the Divine in it and its relation to power. I conclude by demonstrating that seemingly vulnerable love poems that speak to the Divine can be indirect but effective modes of challenging the political authorities.

### **Literature review**

After conducting extensive research about al-Suhrawardi, I found that studies about his poetry were nearly nonexistent. I did nonetheless find a number of studies that can be indirectly related to the subject of my thesis. The first is *al-Ab'ad al-Sufiyya fi al-Islam* by Annemarie Schimmel, in which the poet occupies a small individual chapter in a study under the name of *Za'im al-Ishraq: al-Suhrawardi al-Maqtul* (Schimmel 2006, 293). In this section, the author covers the biography of the poet, including his life and works and stresses his invention of the philosophy of Illumination, which she offers a definition of (ibid., 295). Moreover, she states that he wrote the best narratives of symbolic works (ibid., 294), possibly referring to *al-Sam'iyat* (The Acoustics), *al-'Aql al-Ahmar* (The Red Intellect), *Naghmat Ajnihat Jibril* (The Chant of Gabriel's Wing) and *Lughat al-Naml* (The Language of Termites), which are some of the Sufi tales al-Suhrawardi wrote in a symbolic language. However, she does not mention any observations or studies about al-Suhrawardi as a poet. On the contrary, the author describes Ibn al-Farid as the *Shā'ir al-Ṣūfiyya* (the poet of Sufism) and expands more on his famous poem *al-Tā'iyya*, with an emphasis on critics' attention towards it (ibid., 308–312). Schimmel's book is one of the most comprehensive studies of the history of the Sufism movement in Islam in the Arabic, Persian and Turkish heritage, where the author allocates sections to the most influential Sufis, such as al-Ghazali and Ibn 'Arabi. Nonetheless, the study

tends to be more informative and collective than argumentative, focusing on al-Suhrawardi's death as echoing the tragedy of al-Hallaj, without providing a clear link or explanation for this. Most importantly, there is no sign of academic study of his poetry or research into the concept of dialogue in mystical literature.

The second book that I present is Adonis's *Sufism and Surrealism*, a work whose approach I believe to be highly significant. The book is mainly structured as a comparative study between two methodologies, as the title obviously declares. However, what is actually evident is that Adonis compares Sufism with surrealism not as a philosophy nor as a perspective, but as an art in itself. He says: "This takes us on to what I shall call the 'mysticism' of art. We should not confuse the word here with the burden of its religious-historical associations, but regard it only as an embodiment of an artistic vision" (Adonis 2005, 172). Then, to explain his premise, he states that mysticism separates a person from outward appearances, enabling him or her to achieve profundity and enter into an inward dimension. Sufism judges logic and reasoning through intuition and experiences, in contrast to philosophy, which uses reasoning and logic to judge intuition and experiences. He continues by maintaining that the Sufism of art differs from religious Sufism; the first one rejects life as a veil that blocks true life, while the second refuses to see life as ephemeral. This mysticism is a constant state of flux through matter towards the core of the world, where the universe is in endless movement and it sees creativity as a journey of infinity within the heart of this movement. Moreover, the mysticism of art unites reality and dream, which harmonises contrasting elements, emphasising that the deep meaning of being human remains in the continuous quest for infinity and the role of art lies in the modality of expressing this idea. This type of Sufism concerns itself with what is unknown, and therefore the purpose of its artistic nature is to always reveal the childhood of the world. Adonis ends his explanation by stressing the mutability of this form of Sufi art that

presents the world as new and different in terms of image, through a distinguishable experience, the openness, movement and spontaneity of which travel beyond sensibility (ibid., 172–173).

I consider this perspective towards literary works of Sufism to be crucial to presenting a new analytical view of the work of al-Suhrawardi – since his poetry has never been studied before – and to examining his work aesthetically, in addition to being related to his philosophy of illumination, but by using the concept of dialogue and extending it to investigate how this could affect the question of power. Nonetheless, I find that this approach tends to be something of a generalisation. Adonis explains his point of view yet does not provide examples, something that I believe needs to be presented to illustrate the dimension of challenging the aforementioned view of the Sufi text and what that could allude to.

The writer mentions al-Suhrawardi towards the end of the first part of his book, in a chapter entitled "The Harmonious Difference," in which he speaks of Sufi writing as being the story of emerging from exile and attaining the higher point, since man is an exiled foreigner (ibid., 149). Adonis touches upon a work called *al-Ghurba al-Gharbiyya* (Occidental Exile), which he summarises in a brief paragraph to explain the experience of diaspora of a human being and the various stages needed to reach a higher state, by plunging through layers of darkness to reach the light (ibid., 151). Having said that, this is the only page where he alludes to al-Suhrawardi by referring to one of his philosophical works, not the poetic work, despite his emphasis on concentrating on Sufism as art, the poetics of thought and the form of creativity. Moreover, Adonis points out in several places the reasons behind the conflict between Sufis and strict religious associations due to the use of metaphor. He asserts, for example, that "religious parties are the most hostile to figurative language, since they are interested in what they call the facts, which they preach and explain in their entirety. Figurative language is imaginary, which in their view means that it is wrong and meaningless" (ibid., 121). By noting this point, he articulates his recognition of the relation between mystical art and its capacity to provoke political and religious authorities.

However, these ideas lack a practical application that shows a clear analytical link with the figurative language that might generate such a threat.

The final book in this section is Denis E. McAuley's study on Ibn 'Arabi's *Mystical Poetics*. This book is central to my thesis due to its focus of attention. Regardless of the fact that the study is centred on Ibn 'Arabi, I consider it to be of importance since it is the poetic work of the author it examines, unlike the majority of the other several studies on Ibn 'Arabi, which concentrate mostly on him as a philosopher rather than a poet, as is indeed the case with al-Suhrawardi. MacAuley clearly introduces his approach, in which he integrates Ibn 'Arabi's mystical reflections with his poetic perspective, stating, for example, that "Ibn 'Arabi connects poetry to the faculty of imagination because poetry operates by putting images together, thereby making intelligibilia more accessible to the human mind [...]. Poetry is connected with imagination but also with ordering of the sublunar world" (McAuley 2012, 43). After quoting from Ibn 'Arabi, he continues: "The implication is that because poetry entails the putting together of images in the form of structured (metered and rhymed) speech, it is analogous with the putting together of the elements<sup>4</sup> and thus with movement and change" (ibid.).

This method is vital to the framework of my analysis because I examine al-Suhrawardi's philosophy of illumination and highlight how it is reflected in his poems, so as to add an additional theoretical dimension to the analysis. Nevertheless, I believe that my take on this approach is different. With regard to the analytical perspective on the purpose of mystical poetry, at the end of the fifth section of the third chapter of his book, McAuley concludes that "Ibn 'Arabi's poem is a comment on the Qur'an, but also a piece that calls for interpretation in its own right" (ibid., 87).

In contrast to this interpretation, I consider the role of mystical poetry to be much more than simply a limited summary of an author's set of ideas. Despite the fact that illumination constitutes an

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<sup>4</sup> The yellow bile, blood, phlegm and black bile mentioned by Ibn 'Arabi as quoted in the book.

important method that opens new horizons in reading the poem, I argue that philosophy is an individual element that operates together with another factor that jointly build the poem up to be more than just a receptacle for thoughts. I suggest that the poem itself is an act of speech that proposes a political, forceful message that could challenge the pillars of governmental authority.

McAuley also touches on the notion of dialogue at several points. For example, he analyses a poem between a sinner and a speaker of the Qur'an, where the second is attempting to guide the first to the path of goodness but he refuses to follow him (ibid., 79–81). The poet uses this literary device to emphasise the point that the sinner is actually an unexpected guide to the speaker. However, this surprising dialogue, as he describes it, is a method used to bring the Qur'anic paradox to life (ibid., 82). I find this point of view problematic since it limits the dialogue to the speaker and the sinner without taking into account the relationships that might be generated by this act of speech. If the speaker is advising the sinner, then what is he trying to actually say about himself and the sinner? This type of questioning is not explored in McAuley's analysis.

Regarding primary resources that focus on al-Suhrawardi, the most prominent source is al-Suhrawardi's collection of poems or *Diwan* itself. Al-Shibli states that al-Suhrawardi's *Diwan* is composed of 145 verses (as cited in al-Suhrawardi 2005, 12). Despite the fact that al-Shibli characterises the poems with simplicity, familiarity and clarity, I noticed that his poetry has additional dimensions, specifically in terms of using the second person pronoun or what is called *ḍamīr al-mukhāṭab* in Arabic. Al-Suhrawardi has been individually studied by several scholars such as 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi, Mustafa Ghalib and Muhammad Abu Rayyan. However, their studies only concentrate on his philosophical works without any recognition of his poetry. This matter, as I strongly believe, is what constitutes the significance of my thesis in the field of the study of mystical poetry. From reading his *Diwan*, I observed several tendencies worthy of being examined within a constructive framework. I noticed that the poet uses two types of dialogue when he speaks

of his yearning for the Divine, a direct and an indirect one. There is also an imagery of prophecy in his poems and an application of the concept of love as more than a just a theme but as a sort of language also; an expressive language whose deepest meaning is conveyed indirectly, not through words, but through overtones that lie within words, that can be felt more than understood and that indicate a certain emotional status. I suggest that the state of a yearning lover, which al-Suhrawardi presents in his poems, might be more than just a mystical invocation; it might hide and symbolise a much more profound meaning, which I believe it is possible to discover through certain methodologies such as dialogism and speech act theory.

### **Al-Suhrawardi's biography**

Abu al-Futuh Yahya Ibn Habash ibn Amirak is also known as Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi al-Maqtul. His birth is believed to have occurred between 545AH and 550AH (between 1150 and 1156 CE) in a small village called Suhraward, that lies on a path between Hamadhan and Zinjan in South Sultaniyya in Iraq (Ghalib 1982, 14–15). Ghalib states that the reason behind naming him al-Maqtul (the murdered) was to prevent the masses from considering him a *shahīd* (martyr). However, his students interpreted this word as martyr and this was confirmed when Henry Corbin found a script where one of his pupils calls him a *shahīd* (ibid., 15). In his formative years, al-Suhrawardi started his scholarly path by attending lectures given by Shaykh Majd al-Din al-Jili at the school of al-Miragha, where he met one of the most significant Sufi scholars, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (Badawi 1964, 97–98). Later, al-Suhrawardi traveled to Isfahan and his life of endless journeys began soon afterwards. Al-Shahrazuri divided al-Suhrawardi's life between *Bilād al-Rūm* (the lands of Rome) and *Bilād al-Shām* (the Levant) (ibid., 98–99). According to Ibn al-Raḥiqqa, al-Suhrawardi was constantly on the move in his search for knowledge and isolated from any material concerns:

كنتُ أنا وإياه (أي السهروردي) نتمشى في جامع ميفارقين، وهو لابس جبّة قصيرة مضرّبة زرقاء، وعلى رأسه فوطة مفتولة، وفي رجليه زربول، ورأني صديق لي، فأتى إلى جانبي وقال: "ما جئت تماشي إلا هذا الخربندا؟" فقلتُ له: اسكت! هذا سيد الوقت شهاب الدين السهروردي، فتعظّم قولي وتعجب ومضى. (ibid., 99–100).

I was walking with him - al-Suhrawardi - in Miyafarqin mosque; he wore a short, stitched blue gown, a twisted towel on his head and shoes on his feet, when a friend of mine saw me, came to my side and said: "Have you found no one else to walk with apart from this fool?" So I said to him: "Shush! This is the master of time Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi," and he was astonished by what I said, marvelled at my words, then left.

When he moved to Aleppo, his knowledge shone and attracted people around him; this provided al-Suhrawardi with the confidence to argue not only with religious scholars, but with philosophers as well. His knowledgeable superiority in philosophy and religion provoked the elite's hatred and ire, which led to him being accused of heresy (Abu Rayyan 1959, 15). This reputation aroused the curiosity of King al-Zahir, the son of Salah al-Din, who ruled Aleppo at that time. He invited him to his palace in order to host a debate between himself and other scholars in Aleppo. Al-Suhrawardi showed an interesting quality of wisdom and replied to other scholars' claims with significant theological arguments. This event led al-Zahir to become fond of the poet and to appoint him as one of his closest scholars. Nevertheless, this close relationship did not enable the king to reverse his father's decision to execute al-Suhrawardi (ibid., 15–17).

Extremist religious scholars wrote to Salah al-Din to warn him of al-Suhrawardi's negative influence on his son's beliefs. Mahmud Muhammad Ali Muhammad confirms that there were several factors that constituted the motive behind the assassination of al-Suhrawardi. First and foremost was the political aspect and on this point, Mahmud Muhammad Ali Muhammad agrees with Horton when he states that al-Suhrawardi's grouping involved reviving the sect of al-

'Isma'iliyya, which believes in the holy transfiguration of Ali's sons. Therefore, he was considered a political revolutionary who sought to counter the regime (Muhammad 1999, 29). Secondly, al-Suhrawardi clashed in arguments with his opponents and thirdly, he claimed to be a prophet since he called himself *al-Mu'ayyad bel Malakut* (the supported by the Divine) (ibid., 30). As for his death, the least that can be said is that there appears to be quite some ambiguity surrounding it. Some scholars claimed that he was murdered in prison because of his hunger strike, while others suggested that he was executed with a sword. However, Muhammad supports Corbin's opinion on this matter, namely that al-Suhrawardi was killed under mysterious circumstances in 587AH (around 1193 CE) (ibid., 31–32).

The Sufi scholar left a significant literary heritage, writing more than fifty books in Arabic and more than twenty in Persian. The most significant of them were *Hikmat al-'Ishraq* (The Wisdom of Illumination), *al-Lamahat* (The Glances) and *Kalimat al-Tasawwuf* (The Word of Sufism) (al-Suhrawardi 2005, 20–52).

### **Illumination, *Ishrāq***

Before starting to analyse the chosen poem, it is essential to address a central point that is related to understanding al-Suhrawardi's perspective on how to see the world through his poetry, by briefly reviewing his philosophy of illumination. According to al-Taftazani, illumination is:

(as cited in al-Sih 2004, 187) “حدوث الإلهامات من الله للصوفي بطريق مباشر، وعلى باطنه أو قلبه”

(the occurrence of revelations from the Divine to the Sufi in a direct path to his internal being or his heart).

Al-Sih states that al-Suhrawardi called his philosophy “illuminating” because it was a philosophy that resulted in the truth and in absolute purity, clarity and manifestation. There is nothing more apparent than the light; it needs no introduction. Everything can be divided into what is, in itself, light and into what is not or, in other words, into darkness (ibid.). Moreover,

illumination is an internal psychological and emotional experience that is guided by spiritual meditation and immanent sensation. The standard of this experience's credibility occurs after seeking ascension stages that are achieved via practices that reveal clear facts, which are free of doubt (Talib 2014, 167). The word illumination, *ishrāq*, which originates from the word *mashriq* (the east), itself derives from the word *sharq* (sunrise) and points to yet another word, which is *mashriq* (orient) (Nasr 1963, 376). The lexical association indicates the connection between *ishrāq* and symbolism. It alludes to the fact that the sun rises from the orient and illuminates the world. Therefore, the land will be fraught with lights. This analogy of the land becoming the home of lights symbolises the relation between gnosis<sup>5</sup> and illumination. It means that as the sun rises and shines on the universe, so gnosis rises in the soul and illuminates it. In contrast, the sun sets in the occident, the place where darkness lies and which, according to Nasr, represents "matter, ignorance, or discursive thought, entangled in the mesh of its own logical constructions" (ibid., 379).

One of the key philosophies that influenced the theory of illumination is the philosophy of Hermes<sup>6</sup> in the east, for it seeks to create a Divine wisdom that accomplishes man's salvation through the unification of the human with the Divine (Talib 2014, 126–127). Having said this, al-Suhrawardi was also inspired by Muslim philosophers such as al-Kindi. He was the first to manifest an illuminative tendency among the Islamic thinkers. It was demonstrated in his writings about *nafs* (soul), where he maintains that the soul's essence is analogous with that of the Divine. Therefore,

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<sup>5</sup> Mystical knowledge (Arnaldez 2012). This notion will be discussed in detail in the first section of chapter two.

<sup>6</sup> Harmas, Harmis or Hirmis is believed to be divided into three persons. The first is believed to be either Enoch or the Prophet Idris, who lived before the flood in Egypt and who is thought to be the builder of the Pyramids. The first one is supposed to be the one who documented the first scientific achievements of man on the walls of sanctuaries to prevent their destruction by the flood. The second Hermes is assumed to be from Babylonia and to be the one who lived after the flood and resuscitated scientific studies, however, he is thought to have later migrated to Egypt. The third one is said to have created his philosophy of crafts and science in Egypt after the flood. According to the Sabians, Hermes is perceived as a quasi God or a philosopher prophet. Regarding his role, Massignon claims that he is responsible for promoting the Hellenistic and Neoplatonic tradition in Islam (Plessner, 2012).

the only method to reach gnosis is through the purification of sins and the avoidance of lust. If a soul should achieve that and subsequently continues its search, it will be polished and unified with the Divine's luminous image to show the image of all things, since the polished mirror reflects all images (ibid., 128–129). On the other hand, al-Farabi states that the aim of gnosis is to connect with 'aql fa' 'āl<sup>7</sup> (intellect agent)<sup>8</sup>, which is obtained by means of Gabriel, through whom all images, knowledge and gnosis are revealed. A man can only reach this stage through endurance, practices and self-purification (ibid., 128–129).

In al-Suhrawardi's point of view, light is not that absolute brightness which appears to the naked eye, it is rather a process that occurs through perception and awareness. Therefore, the act of seeing is not limited to and goes far beyond the fact that the naked eye makes contact with a visible object; it is the direction of the self to the mind that shines a light on the eye in order to see the object (Abu Rayyan 1959, 114–115). Al-Suhrawardi launched his theory from the following verse in the Qur'an (Talib 2014, 187):

الله نور السماوات و الأرض مثل نوره كمشكاة فيها مصباح، المصباح في زجاجة، الزجاج كأنها كوكب دري يوقد من شجرة مباركة زيتونة لا شرقية ولا غربية يكاد زيتها يضيء ولو لم تمسسه نار، نور على نور يهدي الله لنوره من يشاء.

(Qur'an 24: 35)

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<sup>7</sup> According to the neoplatonic perspective, 'aql is the first or the second entity that was emanated via divinity as the first cause. It is believed that the intellect is responsible for the creation of the soul and *tabī'a* or character (translation quoted from al-'Ajam, 1999, 1138). Being the first creation, the intellect has several names such as "the messenger" or "the representative of the Divine in the world." For theologians, 'aql represents the origin of knowledge. The notion of intellect is usually integrated with other terms such as character and *fitra* (nature), that indicate methods of independently knowing, deprived of the revelation's authority. Islamic philosophers were influenced by Aristotle and his Greek commentators regarding the meaning of 'aql. From their perspective, intellect consists of a part of the soul that relates to its ability of thinking and knowing, since this is the opposite of recognition (Boer & Rahman, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Translation quoted from al-'Ajam, 1999, 1141.

God is the Light of the heavens and earth. His Light is like this: there is a niche, and in it a lamp, the lamp inside a glass, a glass like a glittering star, fuelled from a blessed olive tree from neither east nor west, whose oil almost gives light even when no fire touches it—light upon light—God guides whoever He will to His Light. (Abdel Haleem 2005, 223)

Al-Suhrawardi defines the light as follows:

”النور هو الظاهر في حقيقة نفسه المظهر لغيره بذاته ، وهو أظهر في نفسه من كل ما يكون الظهور زائدا على حقيقته“

(al-Suhrawardi, as cited in Talib 2014, 214), (light is that which is apparent in its actual self, which shows the other via itself. It is much more manifest in its own self than what all other appearances may add to its truth). Henry Corbin comments on this by saying: “Therefore, the Light cannot be written nor drawn and cannot be acknowledged through evidence, for it is impossible to recognise the *Zāhir* (the Manifest) over all things through something that is less apparent, since the definer is clearer than the defined. Al-Suhrawardi refuses to provide a specific definition of the Light for two reasons: logically, the defined should be clearer than the definer, however, this cannot be applied here, for there is nothing clearer and more manifest than the light. It is by means of the light that things are defined and revealed. It is impossible to define something with anything that is less clear. Secondly, the definition must include a type and a classification or anything that might infer a sort of limitation or a sketch and this cannot be applied to the light either, for it cannot be classified under these faculties (Talib 2014, 214).

Al-Suhrawardi attempts to delve into demonstrating the existence of the *Nūr al-anwār* (Light of lights) following what *mashshā`iyya*<sup>9</sup> (peripateticism) started earlier to prove *wujūd wājib al-*

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<sup>9</sup> A school that was founded by Aristotle. It was named peripatetic due to the fact that he used to teach his students while walking. The school's doctrine was taught based on Aristotle's dogma in scientific proofs and philosophical theories (Saliba 1982, 373)

*wujūd*<sup>10</sup> (the existence of the necessary being). He starts from the principle of unsequenced light and gradually ascends to infinity, due to his claim of there being an end to each level of light. He believes that light should end at a light that has none after it, which is the Light of lights that overflows with self-light in an endless continuity (ibid., 182).

Al-Suhrawardi supports his idea, the existence of the Light of lights, by stating that our reasonable souls (*nufūs nāṭiqā*) are self-appearing (*zāhira li-dhātihā*). Therefore, they are upright lights (*anwār qā'ima*). However, since they are occurring, it is crucial for them to have a measuring instrument or *murajjih*, which in this case is embodied by the incorporeal light (*nūr mujarrad*), and if this was a necessary being (*wājib al-wujūd*), then the aim is achieved, and if it were not, it will end at *wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātih* (necessary being by itself), that is why al-Suhrawardi states:

"فالنفس دلت على الحي القيوم، و القيوم هو الظاهر وهو نور الأنوار المجرّد من الأجسام و علائقها وهو محتجب لشدة ظهوره" (ibid., 183), (the soul indicates the Everliving Eternal Sustainer who is the Manifest, the Light of lights devoid of bodies and their attachments and He is Veiled due to the intensity of His manifestness). In his book *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, al-Suhrawardi mentions that he witnessed the occurrence of these gnoses through illumination and emanation overflowing on his soul from the unknown (ibid.).

There are thus two types of light: mental and sensory, where the first is considered the principle and the second, the impact of that principle (Abu Rayyan 1959, 114–115). Al-Suhrawardi classifies lights into different categories: *anwār mujarrada* (incorporeal lights)<sup>11</sup> and *anwār 'araḍiyya* (accidental lights). The first are original lights and their truth is the light, which means that they are

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<sup>10</sup> Necessary being: a being for whose existence there is no cause, who is the first reason responsible for the existence of things and whose existence must be the very first and must be exalted and above any deficiency. This being has no form, classification or proof, for it is the proof of all things. Its existence is eternal and it is a being that cannot be multiplied. It is pure goodness, intelligence and reason and is the representation of pure beauty and perfection (Jahami 1998, 964).

<sup>11</sup> Translation quoted from Nasr, in Sharif 1963, 387.

illuminative essences in themselves and not by themselves. They descend from the Light of lights vertically and gradually on ten levels. Each level is more illuminative than the one before it (Talib 2014, 215). These lights are mediums for creating, influencing, existing and all the other inferior worlds originate from their shadow. They are simple and cannot be signified with senses nor can they dwell in a body and they have an awareness and life of their own (ibid., 216). According to al-Suhrawardi, these lights have three names: *al-anwār al-qāhira* (dominant lights), which exert *qahhāriyya* (domination) over inferior lights; *al-anwār al-qā'ima* (upright lights), which are illuminative substances standing by themselves and finally, there are *al-anwār al-mudabbira* (regent lights)<sup>12</sup>, which devise the orbits, aspects and other species and which are also known as *arbāb al-anwā'* (lords of the species) (ibid., 218).

Accidental lights are forms that reflect from the Light of lights onto the incorporeal lights, which increases their light, as if we were to add an external light to a lantern, which would be adding light upon light (*nūr 'alā nūr*). Those lights derive their name from being in front of the substance or in other words, as there are ten lights that are substances, it ensues that there are lights that derive from higher lights. These higher lights that come from above are accidental because they are not derived from the light itself but are reflected from other lights (ibid., 216). Accidental lights reflect from all levels of lights because they are constantly multiplying and are generated on a massive scale along the space of existence, therefore, things are generated due to generating lights. The more the lights descend, the more they expand and increase. Similarly to sensory light, the more distant it is from its source, the more it scatters and increases. From this illuminative duality, al-Suhrawardi explains the founding relationship between the Divine and His creatures, for He is the Light of lights and the whole of existence is akin to illuminative levels that are launched by Him. The human truth consists of the soul as the representative of the illuminative aspect while the

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<sup>12</sup> Translation quoted from Nasr, in Sharif 1963, 388.

body represents the dark one. The argument of their integration is an evidence that supports the origin of this systematic complementarity that creates the whole universe. (ibid., 217–218).

The process of illumination and witnessing has two different directions, one is descendant and the other ascendant. This process can be achieved when the veil between the illuminator and the object that has the ability to be illuminated is absent. Al-Suhrawardi compares illumination to the sunlight that rises on the earth, and witnessing to seeing the object. When the eye meets the object, there is an illumination of presence in the self, and then the eye can actually see the object (Abu Rayyan 1959, 139–140). The process of illumination and witnessing has two main doctrines which are *al-qahr* (domination) and *al-maḥabba* (love). Abu Rayyan maintains that these principles are movements that can be applied to the entire being (ibid., 141). The world is considered an exile for the human, and the only way for him to achieve his perfection is by reaching a higher state where he unites with his creator. Hence, man travels through life to reach that point (Adonis 2005, 149). According to al-Suhrawardi, this journey from exile to the higher self is actually a trip from the darkness that lies in the West to the light that remains in the East.<sup>13</sup> This journey has three parts: at first, man is captive in a place where he is engulfed in chains and layers of darkness piled on top of one another. The second stage sees him running towards the East or in other words, the light, and the third and final stage is that of arrival, where he reaches and meets the source of light (ibid., 150). The Divine is the source of light and as He is the creator of the soul, it follows that the soul is also made of light and this is where the boundary between the Divine and the soul is to be found (Badawi 1964, 128). In tentative conclusion, illumination is a dynamic philosophy (Abu Rayyan 1959, 175), which consists of an opposing duality that creates a certain type of movement embodied in man's quest to meet the divine light.

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<sup>13</sup>This is an indication of the story of *ghurba gharbiyya*, the story of the occidental exile, that will be discussed in detail in the analysis section.

Given that we are discussing the notion of duality, it is crucial to explore another two concepts. The first is darkness, which is the counterpart of light and the second is the dilemma of duality that is in contradiction with the monotheism doctrine that al-Suhrawardi launches from. He believes that the idea of primordially belongs to light, whereas the idea of "lastness" belongs to darkness. Light is the existence and the realistic fact, while darkness is dependent and is in fact the lack of light (Talib 2014, 181). Al-Suhrawardi sees light as a complete expression of the immanent intellectual truth, which indicates that light has the originality whereas darkness is only generated from it and caused by it (ibid., 187). Subsequently, the universe consists of these two elements and the human purpose in life is to migrate from darkness towards light. The closer a soul gets to the Light of lights, the more it becomes illuminated and gnostic.

Regarding the dilemma of duality, it is vital to discuss the notion of *fayḍ* (emanation), since it is the cure for this problem.

Al-Suhrawardi's idea of light was based on Ibn Sina's<sup>14</sup> idea of emanation, which itself was built according to Plotinus's<sup>15</sup> ideas, with slight changes in some terms (Talib 2014, 185). This idea was first upheld by Zoroastrianism<sup>16</sup>, which believes in two sources of the complete truth: *Ahura*

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<sup>14</sup> Islamic philosopher born in Afshana, a village outside of Bukhara. He died in 1037 AD. His writings revolved around several topics, including theoretical philosophy, logic, and practical philosophy (Gutas, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> The founder of the neoplatonic philosophy. Born in Egypt in 204 or 205 CE and died in Rome in 270 or 271. His milestone work in philosophy was *The Enneads*, where he discussed crucial topics such as ethics, natural philosophy, cosmology, psychology, epistemology et al. Plotinus created a revolution in metaphysics when he wrote the three essential principles: the One, the intellect and the soul (Gerson 2018).

<sup>16</sup>A religion that was named after he who is believed to be its prophet, whose name is Zoroaster. He was born in Persia and was appointed by the God of goodness, *Ahura Mazda*. The name Zoroaster means the man with the golden light or the person with the divine halo (Isma'il 2015, 8–9). The dogma of this religion believes in two types of life: that of the body and that of soul. It believes in the afterlife, heaven and hell and upholds that the sky is the Divine's abode. It designates canonisation by fire, since it alludes to the God of illumination and light. The doctrine encourages working and seeking blessings by way of cultivation and this is recommended in its holy book (al-Ghazali 2007, 310).

*Mazda*, the principle of goodness and *Ahriman*, the principle of evil. They believed that the conflict between these two factors was continuous and permanent. However, goodness always won and, according to them, oneness was represented through that. Nonetheless, this conflict weakens the idea of oneness and clings to the concept of duality with the Divine. Schools such as *Mānawiyya*<sup>17</sup> and *Mazdakiyya*<sup>18</sup> later developed the idea of replacing them with the duality of light and darkness. They claimed that the spiritual world was made by the Lord of light, whereas the materialistic one was made by the Lord of darkness. Those schools recommended detachment from the materialistic world due to its evil (ibid.,186). In order to move to the spiritual one, on account of its goodness, the schools explained that darkness was generated from a doubt that arose in the Lord of light himself (ibid., 187) .

The secret behind the interest of Muslims in this theory lies in the belief that existence and its contents are remains of Divine greatness, for He is the Creator. Therefore, Muslim philosophers were motivated to search for a method through which the world would have originated from its Creator in a way that creates harmony between philosophy and Islam. Hence, this theory explores how the material was produced from the non-material and how the multiple can be produced from the One and how existence is related to itself from the head of the hierarchy, meaning from *wājib al-wujūd* (the necessary being) to the lowest creatures (Talib 2014, 189). This caused a dilemma

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<sup>17</sup> Manichaeism: named after Mani, who was born in 215 AC. His doctrine was based on dividing the species into five types: four are bodies and the fifth is a soul. The bodies are fire, wind, water and light and their soul lies in the breeze when it moves and attaches to the light. Mani considered material to be the source of evil and urged the killing of the body's instincts. He believed monasticism to be the highest virtue and advised his followers to avoid marriage. He called upon fasting and glorified poverty because of his hatred of materialism (al-Ghazali 2007, 311).

<sup>18</sup> Mazdakism: named after Mazdak who was born three hundred years after Mani. Its dogma was significantly similar to Manichaeism, however, it differed in terms of its views regarding the willingness of the light that aims for goodness, while darkness targets wrong. Mazdak created a social revolution because he propagated a system that had analogies with socialism. Mazdak stated that there are three pillars of light: goodness, the prohibition of murder and hurting souls (ibid., 312).

among intellectuals, who questioned how the One could possibly produce multiplicity, since this contradicted with the concept of oneness. They therefore suggested that the only method to solve this contradiction would be to verify the existence of the Divine's emanation according to Plotinus (ibid., 190). This emanation occurs through mediums and one of them is the *nous* or prime intellect<sup>19</sup>. There is a first principle that emanates as an intellect and which, in its essence, is a one, but in terms of its considerations, is a multiple. It can comprehend itself and its reason. From this comprehension, it generates a second intellect and from its self-comprehension the first sky was created. Afterwards, this comprehension of itself created a third mind and a second sky and continued to create ten minds and nine skies, which in turn created mediums for creation. By way of this method, the philosophers explained the existence of the intellectual world and the material one. Accordingly, the multiplicity of the world was a result of the breeding, so to speak, of the intellects and the skies and not a result of the multiplicity of the Divine. Subsequently, the multiple world created the multiple intellects and skies. This multiple world was created among the first principles and the world was created by the Divine indirectly and with this, they believed that they solved the dilemma (ibid., 191). Moreover, the vision of the *Mashā'i* (peripatetics) correlates between the Divine and the world through the basis of *'illiyya* (causality), which is part of the emanation theory. They believe the material world to be realistic and its condition related to effecting and influencing relationships, where each occurrence is the result of another occurrence in its own existence. This new occurrence then becomes the cause for another one, which arises from it. Consequently, this is how things are related in the material world through a solid association, which is the causality from which it is impossible for any creature to be detached, ergo every creature obtains its existence from a higher principle and connects with other existing entities (ibid., 225) via the bond of causality. It would either be effected or influenced. If it influences, then it is a cause (*'illa*) and if it is effected then it is caused (*ma'lūl*). This chain of the *cause* and the *caused* reveals to us the association

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<sup>19</sup> Translation quoted from al-'Ajam, 1999, 1141.

between the world and its own self, which helps to explain incidents according to their own principles, as well as the reasons to predict their occurrence in the future if their principles exist, for example: the water boils according to the existence of fire. This means that the fire is a direct cause for boiling the water, whenever this principle occurs in the future, it will lead to the same result. Accordingly, all of our epistemological reactions to the world, all of our realisations and our behaviours according to its things are based on the principle of causality. Without this principle, we would not understand the world, be able to deal with or benefit from it. This principle controls the possibilities within themselves and controls the whole world. The evidence that was created by Ibn Sina to prove the existence of the Divine, the evidence by Aristotle that proves the existence of the first deriving force, that by Plato that proves the existence of the God of goodness and the life provider, or indeed the one Plotinus provided to prove the existence of the *nous*, all these evidences were based on the idea of the accusation of causality that states that the Divine is the cause and that this cause creates the caused creatures. Therefore, all things that were born from the Divine influence each other. For instance: the Divine creates a light that we call intellect and this intellect creates another one, and so on. Then a first sky is generated and this creates a second one and so forth until we reach the level of bodies (ibid., 226–227). Al-Suhrawardi believes that the Divine is the cause of the world, consequently, He first creates a light, in turn this light creates a second one and so on and so forth. Afterwards, the incorporeal lights descend and associate with each other in a manner such that each higher light is a cause for an inferior one until we reach the level of *jawāhir ghāsiqa* (dark substances), from which the isthmus and souls later branch out (ibid., 228). The idea of causality negates duality due to the fact that the Divine is the Creator of light, namely, He is not the opponent of darkness since he created both, light and darkness.

## Section Two

### An Analysis of al-Suhrawardi's Poem

خَلِيلِي إِنَّ الْأُنْسَ فِي فِرْقَةِ الْإِنْسِ  
فَكُنْ أَبَدًا مَا عَشْتِ فِي حَضْرَةِ الْقُدْسِ  
تَعِيشُ بِلَا مَوْتٍ وَتَبْقَى بِلَا فَنَاءٍ  
وَتَلْحَقُ بِالْمَعْنَى وَتَتَأَى عَنِ الْحَسِّ  
وَتَغْبِطُكَ الْأَفْلاكُ فِيمَا أَتَيْتَهُ  
وَيَشْرِقُ نُورُ فَيْكٍ مِنْ نَائِرِ الشَّمْسِ  
فَأَنْتَ هُوَ الْمَعْنَى وَفَيْكَ وَجُودُهُ  
وَفَيْكَ جَمِيعَ الْخَلْقِ وَالْعَرْشِ وَالْكَرْسِيِّ.

(al-Suhrawardi 2005, 69)

O friends! Affability is in parting from man  
So, for as you long as you live, be forever in the presence of the Divine  
You shall live without death and know immortality  
You shall grasp the meaning and dissociate from the senses  
And the orbs will envy what you will have become  
And from the brightness of the sun a light shall rise inside you  
For you are the meaning and it resides within of you  
And within you also nest all of creation, the throne and the chair.

The purpose of introducing the following methodological analysis of the poem is to support the argument of this thesis. I argue that al-Suhrawardi's poem is an act of speech that aims to challenge political and religious authority through dialogue with the Divine, where the poet adopts the voice

of a yearning lover who suffers from being separated from his beloved. I argue that this image of fragility is actually a position of power, not weakness.

The poem consists of twenty-eight lines and is written in *al-kāmil*<sup>20</sup> meter. In order to introduce a different analytical structure for examining mystical poetry, I will divide the verses into four scenes, adopting the methodology of dramatic discourse put forward by Gruendler. Despite the fact that Gruendler uses the theory to examine *madīḥ*<sup>21</sup> poetry, I believe that it could be applied to mystical poetry as well, since there are several similarities between them, including directing the speech to a certain addressee who has a superior position to the poet (Gruendler 2000, 163). I will examine dialogue indications in each scene using the Bakhtin theory of dialogism and Buber's philosophy of dialogue in order to illustrate the relationship between dialogue and power. Based on my close reading of the text, I observed that the dialogue varies according to its rhetorical style. In some verses, the poet uses imperatives and in others, he uses assertives. Nevertheless, the most used expressions in the poem are what Searle terms "expressives" (Searle 1979, 15). This being the case, I opted to examine the rhetorical style employed using speech act theory to reach an outcome that could partially be explained by Wolterstorff's conclusion, which maintains that "to speak is not, as such, to express one's inner self but to take up a normative stance in the public domain" (Wolterstorff 1995, 93).

From another observation related to my reading of the poem, I uphold that there is an indirect dialogue being exchanged between particular signs in this very poem. In order to study the interpretation of these signs, it will be necessary to delve into the theory of semiotics, as it will help

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<sup>20</sup> Lexically, *al-kāmil* means "the perfect" and is one of the fifteen meters of Arabic poetry, as classified by al-Kalil Ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi, it consists of six feet, *tafīla*, three in each verse. The sound of the foot is *mutafā'ihun* (Wahba and al-Muhandis 1984, 303).

<sup>21</sup> Panegyric: to praise a person's characteristics or achievements in a public discourse through poetry or prose (ibid., 343).

us examine the nature of signs in much more depth<sup>22</sup> (Qasim 2009, 12) and afford a clearer elucidation. Pierce's<sup>23</sup> approach is the chosen model in the analysis since it further highlights the productiveness of the sign .

The philosophy of illumination was the major work of al-Suhrawardi's life, it is therefore important to use it as a method to analyse his poem, since it is my belief that the poem is a reflection of his doctrine. Moreover, my analysis will include an examination of the use of the *al-kāmil* meter to compose the poem and the indication of the alliterative use of the letter *ḥā* .

The poem under study is an emotional expression that aims to communicate the sorrow that the poet suffers due to his separation from his beloved. This emotional turmoil requires a meter that accomplishes the purpose of composing the poem, which is *bawḥ* (to reveal). I argue that *al-kāmil* is an appropriate rhythm for the expression of feelings and fitting for communicating yearning. As 'Abdullah al-Ṭayyib tells us:

"و من عجيب خصائص الكامل أنه أصلح البحور لإبراز العواطف البسيطة غير المعقدة كالغضب و الفرح و الفخر"

(al-Ṭayyib 1989, 316), (and one of the wonderful characteristics of *al-kāmil* is its ability to express uncomplicated emotions such as anger, joy and pride) and to this he adds:

و حقيقة البحر الكامل [...] غنائية محضة -أعني بغنائية ترنيمية موسيقية خالصة الموسيقى- وللشعراء في الأداء بواسطته مذهبان الفخامة والجزالة هذا مذهب، والرقّة و اللطف وهذا مذهب آخر. (ibid., 318)

The truth about *al-kāmil* meter [...] is that it is absolutely musical. By this I mean absolutely intonational and musical. Poets have two ways of composing with it: the first is with eloquence and abundance and the other with tenderness and gentleness.

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<sup>22</sup> The studied signs will include symbols such as wine, colours and their connotations as well as oppositional sentences.

Moreover, al-Jrisi maintains that one of the characteristics of *al-kāmil* is the temporal extension regarding the sequence of the occurrence of *mutafā' ilun*<sup>24</sup>. He touches on the role of metrical variation when he comments on one of the elegy poems composed by Fatima bint al-Ahjam. He states that the *iḍmār*<sup>25</sup> in her poem reduces the rhythm of *mutafā' ilun* and makes it more suitable to express grief. In addition to *iḍmār*, he mentions *qaṭ'*<sup>26</sup> and states that he believes this variety of metrical variation to result from a certain psychological language that the poet uses for emotional effect<sup>27</sup> (al-Jrisi 2015, 46). Despite the fact that this was the analysis of another poet's work, I suggest that the same conclusion could be applied to the poem of al-Suhrawardi, since it has similar metrical variations, both in its verses and in the sixth *mutafā' ilun* on each line. As this usage provided an appropriate expression of sadness in the first poem, I believe that this change in metre variations provides a space not only to express longing, but also to assist in creating the development of scenes in the poem. The letter *ḥā'* sets the rhyme for al-Suhrawardi's poem and it is preceded by *alif ḥā'* is a letter that can be found in *ḥubb* (love), *rūḥ* (soul), *bawḥ* (to reveal) and *dhabḥ* (to be slaughtered), concepts that are considered to be elements of Sufi poetry. The letter *ḥā'* has a *ḍammā*<sup>28</sup> and is pronounced *ḥū* in the poem. I suggest that this pronunciation reflects the notion of *ḥū*, which is a third person pronoun. In the Sufi context, this pronoun refers to the Divine (al-'Ajam 1999, 1012). It is recognisable by its different pronunciation, as it is normally pronounced *huwa* in Arabic. The absent one here is God; the use of the sound *ḥū* asserts the belief in the oneness, a topic that occupied one of al-Suhrawardi's studies. What is also noteworthy is the

<sup>24</sup> *Mutafā' ilun* is the foot that *al-kāmil*, which itself is a hexameter, consists of.

<sup>25</sup> Prosodical ellipsis. To turn the second vowel in *mutafā' ilun* into a consonant (Wahba and al-Muhandis 1984, 48)

<sup>26</sup> Deleting the consonant of the *watad majmū'* (gathered peg) and putting a consonant on the letter before (al-Jrisi 2015, 46).

<sup>27</sup> *Mutafā' ilun* becomes *mutfā' il*.

<sup>28</sup> The vowel "u" (Zack and Schippers 2012, 328).

fact that *ḥā* ' is the letter of tenderness, as Ibn Jinni states in his book *al-Khasa'is* (as cited in 'Abbas 1998, 39). Therefore, choosing it as the rhyme emphasises the psychological state of the yearning lover, since it is, as 'Abbas maintains:

صوت الحاء هو أغنى الأصوات عاطفة وأكثرها حرارة، وأقدرها على التعبير عن خلجات القلب ورعشاته. ليتحول  
مثل هذا الصوت مع البحة الحائية في طبقاته العليا، إلى ذوب من الأحاسيس وعُصارة من عواطف الحب والحنين  
والأشواق. (Ibid., 174)

The sound of *ḥā* ' is the sound richest with flaming passion and the method most able to express the heart's sorrows and thrills. With the higher tones of the huskiness of *ḥā* ', the sound turns to a melting sensation and oozes with the emotions of love, yearning and longing.

As it was mentioned earlier, the poem is made up of twenty-eight lines, a number that has a special significance in Islamic mysticism. Schimmel states that the number twenty-eight is related to the moon, because once the four phases of the moon have travelled through the twenty-eight mansions, they are considered to be complete (Schimmel 1993, 238). Moreover, Sufis also relate the number twenty-eight to the number of letters in the Arabic alphabet, in which the Qur'an, the divine words, are written. Al-Bairuni confirms that there is a connection between those two facts. He believes that this relationship is evidence of the close link between the word of God and the cosmos. She also maintains that the number twenty-eight is related to the number of prophets before Muhammad and this is why poets compare him to the full moon (ibid., 239), since he is the zenith of prophecy. I propose that there is a link between Schimmel's thought and the poem of al-Suhrawardi and assert that his poem is a reflection of his philosophy. The poet suffers from his separation from the beloved and this state of separation is an intimation of darkness. Since love is

an overwhelming feeling that al-Suhrawardi could not resist, he uses words which employ twenty-eight letters to reach the light of the Divine. He travels from darkness, as the four phases of the moon do through the twenty-eight mansions, but in his case, in using the twenty-eight letters, he roams to complete his poem.

In order to have an entry into reading the poem, it is important to explore it from al-Suhrawardi's illuminating perspective. As I observed earlier, al-Suhrawardi believed that *maḥabba* (love) was the meaning of light and *qahr* (domination) was painted in darkness and that those two notions were dual forces that applied to the entire being. This leads me to conclude that he saw being as consisting of dualities, where light is the opposite of darkness and the interaction between the two is what generates existence. Consequently, existence is the product of the movement between light and darkness. I put forward that this philosophy built the essence of this poem through the oppositional duality in the text, particularly when the poet uses terms such as *sirr al-maḥabba* (the secret of love) and *al-hawā faḍḍāḥū* (love is scandalous).

Gruendler maintains that integrating dramatic discourse and speech act theory produces four levels of analysis: characterisation of the dramatist personae, typology of scenes, supporting verbal ornament and articulated relationships between the praise poet and the *mamdūḥ* (eulogised) (Gruendler 2000, 162). In the first, she confirms that the poet is the one responsible for creating his standpoint since he is the one who expresses himself with words. In the second, she states that praise poetry is made of different scenes, where each scene illustrates a certain type of dialogue. Then, she emphasises the rhetorical methods that the poet uses to demonstrate his aim in writing the poem and finally, she examines the pattern of relationships that the poet creates to test the addressee in his poem (ibid., 162–166). This is the model I apply to the poem, although I make some changes regarding the order of Gruendler's layers of analysis, since al-Suhrawardi's is a mystical poem rather than a praise one. I then integrate it with speech act theory, which I use to analyse the verses

in each scene. It is therefore essential to give a brief explanation of speech act theory before delving into the analysis of the poem.

Speech act theory is classified as a pragmatic approach to the philosophy of language. The method concentrates on the effect of language on the hearer, as intended by the speaker via a process of communication that occurs by uttering words that follow the system of a certain language. Austin is the founder of this theory and Searle developed it further and added classifications for different speech acts later in his works. It is believed that the use of language mainly aims to describe the world or report events and that the statements produced to serve that purpose can either be true or false (Austin 1962, 3). The theory draws the hypothesis that the role of language in communication is not limited to the act of communicating. Searle assumes that language being "rule-governed," intentional behaviour aims to elucidate the prospect of "linguistic characterisation," in other words, to speak a language means to perform a speech act. By acts, he specifies asking questions, making statements, giving commands and so forth. These acts cannot be performed, unless they are produced via "certain rules for the use of linguistic elements." The aim of speech act theory lies in the claim that all linguistic communication produces linguistic acts. The linguistic communication unit is neither the sentence nor the word nor the symbol, however, it is the issuance of the above in the performance of the speech act. Put another way, to comprehend the token as a message is to take the production of that message's phrase under certain conditions to mean that this is a speech act, which constitutes the unit of the linguistic communication (Searle 2011, 16). Searle believes that a "theory of language is a part of a theory of action" and that any meaning can be put into words (ibid., 17). Therefore, the communication that takes place in a conversation between a speaker and a hearer can be effectively achieved without the need to say more.

So how can we differentiate between using language to describe or to report and using it as a speech act? Austin distinguishes between both concepts by using the terms "constative" and

"performative." According to him, a constative utterance is saying something that could be true or false, such as a statement or a description, while a performative utterance occurs when saying a sentence that involves performing an action that could neither be judged as true or false nor be classified as a description or a mere utterance (Austin 1962, 5). As a further example, if someone says: "I promise so many thing to so many people," this statement is considered to be constative, whereas if the person says: "I promise not to tell this secret," we consider this to be performative.

However, Austin urges that in order for a sentence to be performative, it must be uttered in appropriate circumstances (*ibid.*, 8) and there must be an accepted conventional procedure for the performative to obtain a conventional effect. Should that not be the case, it will not be judged as true or false as much as felicitous or infelicitous (*ibid.*, 14). For example, in a wedding ceremony, the person who states: "I now pronounce you husband and wife" must be a priest for that statement to be performative, otherwise, the performative utterance here is just inappropriate.

Consequently, Searle maintains that the basic unit of communication is a speech act. Building on the fundamental of expressibility, he proposes that a chain of analytic connections happens between the speech acts and this could be clearly demonstrated in a conversation between a speaker and a listener through the following: the speaker's meaning, the uttered sentence's indication, the intention of the speaker, the listener's understanding and the governing rules of the linguistic aspects (Searle 2011, 21). Speech acts are divided into three categories: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. The first is defined as an act of utterance or simply the act of saying something in respect of a certain reference and sense to attain a meaning in the traditional sense (Austin 1962, 94). When the act of utterance includes an action, or in other words, if the utterance leads to doing something by saying it, then we call it illocutionary. However, perlocutionary is the effect achieved on people as a result of performing the illocutionary act. It is vital to emphasise that the perlocutionary is not uttered (*ibid.*, 101). Austin explains the distinction further with the example that follows. When someone says: "he said to me: shoot her," it is a locutionary act because it is the

literal meaning of "shoot" that is referred to and the female is identified by saying "her." However, the statement becomes illocutionary if the person says: "he urged me or ordered me to shoot her." In this case, the perlocutionary will be the effect that the act achieved on the listener by convincing or persuading him to shoot her (ibid.).

Searle classifies speech acts into five categories:

1- Assertives: these aim to represent how things are in the world. The direction of fit<sup>29</sup> of this classification is to use language for the sake of serving the world, or as Searle puts it, world to word. The sincerity condition of assertives is to express a belief or a commitment to truth by the speaker.

2- Directives: utterances attempted by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. These can translate as orders, commands, requests and so on and so forth. This category's sincerity condition is to express state and desire.

3- Commissives: they are speech acts that commit the speaker to a future course of action and can be demonstrated in promises, offers, refusals and the like. The sincerity condition of commissives is to express intention.

4- Expressives: speech acts that express psychological state. This includes thanking, welcoming, congratulating and so on. Their sincerity condition is to express desire or belief.

5- Declaratives: utterances that change reality to match the words or speech act, thereby affecting instant change. However, the speaker has to obtain a certain stance of power in institutional affairs to achieve these. The fit of declaratives is word to world. For example, only the president of a country could say "I declare war," in order for the country to enter a status of a war (Searle 1979, 12–29).

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<sup>29</sup> A term used by Searle to specify the direction of the speech. It is either "word to world" or "world to word." For example, you see a black horse, so you utter the words "I see a black horse;" this verse's fit will be "world to words," because you are putting what you are seeing in the world into words (Searle 1979, 14).

It is my opinion that the poem consists of four dramatic scenes. The first one runs from lines one to thirteen, a scene of parting sorrow where the poet speaks with the voice of a yearning lover who aches from being separated from his beloved. The dialogue in this section is directed at one addressee: the Divine. The poet addresses Him using *kum*, a second person pronoun that refers to plurality, when, for example, he says in the first line:

أبداً تَحْنُ إِلَيْكُمْ الأرواحُ  
وَوِصَالُكُمْ رِيحَانُهَا وَالرَّاحُ  
وَقُلُوبُ أَهْلِ وِدَادِكُمْ تَشْتَاقُكُمْ  
وَالِى جَمِيلِ وِصَالِكُمْ تَرْتَاخُ  
وَاحْسِرْتَا لِلْعَاشِقِينَ تَحْمَلُوا  
سِرَّ المَحَبَّةِ وَالهُوى فَضَّاحُ.

(al-Suhrawardi 2005, 65)

Forevermore, souls will yearn for Thee  
And your homecoming is their basil and their wine.  
And the hearts of your love yearn for you  
To the beauty of your reunion ...  
Alas the lovers had to endure  
The secret of love, and it is scandalous.

I maintain that using this pronoun is attributable to the Sufi belief that the Divine is not only the One but also the many, as Adonis states: “He is not in the sky or on earth, but is the sky and earth together merged into one” (Adonis 2005, 8).

Al-Suhrawardi confirms that the Divine is the source of light and that his brightness is reflected in the universe, as I mentioned earlier. Therefore, from the combination of Adonis's statement and al-Suhrawardi's philosophy, it could be concluded that since multiplicity leads to the One, then speaking to them (the souls of lovers) or in other words, using the pronoun *kum* is actually speaking to Him. On the other hand, the poet also uses the plural to speak about himself. His *rūḥ* (soul) is *arwāḥ* (souls), his *qalb* (heart) is *qulūb* (hearts), he is a *'āshiq* (lover) and yet, he is sorry for the state of *'āshiqīn* (lovers), which could refer to him, as though he were using the plural to express the greatness of his love for the Divine in his heart, the consequence of which is the need for multiple hearts to house the vastness of that immeasurable love for Him. Moreover, we can see that here, the verses could be assertives and expressives at the same time. The poet is describing what he believes the world to be and expressing his emotions with words that constitute an illocutionary act. However, since the receiver of this text or the reader plays the role of the hearer in the speech act theory structure, by consequence, we could decide what the perlocutionary act would achieve from reading these verses. Based on this, I suggest that in this case, the perlocutionary act is that the approach of using the plural to express the singular could have two indications: it could be a method for the poet to express his love for the One who is many, since using words that imply singularity is not expressive enough, and it could also be the poet's desire to equate himself with the lover, since love gives him the right to claim that "I am the one whom I love and whom I love is I" (Adonis 2005, 86)<sup>30</sup> (ibid., 86)<sup>31</sup>.

On the contrary, the poet shifts to speaking about himself in the singular in lines eight to ten while he continues to address the Divine with the pronoun *kum*. He refers to himself as *mushtāqikum* (your yearner) and *nafsuhu* (his soul) and says:

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<sup>30</sup> "أنا من أهوى و من أهوى أنا."

<sup>31</sup> Adonis states that "the essence of the beloved is the same as the essence of the lover and the essence of the lover is the same as the essence of the beloved" (Adonis 2005, 86).

جودوا على مُشتاقِكُمْ بلقائِكُمْ  
فالصبُّ عند لقائِكُمْ يـرتاحُ  
فإلى لِقائِكُمْ نَفْسُهُ مُرتاحَةٌ  
وإلى لِقائِكُمْ طَرفُهُ طـمـاخُ  
خَفَضَ الجَنَاحَ لَكُمْ وَليسَ عَلَيْكُمْ  
لِلصَّبِّ في خَفَضِ الجَنَاحِ جُنَاحُ.  
(al-Suhrawardi 2005, 59)

Bless your yearner with a reunion  
For when the enamoured meets you, he rests  
And when he gets together with you, his soul is peaceful  
And his eyes aspire to be with you  
For you, he lowered his wing, for there is no harm  
In lowering your wing for the beloved.

It could be suggested that the change to the singular is related to the shift in emotional stance. From the first line to the seventh, the poet presents himself as longing but what is different in line eight is that yearning turns to humility. This could be significant due to the Qur'anic echo in line ten, where the Divine orders the reader to be merciful with his parents:

"واخفض لهما جناح الذل من الرحمة وقل رب ارحمهما كما ربياني صغيرا" (Qur'an 17:24)

(And lower your wing in humility towards them in kindness and say, "Lord, have mercy on them, just as they cared for me when I was little" [Abdel Haleem 2005, 176]).

In a chapter called *al-Tadhallul lil-Ḥabīb min Shiyam al-Adīb* (lowering oneself for the sake of the beloved is a manner of decency), al-Asbahani confirms that to win the beloved's heart, the lover should show patience with the beloved's coquetry and seek pride in humility (al-Asbahani 1985, 100). He validates his standpoint by quoting a poem from Dawud al-Zahiri, who states in one of his verses:

قد ذلّل الشوق قلبي فهو معترفٌ  
أن التذلل في حكم الهوى شرفٌ.  
(ibid., 107)

Longing has overcome my heart and so it has accepted

That humility in the rule of love is an honour.

Humility is an honour in love, it is therefore logical for the poet to refer to himself in the singular in order to obtain excellence and attain this noble position. It is worth mentioning that when the poet uses the second person pronoun to address the Divine and speak to him directly, he is actually addressing the divine state of absence. This reflects the stage of darkness in al-Suhrawardi's belief, where the worshipper suffers from being far from his beloved or the higher state. This can be integrated with Bakhtin's philosophy. From his perspective, dialogism starts with existence being visualised as an event, an event that states that a person is responsible for – and to – the specific condition that existence assumes as it creates the constantly changing and unique place that the "I" occupies in it. Existence sends messages to man in a range of different methods such as social codes, and man is responsible for forming a meaning out of such utterances. To further exemplify, Bakhtin translated Dostoyevsky's dictum that maintains that human mentality is a theatre, in which the war between the "centripetal impulses"<sup>32</sup> of cognition and the centrifugal

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<sup>32</sup> Centripetal impulse: a nerve impulse that travels from the periphery toward the central nervous system, that is, a sensory or afferent impulse (APA Dictionary of Psychology 2021).

forces<sup>33</sup> of the world is fought out."<sup>34</sup> So in order to understand the world, it is necessary to reduce the number of meanings that result from that conflict (Holquist 2010, 47). This analogy is made by discriminating among values, something which leads to the production of concepts such as “ideology” and “social.” These are important stages to mention because they affirm that understanding these notions is related to the concept of addressivity, which is what al-Suhrawardi attempts in each scene. According to Bakhtin: “Addressivity means rather that I am an event, the event of constantly responding utterance from the different world I pass through. The lack of water means nothing without the response of thirst, [...] nothing means anything until it achieves a response” (ibid., 48).

Moreover, we can see that the first and third verses are directives and the second is an expressive. I argue that the perlocutionary act achieved by these speech acts is that addressing the Divine in the poem actually means that the poet is addressing himself as an event. Yearning, suffering and longing for the Divine is the response to missing the feeling of being close to him, therefore, the poet is stating the existence of an emotional and mutual relationship between himself and the Divine. This is a position that I believe denotes power and authority, an allusion that totally differs from its apparent presentation, based on the assumption that the world that the poet's speech act is attempting to narrate is an experience lived by him exclusively and that only through his poem and the speech acts the poem contains are we are able to imagine that experience.

The poet is not the only speaker in this scene. He speaks about himself in the plural in line five and also presents a new speaker:

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<sup>33</sup> Centrifugal force: a fictitious force, peculiar to a particle moving on a circular path, that has the same magnitude and dimensions as the force that keeps the particle on its circular path (the centripetal force) but points in the opposite direction (Britannica 2018).

<sup>34</sup> To expand further on this notion, Holquist explains that “a helpful analogy here is the way a given natural language selects out of all possible noises a limited number of sounds it will process as being significant” (Holquist 2010, 48).

وَإِذَا هُمْ كَتَمُوا تَحَدَّثَ عَنْهُمْ

عِنْدَ الْوَشَاةِ الْمَدْمَعُ السَّفَاحُ.

(al-Suhrawardi 2005, 59)

And if they kept their secret, they are gossiped about  
Stealthily by murderous tears.

From the perspective of semiology, tears are considered to be a sign. The object<sup>35</sup> of this sign is suffering and the interpretant<sup>36</sup> is unbearable love. Since tears consist of water, the relationship between emotions and water has a religious connotation. In *Sūrat al-Baqara* in the Qur'an, the Divine says:

ثم قست قلوبكم من بعد ذلك فهي كالحجارة أو أشد قسوة وإن من الحجارة لما يتفجر منه الأنهار وإن منها لما يشقق  
فيخرج منه الماء وإن منها لما يهبط من خشية الله و ما الله بغافل عما تعملون. (Qur'an 2:74)

Even after that, your hearts became as hard as rocks, or even harder, for there are rocks from which streams spring out, and some from which water comes when they split open, and others which fall down in awe of God: He is not unaware of what you do.

(Abdel Haleem 2005, 10)

To cry out of the torture of concealment is an allusion to mercy and tenderness, the opposite of what was mentioned in the *'āya*; cruel hearts are similar to stones. That being said, water could be

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<sup>35</sup> According to Peirce, “the relation between the object of a sign and the sign that represents it is one of determination: the object determines the sign” (Atkin 2013) To explain further, if someone gives flowers to someone else, the flowers, in this case, would be a sign and the emotions would be the object of the sign.

<sup>36</sup> The concluded comprehension of the sign and object correlation, or how we translate the original sign's development (ibid., 2013)

produced from stones, and water is a symbol of turning cruelty into kindness, a sign of feeling that produces life. This is evidenced by what the Divine says in *Sūrat al-Anbiyā'*:

”وجعلنا من الماء كل شيء حي“ (Qur'an 21:30)

(And We made every living thing from water [Abdel Haleem 2005, 204]). The notion of life is the polar opposite of death and this oppositional duality from the perspective of feelings reflects the Sufi doctrine. According to Adonis, death in Sufism is a means of reaching the higher state. In love, death is a way to be rid of the mortal narrowness. Moreover, death qualifies the Sufi to pass from the partial to the total in order to reach life. As al-Hallaj once said: “Kill me, my trusted followers as in my death is my life”<sup>37</sup> (Adonis 2005, 90).

The second scene is the scene of connection, in which the poet witnesses the light of the Creator. It begins in line thirteen, preceded by a supplication to be blessed with light, where al-Suhrawardi says:

عودوا بنورِ الوصلِ في غسقِ الجفا  
فالهجرُ ليلٌ والوصلُ صباحُ  
...  
صافاهُمُ فَصَفَتْ قلوبهم بها  
من نُورها المشكاةُ والمِصباحُ.

(al-Suhrawardi 2005, 59)

Return with the light of intimacy in the darkness of abandonment

For abandonment is night while intimacy is day

With his goodwill he reconciled with them,

and their hearts became pure

And with that, the lamp was lit.

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<sup>37</sup>”اقتلوني يا ثقاتي \* إن في قتلي حياتي.“

The lines above echo the concept of duality of light and darkness that was discussed in the first section. It furthermore refers to the verse in *Sūrat al-Nūr* that was the base of the wisdom of illumination, as I clarified earlier. I believe it is through these verses that al-Suhrawardi incorporates philosophy into his poetry. Additionally, by referring to the 'āya, he dyes his poetry with the colour of power, since he is quoting from the words of the Divine. In this scene, the speech acts are directives and assertives and I suggest that the perlocutionary act is that reaching the Divine's light indicates meeting Him and obtaining his share of gnosis, which itself implies distinguishing himself as a person who owns a higher stance than the others because the call for *wiṣāl* (union) was gratified.

In line fourteen, al-Suhrawardi allocates a new addressee by saying *yā ṣāḥi* (O! friend) to continue what he started in the first section, to speak of his yearning but not to the beloved directly. In this part, al-Suhrawardi uses assertives and directives in order to achieve two perlocutionary acts: the first is that this approach is designed to use the addressee to tell more about the poet, and not about *al-muḥibbīn* (the lovers), even though the poet is describing their state, since Bakhtin maintains that in dialogism, the very capacity to have consciousness is based on otherness (Holquist 2010, 18). Moreover, he asserts that we can understand how other relationships work through dialogue (ibid., 19). The second perlocutionary act is that when al-Suhrawardi speaks to his friend about the lovers, he is actually presenting an image of himself as a lover who is going to receive an invitation from the Divine, the one who is willing to give him the key to his door. As he states:

ودعاهم داعي الحقائق دعوةً

فغدوا بها مستأنسين وراحوا

ركبوا على سُنن الوفاء، فدموعهم

بحرٌ وشدة شوقهم ملاحُ

وَاللّٰهُ مَا طَلَّبُوا الْوُقُوفَ بِبَابِهِ

حَتَّى دُعُوا وَأَتَاهُمُ الْمِفْتَاحُ.

(al-Suhrawardi 2005, 60)

And the Caller of Truth called upon them with an invitation

So they happily accepted and went

To sail upon the ships of loyalty, where their tears

Became sea and their acute yearning a sailor

By Allah I swear, they did not ask to be standing by his door

Until they were called, and given the key.

To love is not enough to make the connection; what is crucial for that love to be reunited with the Creator is to be called. This is where the engagement with the journey lies. The fact that the Divine has called someone means that He communicates with them. The poet achieves that perlocutionary act by using an assertive in the first and third aforementioned verses and assertives combined with expressives in the second. This fact agrees with Bakhtin's metaphor for unity. He believes that unity has two aspects which are "self" and "other" and that the relation between them is created by dialogue through the event of utterance (Holquist 2010, 36). This view is also connected to the emphasis on the response by Bakhtin that I mentioned earlier. Regarding the concept of journey, in the aforementioned verses, al-Suhrawardi states that longing pushed the lovers to cross the sea in order to meet the Divine. I believe this to be another example where his philosophy is reflected and suggest that in this case, the poet is referring to the story of *ghurba gharbiyya*, the story of the occidental exile, which is a symbolic story written by al-Suhrawardi. The tale tells of a seeker who lives in Qayrawan, today's Tunisia, which lies to the west of the Islamic world. The story starts with a mystic and his brother who are imprisoned in a deep well in the city.

These two siblings have a father named shaykh Hadi Ibn al-Khayr al-Yamany, who is obviously from Yemen. The word Yemen is derived from the word *yamīn*, which means "right" in Arabic and indicates the direction of the orient. The land of Yemen is conventionally correlated with Prophet Solomon's wisdom. Therefore, Qayrawan represents the west and darkness, while Yemen points to the orient and to light (Nasr, in Sharif 1963, 381). Outside the well where the brothers are trapped is a fort surrounded by various towers, which according to Nasr, represent the universes, elements and heavens or faculties of the soul. The brothers are only able to escape at night, which implies that humans attain the world of spirituality after death only, or possibly through dreams, since according to the Islamic tradition, sleep is considered a partial or temporary death. Inside the well, the siblings live in complete darkness and feel nostalgic whenever they hear news from Yemen, which they can only reach through dreams or contemplation. One night, an order is issued commanding the brothers to return to their homeland. Nasr interprets this as an indication of the status of receiving a revelation from the world of spirituality and the start of asceticism. The order states that they are to leave the hem of their dress, which signifies liberating the soul from attachments. The demand of their father to come home involves various challenges, of which killing their wives, an act meant to symbolise overcoming passion. The order also requires them to set a ship and sail to Mount Sinai and this is where their journey in the name of God begins. During their sea journey, a wave crashes between the mystic and his son, which alludes to the sacrifice of the animal soul and means that morning is approaching and the union between the particular soul and the universal one is getting nearer. A storm of rain and stones is the next disaster they face and it is symbolic of the evil in the world. The mystic subsequently reaches a point where he needs to throw his foster-mother overboard and let her drown in order to get through the storm. Nasr interprets this part as sacrificing the natural soul. The calamities do not abate and the mystic reaches a point where he is faced with a king who is forcefully collecting taxes and in this case represents death, the taste that all mortals have to try. He then arrives at Mount Gog and Magog, an embodiment of evil, where he faces other

demonic creatures like jinn, which stand for love and imagination (ibid., 382). In the end, he overcomes them all to reach his father in Yemen, but not before being involved in several fights that are a symbolism of the light and soul, in order to reach his parent, which in turn symbolises the light of the Divine (ibid., 383).

I believe that this story is credibly related to the scene in the poem, particularly when al-Suhrawardi uses the image of sailing on a ship to answer the Divine's calling of light and journeying over the sea to heed it, which culminates in being welcomed by the Divine and the door of light opening up for them, a clear indication that he succeeded in reaching the Light of lights and receiving the revelation from Him.

The poet then directs his speech to another addressee, the *nadīm* or the drinking companion. The poet asks him to bring him a glass of wine and the scene of arrival begins. This scene is the result of entering through the door after being called by the Divine. It is the reward for witnessing the light of the Divine. Tasting the wine is an allusion to experiencing love. As Adonis states: “Ibn ‘Arabi maintains: It has a nectar, which he describes as a constant revelation that never ceases” (Adonis 2005, 80).

Al-Suhrawardi describes the wine of love as something that only prophets have tasted and therefore, by using directives and expressives, the perlocutionary act performed here might be that of claiming a similar privilege. He is telling the audience, the readers of this poem, that he has experienced this love, with the assumption that they have not. This is clearly illustrated in these lines:

قَمْ يَا نَدِيمَ إِلَى الْمَدَامِ فَهَاتِهَا  
فِي كَاسِهَا قَدْ دَارَتْ الْأَقْدَاحُ  
هِيَ خَمْرَةُ الْحَبِّ الْقَدِيمِ وَمَنْتَهَى  
غَرَضَ النَّدِيمِ، فَنَعْمَ ذَاكَ الرَّاحُ

هي أسكرتُ في الخلدِ آدمَ أولاً  
وعليه منها خلعةٌ وشاحُ  
وكذاك نوحا في السفينة أسكرتُ  
فلهُ لذلك أنةٌ ونياحُ.

(al-Suhrawardi 2005, 62)

O! My drinking pal bring me the wine  
That glasses and goblets are circling around  
It is the Wine of ancient and utmost love  
Of the drinking companion's desire, excellent is that wine  
It first inebriated Adam in the heavens  
And dressed him in a gown and a sash  
Noah too did it inebriate in the ship  
And for that, he groaned and bewailed.

The symbol of the ship appears here yet again, but in reference to Noah's ark, the building process of which, according to the Qur'an,<sup>38</sup> was fraught with bullying and disbelief from his people for a long time. Yet when the flood appeared, it became the symbol of survival due to faith in the Divine. I suggest that al-Suhrawardi is implying an indirect analogy of the ship in his story and the one in Prophet Noah's.

What is significant in this section is that dialogue is not represented as a conversation. I believe that the state of al-Suhrawardi drinking the wine is actually where the indirect dialogue occurs. Buber states that relationships between the self and the other are actually dialogical (Buber 2002, 242), in which case the act of dialogue is based on communication and the interaction between one entity and the other, which could be an object. This is where I believe the conversation between the poet and the Divine occurs.

In line twenty-eight, al-Suhrawardi addresses the audience directly by using directives and advises them to follow the path of the lovers if they wish to experience the light of the Divine,

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لقد أرسلنا نوحا إلى قومه فقال يا قوم اعبدوا الله ما لكم من إله غيره إني أخاف عليكم عذاب يوم عظيم، قال الملائكة من قومه إنا لنراك في ضلال مبين، قال يا قوم ليس بي ضلالة ولكني رسول من رب العالمين، أبلغكم رسالات ربي وأنصح لكم وأعلم من الله ما لا تعلمون، أوعجبتم أن جاءكم ذكر من ربكم على رجل منكم لينذركم ولتتقوا ولعلكم ترحمون، فكذبوه فأنجيناه والذين معه في الفلك وأغرقتنا الذين كذبوا بآياتنا إنهم كانوا قوما عمين. (Qur'an 7: 59-64)

We sent Noah to his people. He said, 'My people, serve God: you have no god other than Him. I fear for you the punishment of a momentous Day! But the prominent leaders of his people said, 'We believe you are far astray.' He replied, 'My people, there is nothing astray about me! On the contrary, I am a messenger from the Lord of all worlds: I am delivering my Lord's messages to you and giving you sincere advice. I know things from God that you do not. Do you find it so strange that a message should come from your Lord—through a man in your midst—to warn you and make you aware of God so that 'you may be given mercy?' But they called him a liar. We saved him, and those who were with him, on the Ark and We drowned those who rejected Our revelations—they were wilfully blind. (Abdel Haleem 2005, 98–99).

which alludes to the perlocutionary act that he assumedly tasted it himself, as the poem indicates.

He says:

فَتَشَبَّهُوا إِن لَّمْ تُكُونُوا مِثْلَهُمْ  
إِنَّ التَّشَبَّهَ بِالْكَرَامِ فَلَاحُ.

(al-Suhrawardi 2005, 62)

So model after them if you are unlike them

For emulation of the kindhearted is salvation.

## Conclusion

What remains to be addressed is how the outcome of the above analysis and the points it has raised can be linked to the question of power.

Love, in the Arabic-Islamic context, is related to sorrow, separation and subordination, as the widely known Persian poet Rumi puts it: "Love is a torture, love kills" (as cited in Adonis 2005, 90). That is why love was considered to be a sign of weakness. For instance, the lover will never get to marry his beloved as is shown in the tragedy of Jamil and the Majnun. However, based on speech act theory, I claim that the combination of expressives, assertives and directives in this poem aim to establish the perlocutionary act that is the normative stance in the public domain: this state of being "a yearning defeated lover" is actually an indication of power, based on the hadith, which is highly used by Sufis:

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مَا يَزَالُ عَبْدِي يَنْقَرُّ بِإِيِّ بِالنَّوَافِلِ حَتَّى أُحِبَّهُ فَإِذَا أَحْبَبْتُهُ كُنْتُ سَمْعَهُ الَّذِي يَسْمَعُ بِهِ وَبَصَرَهُ الَّذِي يُبْصِرُ بِهِ وَيَدَهُ الَّتِي  
يَبْطِشُ بِهَا وَرِجْلَهُ الَّتِي يَمْشِي بِهَا وَإِنْ سَأَلَنِي لِأَعْطَيْتُهُ وَلَئِنْ اسْتَعَاذَنِي لِأُعِيدَنَّهُ وَمَا تَرَدَّدْتُ عَنْ شَيْءٍ أَنَا فَاعِلُهُ تَرَدَّدِي  
عَنْ نَفْسِ الْمُؤْمِنِ يَكْرَهُ الْمَوْتَ وَأَنَا أَكْرَهُ مَسَاءَتَهُ. (al-Nabulsi 2001)

My Servant continues to draw close to me through supererogatory acts until I love him. And when I love him, I am his healing through which he hears, His sight through which he sees, His hand through which he grasps and the leg with which he walks (McAuley 2012, 144) and if he asks Me, I will give him, and if he asks My protection (refuge), I will protect him; (i.e. give him My Refuge) and I do not hesitate to do anything as I hesitate to take the soul of the believer, for he hates death, and I hate to disappoint him.

(Sunnah 2021)<sup>39</sup>

Additionally, the concept of love is not only related to the heart of the mystic, but also shown in the association and the intensity of lights. Al-Suhrawardi states:

(as cited in Talib 2014, 199) “والأنوار إذا تكثرت، فللعالي على السافل قهر، وللسافل إلى العالي شوق وعشق”

(when the lights breed, the higher light dominates the lower one and the lower light yearns and loves the higher). Therefore, if the universe becomes illuminative and the man who is in the inferior level desires to see the radiation of the emergent lights above him, assuming that he purifies his heart of all the defects of materialism and opens himself as a bright white page and a polished mirror, his self-page will reflect the descendant lights and he will know whatever he wants to know, because those lights are gnosis (*ma'ārif*). In other words, the whole universe is identified as illuminative radiations and the human soul is part of these lights. If the soul purifies itself, the levels of lights will be reflected in it and this reflection means that this soul knows the spaces of existence. However, this *mushāhada ma'rifiyya* (gnosis witnessing) does not reach the Light of lights, it only

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<sup>39</sup> Two different translations were used for this text because, although McAuley's translation was of a higher quality than that of Sunnah, unfortunately, it did not include the second part of the text, for which I had to search for an alternative translation and the best one I could find was Sunnah's.

reaches the lord of species, because the *nūr qayyūm* (eternal sustainer light) cannot be comprehended, just as the human sight is too weak to comprehend the light of the sun (ibid., 200) and as is shown in the poem, al-Suhrawardi relates the moment of receiving the light of Divinity, which I suggest supports the argument of the poet preceding himself as a powerful person, as a result of meeting the Divine, speaking to Him, and drinking from his wine of wisdom. This can be clearly illustrated in one of his poems, when he says:

أشكر الله الذي خلّصني  
وبنى لي في المعالي ركنا  
فأنا اليوم أناجي ملاً  
وأرى الحقّ جهاراً علناً  
عاكف في اللّوح أفراً وأرى  
كلّ ما كان ويأتي ودناً  
وطعامي وشرابي واحد  
وهو رمزٌ فافهموه حسناً.

(al-Suhrawardi 2005, 104)

I thank Allah for He has rescued me  
And built me a corner in exaltedness  
For I confined an assembly today  
And see the truth openly and in forthrightness  
Secluded, I delve into the reading of inscriptions and I see  
All that has been, all that will be and all that is near  
One is my food, and one is my drink  
And it is a symbol, therefore understand it well.

On the other hand, how can a person know that the Creator loves him? This question could be answered with the explanation that Adonis provides of the scene of tasting the wine: “The vessel in the sense of the heart signifies the external appearance, the nectar signifies what is visible in it and the act of drinking is what the revelations reveal to the person receiving them, i.e. the drinker.. The nectar of love can also mean the love God has for us and which makes us love him. For when we love him we know all by experiencing his love for us, [...] that love for himself is the same as his love for us” (Adonis 2005, 81). Moreover, there is a hadith that was only mentioned in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Albāni* that provides an even clearer correlation between vulnerability, Divine presence and being loved by Him. The hadith states:

"إِنَّ لِلَّهِ أَنْبِيَّةً مِنْ أَهْلِ الْأَرْضِ، وَ أَنْبِيَّةُ رَبِّكُمْ قُلُوبُ عِبَادِهِ الصَّالِحِينَ، وَ أَحَبُّهَا إِلَيْهِ أَلْيُنُّهَا وَ أَرْقُهَا"

(as cited in al-Zubaydi 2016, 410), (verily, Allah has vessels among the people of the earth, and the vessels of your Lord are the hearts of his righteous servants. The most beloved of them to Him are the softest and most tender of them [Abu Amina 2021]).

Al-Zubaydi mentions a commentary on this hadith that maintains that by softness and tenderness, what is referred to is that when the heart is purified and becomes as the polished mirror, with the lights rising on it, the chest will be illuminated and inundated with light radiations. The eyes of the heart will then be able to see the immanence of the Divine's matter in his creatures, which will make it notice the Divine's light. When this happens, it is indicative of a heart that has attained perfection and has been blessed with purity and will be afforded the grace of being seen by Allah; whenever the Divine looks at this heart, He will be pleased and His love for it will be increased. It will be embraced by the Divine's mercy and set aside from the crowd and He will pour his heart with His lights of gnosis (As cited in al-Zubaydi 2016, 410).

شربنا فبُحنا فاستبيحت دماؤنا  
أ يُقتل بواح بسرّ الذي يهوى؟  
وما السرّ في الأحرار إلا ودیعة  
ولكن إذا رَقَّ المُدام فمنّ يقوى؟

(al-Suhrawardi 2005, 55)

We drank and so disclosed revelations and our blood was spilled

Is a revealer killed by the secret of whom he adores?

And what is the secret embraced in freedom but an entrusted treasure

Yet if the mind were clouded by wine, then who will keep the treasure safe?

Experiencing the taste of divine love forces the yearning lover to speak, but when he reveals his feelings, his blood is liable to be spilt. How could an emotional expression be used to frame a pretext to assassinate a poet as a result of accusing him of heresy, a tragedy that occurred to al-Hallaj and was echoed in the case of al-Suhrawardi? By examining dialogue in this chapter as a primary element in mystical poetry, I intended to answer this question and to suggest other methodologies that have not been applied to the mystical poetry of al-Suhrawardi before. Concerning problematic issues, the literature review includes certain suggestions that provide a solution for current limitations and offer a new perspective from which to read mystical poetry. To summarise, the vital points mentioned in this paper are as follows: al-Suhrawardi has mainly been studied as a philosopher with barely any recognition of him as a poet; mystical poetry studies have focused on significant aspects of symbolism, but dialogue has, however, not been one of them; dialogical studies of the Qur'an have been either rhetorical, missionary or philosophical but not from a standpoint of literary analysis, and finally, the poetry of al-Suhrawardi, despite being

characterised as expressive and simple, contains several elements worthy of being explored through the structure of theory.

In the second section, I attempted to analyse al-Suhrawardi's poem by using a number of methodological approaches in order to explore the dialogical aspect of his poetry. I have argued that exploring such indications requires the application of certain structures to examine scenes, the relationship to addressees, signs and language. I have made it clear that since al-Suhrawardi is a Sufi philosopher, it is vital to understand his philosophy of illumination in order to have an in-depth reading of his poem, since I put forward that the chosen poem for the analysis is built on the essence of his philosophy.

## Chapter Two

### al-Niffari

#### Section One

أليس العلم جمعاً قد أتاني

يخاطبني على حدّ البيان

وقال: اشربْ عراقيّ مشارّ

إلى أمرٍ يجلّ عن البيان

وقلتُ لكلّ علم: لستَ منّي

ولا أنا منك في قرب التداني.

(al-Niffari 2007, 12)

Wasn't knowledge given to me as a whole

Speaking to me at the limits of eloquence?

And He said: Drink, O Iraqi,

To a purpose that is greater than the spoken word

And I said to every field of knowledge: you haven't arisen from me

Nor I from you in terms of proximity.

Seekers, those who are struck by the thunder of divine love, find their relief in expressing what they had concealed in flame, yearned for and suffered from by revealing the sighs of longing through literature. Furthermore, they speak to the Divine and urge Him for more of that suffering which is caused by love, for the sake of wonder, fondness, fruitful pain and receiving their response from the Beloved. As the poet Ibn al-Farid says:

زدني بفرط الحبّ فيك تحيّرًا  
وارحم حشّي بلظى هواك تسعّرًا  
وإذا سألتك أن أراك حقيقة  
فاسمح ولا تجعل جوابك: لن ترى.

(Ibn al-Farid 1962, 169)

Let me be bewildered by my lavish love for you  
Intensify my confusion through my lavish love for you  
And have mercy on my heart  
Which is ablaze in the flames of your love  
And if I should ever ask you to be manifested in reality  
Do allow it and never let your answer be: You will not see.

Despite the poet's expressed entreaty in his poem, he can only meet his Beloved through imagination and advises the reader to follow in his footsteps to pluck the fruit of divine love. He did not, however, receive any direct or verbal response, unlike al-Suhrawardi who, in the first chapter, claims to have obtained the privilege of an indirect dialogue with the Divine through the consumption of wine. So what if the Divine spoke back directly and verbally? What would the content of His divine conversation include and allude to?

Al-Niffari suggested those questions and we will explore them by examining his work, in which he speaks to his Beloved and the Divine replies to him directly and instantaneously in a linguistic and literary form that the poet calls *Mawāqif*. However, before analysing the chosen *Mawāqif*, it is crucial to provide a summarised background of the poet's life and times to understand how these aspects later influenced his writings.

## The life of al-Niffari

Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Jabbar ibn al-Hasan al-Niffari,<sup>40</sup> the Sufi philosopher, writer and poet, lived in the fourth century of Hijra (tenth century AD) and died in 354 H (964 AD) (al-Niffari 1987, 1). Multiple studies (al-Niffari 1987; al-Yusuf 1997; al-Marzuqi 2007; al-Niffari 2007; Baldick 1989) agree that there is little information available about his life. Having said this, Arberry addressed this concern by citing al-Tilimsani’s description of al-Niffari as being “a wanderer in deserts” who “dwelt in no land, neither made himself known to any man” (al-Tilimsani, as cited in al-Niffari 1987, 1).

There are other theories explaining this mystery about al-Niffari’s life. For one, al-Yusuf states that al-Niffari was one of the important Sufis to cast himself in the image of a prophet in history. Nevertheless, he believed that he was a messenger who was dispatched only to himself (al-Yusuf 1997, 5). He was therefore committed to the principle of concealment or *taqiyya*<sup>41</sup> regarding his writings and beliefs (ibid., 25). On the other hand, al-Ghanmi maintains that being controversial and loyal to his own spiritual path made the Sufi not care about recording his writings and these characteristics were behind the absence of documentation about his daily life (al-Niffari 2007, 8). It is therefore not surprising that al-Niffari was anonymous to writers who were his peers and is not mentioned in the most crucial Sufi sources<sup>42</sup> in the East (al-Yusuf 1997, 24). Furthermore, Qudsi believes that the poet being shocking in his statements, a wanderer, or obscure in his writings were not the reason for this neglect. She argues that the fundamental factor in the neglect of documentation about al-Niffari’s heritage and life was his rejection of the Sufi policy system of the

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<sup>40</sup> Based on my extensive research, most of the sources confirm that this was the name of the author of the *Mawāqif*. It is noteworthy that the person who collected his writings and published his book was his grandchild, Abu ‘Abd al-Allah Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Allah al-Niffari. Al-Marzuqi, however, believes it was the grandchild himself who was the author of the *Mawāqif* (al-Marzuqi 2007, 25).

<sup>41</sup> The concealment of one’s true beliefs in times of adversity (Kohlberg 1975, 395).

<sup>42</sup> *Al-Ta‘arruf li-Madhab al-Tasawwuf* by al-Kalababdhi, *Qut al-Qulub* by Abu Talib al-Makki, *al-Luma‘* by al-Tusi *Tabaqat al-Sufiyya* by al-Sullami and *Risalat al-Qushairi* (al-Yusuf 1997, 24).

time, a system which afforded a privileged position to the Sufi shaykhs who granted divine authority upon Sufi disciples. Subsequently, the mystery of al-Niffari's life was in fact a challenge to religious authorities, which resulted in it being met with complete neglect (Qudsi 2014, 415–416). I concur with Qudsi's point of view due to the indirect relationship between the *Mawāqif* and the concept of power; a relationship that I intend to prove later in this chapter.

### **Social and historical background**

Al-Niffari lived in the age of al-Farabi, al-Tawhidi and al-Mutanabbi (al-Niffari 2007, 8). To be precise, he spent most of his life in the second Abbasid age,<sup>43</sup> when the state was weak due to the gradual increase of Turkish power. This period also witnessed the involvement of women in national matters, the repeated appointment and removal of ministers and the rise of several political movements, such as al-Zanj and al-Qaramita (al-Marzuqi 2007, 26). The era was also fraught with skepticism regarding established religion, when atheists attacked Islam and other religions. On the other hand, the trend of Sufism expanded and subsequently created a noticeable influence in the cultural field (ibid., 27).

### **Testimonies and influence**

Although al-Niffari was unknown in the East, he received attention from writers in the Maghreb and Egypt due to the interest of al-Tilimsani and Ibn 'Arabi in his works (al-Niffari 2007, 10). Al-Tilimsani even created a classification for al-Niffari's *Mawāqif* and attempted to present a

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<sup>43</sup> An age that started in 232 H (847 AD) with the beginning of al-Mutawakkil's leadership. This age was well-known as a time when the Turks dominated most of the important positions in the Abbasid regime, such as politics and the military. It was an era infamous for corruption and political instability, during which several revolutions took place, including the *Zanj and the Qarmatian* revolutions. The age ended in 333H (945 AD) with al-Mustakfi as its last successor. His rule came to an end with the invasion of the Buyids of Baghdad (Dayf 2001, 9–52).

deconstructed explanation of these in order to illuminate the mysterious writing method al-Niffari uses in his book.

Moreover, in his translation of the *Mawāqif*, Arberry categorises later Sufi scholars who mentioned al-Niffari in their books<sup>44</sup> and provides translated quotations of what they said about him. However, he points out that Ibn ‘Arabi was the scholar most interested in al-Niffari due to the fact he frequently mentions his name in the *Futuhāt Makkiyya* (al-Niffari 1987, 2). For example, Ibn ‘Arabi says:

واعلم أنه ما من منزل من المنازل، ولا منزلة من المنازلات ولا مقام من المقامات و لا حال من الحالات إلا وبينهما برزخ يوقف فيه العبد وهو الذي تكلم فيه صاحب المواقف النفري رحمه الله تعالى في كتابه المسمى بالمواقف الذي يقول فيه أوقفني الحق في موقف كذا، فذلك الاسم الذي يضيف إليه، هو المنزل الذي انتقل إليه، المقام أو الحال أو المنزل.

(Ibn ‘Arabi, as cited in al-Marzuqi 2007, 36)

Know then, that between every *manzil*, *munāzala*, *maqām*, and *ḥāl*, there is a buffer state (*barzakh*) in which the mystic pauses (*yaqif*). It is this which is referred to by the author Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Jabbar al-Niffari in his book called the *Mawāqif*. In this book he writes, “God (*al-Ḥaqq*) stayed me in such- and- such a staying,” and here follows the name of the *manzil* or *munāzala* or *maqām* or *ḥal* to which he is being transferred.

(al-Niffari 1987, 8–9)

As a result of this interest in al-Niffari, Schimmel maintained that Ibn ‘Arabi was inspired by his mystical ideas (Schimmel 2011, 80). In addition to Ibn ‘Arabi, al-Ghanmi believes that al-Niffari also mystically influenced al-Ghazali when he discussed the issue of *tawḥīd al-‘awāmm wa*

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<sup>44</sup> Sha‘rani in *al-Tabaqāt al-Kubra* (al-Niffari 1987, 11). Qashani in *Lata‘if al-A‘lam fi Isharat Ahl al-Ilham* and Hajji Khalifa in *Kashf al-Zunun* (ibid., 13). Dhahabi in *Mushtabih* (ibid., 13).

*al-khawāṣṣ* (monotheism of the masses and the peculiar) in his book *Mishkat al-Anwar*<sup>45</sup> (al-Niffari 2007, 12). Additionally, the book of al-Niffari laid its shade on later Sufi poets such as Abu al-Hasan al-Shushtari, who wrote verses about how the Divine was speaking to al-Shibli and al-Niffari, in which he says:

وأنطقَ للشبليِّ بالوحدة التي  
أشار بها لما محاه عنده الكونا  
وكان لذات النفرىِّ مولِّها  
يخاطب بالتوحيد، صيره خذنا  
وكان خطيبا بين ذاتين من يكن  
فقيرا يرَ البحر الذي فيه قد غصنا.

(al-Shushtari 1960, 75)

And it [was] uttered through al-Shibli  
the union that he referred to when he effaced the universe.

And it enraptured the essence of al-Niffari so that he  
Spoke of monotheism until it became his companion.

He was a speaker between two essences. He who is  
Poor can see the ocean into which we have plunged.

(al-Shushtari 2009,133)

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<sup>45</sup> Al-Ghazali uses sentences such as: "يا من لا هو إلا هو، ويا من لا هو بلا هو إلا هو" (O He! Who there is no he but Him. O He Who is not he without he but Him) and al-Niffari uses exactly the same words in the *Mawāqif*, in reference to his vision (al-Niffari 2007, 12).

Al-Niffari's influence was not exclusively limited to the mystical level, but also inspired literature and linguistics. Al-Marzuqi pointed out that Ibn Qadib al-Ban imitated al-Niffari's style in his book *al-Mawaqif al-Ilahiyya*. To be precise, he followed al-Niffari's preamble, the one that starts with "he stayed me and told me" (al-Marzuqi 2007, 37). It is believed that al-Niffari was a writer of the elite, rarely appreciated or accepted because of his symbolism and allusions. Therefore, even in the present time, he has only inspired a few intellectual poets such as Adonis and 'Afifi Maṭar (ibid.). On the other hand, Elmarsafy confirmed that the eloquence of al-Niffari also influenced modern Arabic novelists. He exemplified this point by stating that Jamal al-Din al-Ghitani used the vocabulary of al-Niffari's *Mawāqif* to write about his father in his book *al-Tajalyyat* (Elmarsafy 2012, 89).

### **Al-Niffari's Eastern and Western recognition**

Despite al-Niffari's uniqueness, I believe that even in modern academic studies, he has not been as extensively explored by researchers as other Sufi writers such as Ibn al-Farid and Rumi have been. The studies that I found about him were mostly brief summaries, which focus on two aspects: the philosophical and the literary. I will present each study's angle in this section to demonstrate the new point of view that I will be suggesting regarding the examination of al-Niffari's work.

Starting from the ancient research, the first study that considered al-Niffari's *Mawāqif and Mukhāṭabāt* was *Sharh Mawaqif al-Niffari* by al-Tilimsani. This study was more of a paraphrase of the meaning of al-Niffari's texts than an analytical examination. To cite one example, in the passage that follows, al-Tilimsani quotes al-Niffari then adds his own comment:

"قوله: أنا العزيز. قلت: أي أنا الفرداني" (al-Tilimsani 1997, 58)

(He says: I am the great. I said: it means that I am the one). The book does not go beyond literal meaning and so is limited in terms of analysis. This limitation has not prevented it from being the milestone reference work on al-Niffari's life, on which every modern study depends.

In 1935, Arberry introduced al-Niffari to the Western world by translating the *Mawāqif* into English. The first section of the chapter was dedicated to al-Niffari's biography, writings, testimonies and theology, where the author attempted to define al-Niffari's terminology in order to gain an insight into his philosophy. For instance, he defined the *waqfa* and *ma'rifa* based on al-Niffari's explanation in his own texts (al-Niffari 1987, 14–16). Despite the significance of Arberry's work, his book is considered valuable as a translation only and in my opinion, the element of dialogue in al-Niffari's work was not examined by Arberry.

Paul Nwyia was one of the first researchers to examine the tendency of dialogue in al-Niffari's works. In his paper regarding this matter, Nwyia points out new suggestions resulting from a deep critical analysis of the *Mawāqif*. His central argument was based on the idea of the obliteration of the human voice in favour of the dominance of the Divine one. He believed that the discourse in the text was not being held between two selves, but that the self of al-Niffari was in fact occupied by the Divine. The dialogue was hence taken over to glorify the Divine voice (Nwyia 1965, 18). Consequently, Nwyia considers the dialogue as an indication of Divine hegemony by stating that the absolute presence of Him signifies the absolute absence of the *wāqif* (ibid., 19). The Divine allows his worshipper to write His words only. His writings are actually the speech of God that constitutes the essence of creativity (ibid., 23). Nwyia asserts that the Divine is responsible for inspiring al-Niffari to speak, which would suggest the Sufi's uselessness and incapacity to compose or even speak without the permission of the Divine. He presumes that the dialogue is a paradox, or essentially a monologue where the Divine speaks only to manifest man's purification as a mode of reaching God through the language of dialogue (ibid.). The scholar states that the problem lies in the use of language from al-Niffari's point of view, since what is being said is actually what the Divine is saying, which requires al-Niffari to replace his mortal language with a more elevated or exalted form of communication (ibid., 24). This is why language continues to disappoint the Sufi; God is not the subject since no words are sufficient to describe Him. It is worth mentioning that

Nwyia's study includes important notes regarding the *Mawāqif*, most crucially his opinion regarding the similarity to some Biblical texts (ibid., 26). Nwyia's study is highly credible in terms of examining the notion of dialogue in al-Niffari's writings, however, I might disagree with his conclusion that denies any significant agency on the part of the writer and limits empowerment to the Divine, leaving the worshipper weak and useless, an image that I believe is far removed from the result of my suggested analysis.

In her book, *The Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Schimmel mentioned al-Niffari in approximately two pages, claiming that the *Mawāqif* was a replica of Prophet Muhammad's experience, in which he became the trusted one of the Divine through dialogue (Schimmel 2011, 80). Subsequently, the author continues her presentation of al-Niffari by stressing the importance of the letter or *ḥarf*, to his philosophy and emphasising how he saw it as a "veil of gnosis" that created a barrier between the Divine and the worshipper (ibid., 81). Schimmel notes vital observations regarding the dialogue between al-Niffari and the Divine, by suggesting that al-Niffari's experience was based on the notion of *du'ā'* (prayer), where he enjoyed the gift of speaking with the creator (ibid.). Having said this, she does not expand any further on this thought.

At a later date, Adonis allocated a section in his book in which he examines al-Niffari's work closely and asserts that the Sufi's written work was a genre that combined poetry and thought. For this reason, he called it *Shi'riyyat al-Fikr* (The Poetic of Thought) on account of the fact that al-Niffari's texts were estranged from both the language and poetic writings of his age (Adonis 2005, 155). Adonis believed that the experience of al-Niffari shed light on the darkness and obscurity that is generated from the use of language in daily life, which traps the true and essential meaning of words, since poetry, like love, is an act of liberation (ibid., 160). Adonis mostly focused on al-Niffari's work from the perspective of the linguistic revolution as set against the traditional use of language, as well as the mysterious writing style that al-Niffari practiced in his *Mawāqif*, in a bid to elucidate the fact that the truth lies in the unknown and the unsaid (ibid., 158). Eventually, he

concluded that al-Niffari was an inspiration due to his ability to revive the Arabic sentence from what he termed the “dead expression” (ibid., 162). Adonis’s remarks touch upon important notions, such as otherness and living expressions. Interestingly, he does not include the aspect of dialogue in this equation.

The extensive research carried out for this paper came up with five complete academic studies about al-Niffari, which examine him and his work very closely. The first is by al-Yusuf, who attempted to create an initial overall presentation of the Sufi writer. This one hundred and seventy-page study acts as an introduction to decoding al-Niffari’s theology for the reader and to provide philosophical guidance in understanding al-Niffari’s symbolism. Al-Yusuf begins his study with a brief biography and classifies the chapters of his book according to Sufi terminology, stylistics and imagination. The outcome of al-Yusuf’s effort is based on an analysis of certain quotations from the *Mawāqif*, such as the following, where he quotes al-Niffari:

"وتعرفت من وراء التعرف بما لا ينقال للقول فيعبره، ولا يتمثل للقلب فيه فيشهده"

(al-Niffari, as cited in al-Yusuf 1997, 76),<sup>46</sup> (I have revealed Myself from beyond gnosis by means of that which cannot be expressed in speech, that it should thereby be interpreted, nor presented to the heart, that it should abide in it and witness it [al-Niffari 1987, 136]) and then comments:

وهذا يعني أن ما لا ينقال هو وراء كل معرفة، فضلا عن إنه لا يرضخ لسلطة الشكل إذ لو تشكل لاستطاع القلب أن

يلتقطه ويستتب فيه على نحو دائم. (ibid.)

And that means that the unsaid is behind every gnosis. It does not acquiesce to the authority of form, because if it did, then the heart could capture it and prevail on it forever.

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<sup>46</sup> Al-Niffari in his fourth *mukhāṭaba*.

Despite al-Yusuf's clear and well-intentioned analytical attempt, his comments revolve around exploring the philosophical ties of al-Niffari with no recognition of the milestone feature of his works, which is dialogue. A method that, I believe, is similar to al-Tilimsani's approach of explaining the hidden meanings of al-Niffari's writings.

In terms of al-Niffari's compositional style, the author states that there are four writing styles used by the Sufi in his book: the direct, pure and simple style, where he reaches out directly to the reader without any complications (ibid., 102); the abstract, dry style that lacks any aesthetic aspect (ibid., 104); the allusive style, which tends to be metaphoric (ibid., 109) and the symbolic, insinuating style that depends on the principle of *siwā* (otherness) and the Divine duality, which separates the One from the object (ibid., 115). Despite this stylistic division, al-Yusuf does not analyse the question and answer method that al-Niffari used in his direct dialogue with the Beloved.

Following al-Yusuf's path, al-Marzuqi introduces his analysis of al-Niffari by documenting his life, works and philosophy, with the difference that his study is more extensive in terms of al-Niffari's theology. The scholar classifies al-Niffari's vital methodologies into four chapters, where he explores each notion in detail in order to provide a comprehensive insight into the Sufi's thoughts. In addition, the author divides al-Niffari's stylistic characteristics into two different sections: Sufi and literary (al-Marzuqi 2007, 54–64). Al-Marzuqi confirms that symbolism and quoting from the Qur'an are the most notable mystical methods of the Sufi category, where the first is inspired by the *bāṭin*, or inner norm in the mystical language (ibid., 55) and the second is influenced by Qur'anic verses in order to promote a certain idea (ibid., 63). To make it perfectly clear, al-Marzuqi maintains that al-Niffari includes Qur'anic themes in his *Mawāqif* and mentions this example as an evidence:

"يقول مثلا: وقال لي الذين جاهدوا فينا، الذين رأوني فلما غبت غطوا أعينهم غير أن يشركوا بي في الرؤية" (ibid., 63)

(and he said to me: And those that persevere for our sake, they are those that see Me: when I was absent, they veiled their eyes jealously, lest they should associate anything with Me in their vision

[al-Niffari 1987, 62]). Al-Marzuqi believes that the beginning of the above line is quoted from *Sūrat al-ʿAnkabūt*, verse 69:

"والذين جاهدوا فينا لنهدينهم سبلنا وإن الله لمع المحسنين" (Qur'an 29: 69)

(But We shall be sure to guide to Our ways those who strive hard for Our cause: God is with those who do good [Abdel Haleem 2005, 256]). This idea of al-Marzuqi is in controversial contradiction to Nwyia's thought on al-Niffari's compositional style. Nwyia asserts that al-Niffari does not quote the Qur'an in his *Mawāqif* and even alleges that the *Mawāqif* share a similarity with the stylistics of biblical texts (Nwyia 1965, 26). This point will be explored further in the analysis section.

As for the literary category, al-Marzuqi's observations are limited to the rhetorical point of view. He maintains that al-Niffari's style tends to use assonance, alliteration and antithesis (ibid., 65–66) and in another section, he examines the notions of *duʿāʾ* (prayer) and *ṭalab* (request) in al-Niffari's work. The author emphasises that al-Niffari's prayer is divided into three levels: *ʿilm* (knowledge), *maʿrifa* (gnosis) and *waqfa* (staying) (ibid., 113). Al-Niffari characterises how *ṭalab* (request) is presented by each level. In the first one, worshippers are allowed to pray and ask the Divine to fulfil their needs. In the second level, they are allowed to question the Divine, but are mostly preoccupied with Him rather than with asking Him to grant their desires. In the last level, worshippers of *wuqūf* are not allowed to ask for anything, as to request any wish from the Divine after having witnessed his presence would be tantamount to a mockery (ibid.). Nonetheless, al-Marzuqi does not expand further on the relation between prayer and dialogue, aware as he appears to be of the prayer tradition in Islam, in which speaking to the Divine directly is never in expectation of a two-way conversation or of an answer from Him, but mainly a recitation and recognition of His praise and greatness.

In 2007, al-Ghanmi published an edited collection of al-Niffari's works, which included writings other than the *Mawāqif and Mukhāṭabāt*, such as *Mawqif al-Mawaqif*,<sup>47</sup> *Ajza ' Mutafarriqa*,<sup>48</sup> *Qism al-Hikam*, *Mawaqif wa Munajajat*<sup>49</sup> and *Bab al-Khawatir wa Maqala fi al-Mahabba*.<sup>50</sup> Al-Ghanmi's book constitutes a mere Arabic translation of Arberry's work since the introduction to the *Mawāqif* in the book is completely quoted from Arberry. Having said this, in his main introduction, al-Ghanmi stresses the problematic issue of defining the genre that al-Niffari attempts to produce: should his texts be considered poetry, philosophy or prose? Eventually, he concludes that Adonis's opinion, in his work entitled *al-Shi'riyya al-'Arabiyya*, is the most credible one, inferring that al-Niffari's texts are simply beyond classification (al-Ghanmi, as cited in al-Niffari 2007, 30). This is an idea that I will be arguing against later in this chapter.

In terms of providing new perspectives on al-Niffari's work, Balqasim's study might be the most dependable one. Divided into three sections, his book first presents an analytical review of al-Niffari and explains how his work was perceived in the East and the West. The second section discusses the notion of *waqfa* in depth and points out how this meditative tendency demands the recipient's *inṣāt* (listening in silence), since this direct communication with the Divine requires a complete separation from *siwā* (otherness) in order to achieve the *waqfa* (Balqasim 2012, 110). In his third chapter, Balqasim illustrates his suggested approach to al-Niffari. He believes that the path

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<sup>47</sup> Includes al-Niffari's visions in 366 H (976–977 AD). It consists of sixty-six *Mawāqif* starting with *Mawqif Istiwā' al-Ma'rifa* and ending with *Mawqif al-Maqāmāt* (al-Marzuqi 2007, 48).

<sup>48</sup> Other fragments include other *Mawāqif*, additional to some *Munājajāt*. These start with *Mawqif lā Yu'limunī al-Kawn* (The Universe does not hurt me) and end with *Fa'innaka lā Tadrī bi'anna Rubba Lahẓatin Tafūtuk lā Tadrī ḥattā Tasta'idahā* (You do not know that it might be two moments; you cannot know how to have it back). Published by Nwyia in his book *Nusus Sufiyya Ghayr Manshura* (Unpublished Sufi texts) (ibid.).

<sup>49</sup> Contains visions seen by al-Niffari in 359 H (959–960 AD) (ibid.).

<sup>50</sup> A book that includes two chapters: the first one mentions the stages of the heart's thoughts that divide it into excellence and illness, and the three methods of gnosis (ibid., 49). In the second one, he speaks about the characteristics of the lover and his feelings.

to understanding the Sufi's theology starts with decoding his composed stylistics, where he believes that the Shaykh built his book based on two foundations: *muḥāwara* (dialogue) and *taqaṭṭu* (separation) (ibid., 243). The credibility of this study lies in the author's focus on the issue of dialogue, stylistic interpretation and power. The writer believes that the dialogue constitutes the structure of the texts that achieves an identity based on a relation between the Divine and the human (ibid., 244). Moreover, he points out that *istimā* (listening), plays an important role in the text structure, since the *Mawāqif* were written as a mode of listening in a certain dialogue (ibid.). Balqasim maintains that there are two different types of dialogue in al-Niffari's book: one between a speaker and a silent being and the other between two speakers, both of which he provides an interpretation for (ibid., 245–250). He follows the same criteria to explain the notion of separation by analysing *Mawqif al-Qurb* and the sixth *mukhātaba* (ibid., 256–286). In addition, it is crucial to mention that Balqasim touches upon engaging the tendency within the writings of the *Mawāqif* to seek power, when he states:

"والنتبه إلى تفاصيل خطاب النفري يكشف، مما يكشف عنه، أن مبتغى هذا الصوفي هو كتابة القوة" (ibid., 221)

(paying attention to al-Niffari's discourse details, reveals and further divulges that this Sufi seeks writing power). Nevertheless, the writer leaves this point with no further discussion. Despite the analytical efforts of Balqasim, I believe that there are a number of problematic points in his account. For one, with regards to the dialogue interpretation, he concludes that the direct dialogue between al-Niffari and the Divine alludes to muting the mortal voice so that direct dialogue becomes possible. However, it does not mean that it is a conversation between two parties but that one of the voices is generated from silence (ibid., 251). Balqasim is therefore suggesting that the dialogue's purpose is to witness the way in which the self is elevated through equality, with the intent of weakening one voice in order to make the other louder, a state achieved by silencing duality and eliminating the weight of double talk to express what he calls *alam al-thanawiyya* (the pain of dualism) in unification writing (ibid., 251–254). This idea agrees with Nwya's suggestion that the

Divine inspired al-Niffari to speak and that his writings are actually the Divine's words disguised as those of al-Niffari. The problem with this argument is that it isolates the writer's consciousness and deprives him from expressing his own reflection on the relation between the worshipper and the One. This point of view will hence be argued against later in this chapter on the basis of the methodological framework. In addition, following on from the *taqaṭṭu* ' (separation) interpretation,<sup>51</sup> there are two resulting points: *al-Taqaṭṭu* ' *wa-l-Khayba*<sup>52</sup> and *al-Taqaṭṭu* ' *wa-l-Ṣamt*<sup>53</sup> (ibid., 286). Nonetheless, it appears that these points are generated from al-Niffari's style in his book. Despite the importance of these factors in explaining the structure of his texts, Balqasim's analysis tends to be poetic and focused on al-Niffari's preoccupations with writing rather than with attempting to discover further allusions to his text.

The last recent study that will be looked at is a research conducted by Arin Qudsi, which remarks on the neglect of al-Niffari in early Sufi literature. The fourteen-page study starts with a historical review of Sufism in al-Niffari's age and sets out possible explanations for omitting him from contemporary studies. I believe that the crux of this paper lies in the last five pages, where the author suggests new perspectives on the mystery of al-Niffari's life by means of a critical analysis of his *Mawāqif* that considers his writings not only philosophically but also politically, and in which she argues that the notion of *waqfa* implies a fierce war against the Sufi system of that time (Qudsi 2014, 412). Nonetheless, she does not consider how this could be integrated within the concept of dialogue or the use of language in his texts.

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<sup>51</sup> Balqasim believes that *taqaṭṭu* ' as a style was generated from the failure of recording the experience of *waqfa*. Therefore, writing the *waqfa* was actually an attempt to write its trace in his memory, something which made his texts appear unrelated and incoherent. As a result, this animated Balqasim to suggest that the *Mawāqif* belong to a genre called fragmentary writing, *l'écriture fragmentaire* (Balqasim 2012, 257–259).

<sup>52</sup> The failure in being separated from *siwā* (ibid., 294).

<sup>53</sup> *Taqaṭṭu* ' is the silence that prevents the meaning of achieving fullness due to the Divine's evasiveness (ibid., 299).

## SECTION TWO

### al-Niffari's Theology

The attempt to find the treasure of meanings inherent in *The Mawaqif and Mukhatabat* requires tracing a map or outlining guidelines to al-Niffari's theological notions, given that this book is not only a literary production but also a summary of his philosophy. This section will seek to define the author's fundamental methodological terms in order to provide an overview of his literary and philosophical structure. The roots and origins of these fundamental methodological terms will also be examined, in order to explore the relationship between them and the theories that will be introduced in a later section and which will be suggested as further tools to examine his work.

The in-depth and highly detailed dissection of the terms, notions and concepts that are presented in this section, are very much at the basis of the proper grasping of the focus of this thesis, namely al-Suhrawardi's poetry in particular and Sufi poetry as a whole, but also the concept of dialogue in poems, prose and letters directed at the Divine. The clue to deciphering certain key elements that will elucidate the deeper and often well-camouflaged meaning of most of the texts I am presenting here are embedded in these terms. Decomposing them to strip away the layers wrapped around them that veil their true meaning is a large part of what will allow me to prove the points I am making and reach the conclusions I am seeking. The subtlety with which deeper meanings have been weaved into the texts under study is such, that they would be next to impossible to decipher adequately without first delving into the intricacies of Sufi terminology, so let us begin.

#### ***Waqfa***

The book of *Mawāqif* (spiritual stayings) and *Mukhāṭabāt* (addresses or discourses) is divided into seventy-seven *Mawāqif* and fifty-six *Mukhāṭabāt*. Each *mawqif* starts with "*awqafanī fī ... wa qāla*

*lī*" (he stayed me in ... and said to me), whereas each *mukhāṭaba* begins differently with the opening line "*yā 'abd*" (O! Worshipper). Despite this diversity in discourse, al-Niffari believes that attaining the privilege of communicating with the Divine as a listener or a speaker necessitates achieving what he calls *waqfa*, the essential basis and precursor of *a mawqif*. So what exactly is meant by *waqfa*?

Before giving several philosophical definitions of the term, it is vital to mention the lexical definition to show its linguistic basis. In *Lisan al-‘Arab*, Ibn Manzur lists various meanings related to the verb *waqafa* (the root of the word *waqfa* in Arabic) that are, from my point of view, associated with the meaning of *waqfa*. According to Ibn Manzur, *waqafa* is the opposite of sitting (Ibn Manzur 2016). *Waqafa al-ard li-l-masākīn* (to endow the land for the sake of the unfortunate ones) means to confine the land (*yaḥbisuha*), while *awqaftu ‘an al-amri alladhī kuntu fīh* (I stopped doing something) indicates quitting (ibid.). Furthermore, he mentions the following verse from the Qur’an, where the Divine says:

"ولو ترى إذ وَقَفُوا عَلَى النَّارِ" (Qur’an 6: 27)

(If you could only see, when they are made to stand before the Fire” [Abdelhaleem 2005, 81]) and states that there could be three interpretations for it. The first would indicate that they might have seen the fire. The second, that they could have been on top of the fire and it was beneath them, and the third, as Ibn Sida confirms, that they were placed in the fire and knew the magnitude of its torment (Ibn Manzur 2016). Additionally, the author highlights the association of the verb *waqafa* with four other concepts: matter, speech, guilt and silence, which I believe is a pivotal element to al-Niffari’s *waqfa*. For example, *al-tawaqqufu fī al-shay’* (stopping at a matter)<sup>54</sup> refers to lingering and hesitation; *waqqafa al-ḥadīth* means to make clear and *waqqaftu ‘alā* means to acquaint somebody with something, as in the phrase *waqqaftuhu ‘alā dhanbih* (I informed him of his guilt), which indicates informing (ibid.). Moreover, *waqafa ‘alā shay’* means to pause and pay attention to

<sup>54</sup> This translation is quoted from *The Arabic English Dictionary* (Wortabet 1984, 773).

something and *waqafa* 'alayh signifies understanding and comprehension (Lane 1968, 3058). On the other hand, *awqaftu* implicates silence.<sup>55</sup> Ibn Manzur also raises the included idea of duality in the term *tawqīf*, when he writes:

"التوقيف: البياض مع السواد" (Ibn Manzur 2016)

(*tawqīf* is whiteness with blackness). These notions of duality, comprehension, awaiting, silence and informing will all be clearly addressed within our forthcoming examination of the philosophical definitions of *waqfa*.

Al-Niffari's *waqfa* is the annihilation of the seeker's self within the sought-after self. It was named thus due to the cessation of demands (al-Marzuqi 2007, 173), because thoughts are effaced by the light of *waqfa* and it is an elevated state aware of all values (al-Niffari 1987, 15). The power of intelligence and consciousness is absent in this stage, one where the meeting of contradictions is achieved in the closest position to God (Qudsi 2014, 413). It is a total separation from *siwā* (ibid., 412). Indeed *waqfa* is the highest stage in al-Niffari's philosophy and it follows two other stages: *'ilm* (knowledge) and *ma'rifa* (gnosis)<sup>56</sup> (al-Marzuqi 2007, 175). In fact, it is the spirit of *ma'rifa* and the source of *'ilm* (al-Niffari 1987, 14). It involves a complete cessation of requesting, of *ḥarf* (letter)<sup>57</sup> and of other faces of otherness (Balqasim 2012, 153). In *waqfa*, there is no attachment to any object and no object can be attached to this state. It is the negation of objectivity and is therefore beyond mental recognition, since the mind is attached to objects (al-Marzuqi 2007, 173).

### ***Waqfa* as combustion**

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<sup>55</sup> In addition, Ibn Manzur states: "*Kullu shay'in tumsiku 'anhu taqūlu awqaftu*" (everything you held from can be expressed with *awqaftu* (I stopped), [Ibn Manzur 2017]).

<sup>56</sup> These notions will be discussed further a little later in this section.

<sup>57</sup> This notion will be explored profoundly later in this section.

The theory of *waqfa* is involved with various significant terms that illustrate the characteristics of this state. Fire is a recurring theme in several definitions, such as when Arberry tells us: “it is the fire of otherness” (al-Niffari 1987, 15), or when Balqasim (2012, 154) believes that:

"تقوم الوقفة على احتراق الرسم وزواله"

(*waqfa* is based on the burning of the image and its demolition). Al-Marzuqi (2007, 179) appears to agree with the above and adds that:

"الطريق إلى الله تعالى هو المحو لا الإثبات"

(the path to the Divine is through effacing not affirming). It is hence fairly evident that *waqfa* is where the absolute presence of the Divine occurs and the complete absence of the self is actualised (Qudsi 2014, 413). This is where we see the reason for which *waqfa* was the highest point of al-Niffari’s hierarchy of stages, because it requires transcending *‘ilm* and *ma‘rifa* (al-Marzuqi 2007, 197) and that is what Balqasim denominates as *‘ubūr* (passing) (Balqasim 2012, 152).

### ***Waqfa* as passing**

Balqasim maintains that *wuqūf* (halting)<sup>58</sup> is not related to *waqfa* but that it alludes to limiting *waqfa*’s way, yet its way associates with what is fortified from exclusivity and limitation and that, is the Absolute. *Waqfa* has no termination, consequently, it tends to denote *‘ubūr* as opposed to *wuqūf* (ibid.). This concept provides an additional perspective of *waqfa* as not only being a stage to reach, but also a state of transition towards the farthestmost (ibid.). I believe this engagement with *‘ubūr* is credibly crystallised in Arberry’s statement: “*waqfah* is the gate of vision” (al-Niffari 1987, 14).

Nevertheless, *waqfa* is not the end of *‘ubūr* since there is no pausing in it. Passing only leads to passing, just as limitation means the limitless (Balqasim 2012, 152). Passing over everything is what al-Niffari terms as “passing cosmic.” This *‘ubūr* leads to a time before the creation of objects and their laws, which was just a ferry in this transition. This is why the Absolute mode maintains a

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<sup>58</sup> Translation by Lane 1968, 3059.

significant relationship between the pre and the post; the time before the passed object and after it (ibid., 153).

### ***Waqfa* and duality**

*Waqfa* is the conjunction of contradictions, which means that it involves various dualities and oppositions to create it. Balqasim believes that *waqfa* requires a direct connection with the Absolute but that this connection is always threatened by severance (ibid., 155). For her part, Qudsi (2014, 413) maintains that *waqfa* is a complete separation from otherness. Moreover, in terms of realising *waqfa*, the same author states that it correlates with vision (ibid.). On the other hand, Balqasim asserts that al-Niffari presents his texts as a state of hearing the Divine words, due to the leading sentences in his texts that take the form of a direct call and address from the Divine to him, which then achieves vision<sup>59</sup> (Balqasim 2012, 168). Moreover, this direct call in his *Mukhāṭabāt* weaves another pattern of dualities. When the Divine addresses al-Niffari by saying “*yā ‘abd*,” it gives the impression that the addressee is a mortal or a slave. In apparent contrast, al-Niffari himself states in one of his *mawāqif* that “*al-wāqif ḥurr*” (the *wāqif* (worshipper) is free) and Qudsi is of the opinion that this expression is an indication of the Divine’s power and majesty, which graced al-Niffari, transforming him into a quasi-divine being (Qudsi 2014, 413). Balqasim introduces *waqfa* as a state of *farāgh* (emptiness) and maintains that in order to be a *wāqif*, a person must be empty of otherness. In contrast, this blankness is actually the path to be filled with the Divine light, since the empty heart of a worshipper is capable of embrace (Balqasim 2012, 164).<sup>60</sup> Referring to the dualism inherent in *waqfa* is crucial to the argument of this research and the upcoming discussion, which

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<sup>59</sup> Balqasim specifies three aspect of the relation between *samā’* (hearing) and *ru’ya* (vision); the aspect of reason, preference and identification (Balqasim 2012, 171–172). I will expand more on this relation later in this section.

<sup>60</sup> Examples of opposition are innumerable in al-Niffari's text such as: *uktub, lā taktub, ‘iqra’, lā taqra’*. However, the mentioned examples were chosen based on their relativity to constituting the notion of *waqfa*.

will include examining other Islamic and literary traditions to whose characterisation standing and speaking are vital elements.

### **Types of *waqfa***

Balqasim notes that al-Niffari's *waqfa* has three classifications, based on its association with certain genitives and the position of *siwā*. Each type intimates a certain meaning. *Al-Waqfa 'an* means suspending the laws and rising above them. This type of *waqfa* affirms *siwā*, despite the separation that itself occurs in *waqfa* (ibid., 156). *Al-Waqfa bi*, on the other hand, denotes upholding the Absolute, where He totally occupies the *wāqif*'s senses (ibid.). Finally, *al-waqfa li* is to stand for the Absolute. It is the purification from all requests, including speaking to the Divine and listening to Him. It is a complete voidness of objects and what al-Niffari calls *Maqām Allāh* (ibid.).

### ***Waqfa* and other traditions**

As the discussion above shows, al-Niffari's *waqfa* consists of three vital elements: standing, speaking and receiving – concepts that I believe are firmly related to the tradition of *al-wuqūf 'alā al-aṭlāl* (standing or crying over the ruins). Balqasim states that writing is a method of distinguishing between *waqfa*'s epochs, due to the fact that he considered writing to be an attempt to recapture what happened in *ru'ya* (vision). *Al-'isti'āda* (recalling) works using a different scale of comprehension than the one achieved during the vision and is occupied by what was burnt in *waqfa*. Thus, what the writer recalls is not the experience of *waqfa* but another phenomenon arising from *iltifāt*.<sup>61</sup> He maintains that al-Niffari's writing is meant to keep what remains and to bear witness to absence due to its preoccupation with an evanescent truth (Balqasim 2012, 234). This suggestion

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<sup>61</sup> Lexically, it means turn the face towards a thing (Lane 1968, 2265). However, figuratively, it denotes apostrophe (Wahbah and al-Muhandis 1984, 58). Having said this, I tend to believe that what he really means in this context is turning back to capture the lost moment, which Balqasim calls *infilāt*, a thing that goes forth or escapes suddenly (Lane 1968, 2435).

engages with nostalgia,<sup>62</sup> a notion that creates the foundation of *shi‘r al-aṭlāl* (*aṭlāl* poetry).

According to Hasan (1986, 6):

"الحنين هو الأساس الذي يقوم عليه شعر الوقوف على الأطلال في الحقيقة"

(Nostalgia is a sentimental yearning for a period of the past or regretful or wistful memory of an earlier time" [Oxford English Dictionary, 2016]).

*Aṭlāl* poetry is an expression of sadness or, as Braune states, crying over ruins is actually crying over human existence, since remains are symbols of mortal life (Braune, as cited in Kahlush 2007, 67). In terms of sadness, Balqasim stresses a crucial question asked by al-Tilimsani: "How can *waqfa* agitate sorrow when it is supposed to negate it?" He believes that two matters must be considered in order to answer this question. The first one is that grief comes from a conscious sustainment of *waqfa* that alludes to an eternity of *siwā*, a situation that ultimately creates sadness. The second is that *waqfa* is an experience of annihilation where nothing remains, including the *waqfa* and *wāqif* (Balqasim 2012, 154), meaning that this cannot be a continuous state. I believe the similarity here is clear. The *jāhilī* (pre-Islamic) poet stands in front of a place that represents the dissipation of his life and memories, which leads him to taste the bitterness of absence, a feeling similar to what the *wāqif* experiences when he senses the absence of the Divine caused by the existence of *siwā* in his mind. Moreover, writing about *ṭalal* (remains) in the poem is akin to writing about memories or the attempt to grasp a moment that happened in the past in order to comfort the self. Similarly, writing the *waqfa*, as I mentioned earlier, is actually documenting the events of *waqfa* or in other words, recalling what happened during its occurrence.

Qasim states that the *jāhilī* poet attempts to freeze the time that contains temporary joy by composing poems (Qasim 2014, 7). Al-Yusuf endorses this suggestion by noting that standing in front of the *ṭalal* encompasses two periods: the pleasant past and the miserable present (al-Yusuf, as

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<sup>62</sup> In fact, *aṭlāl* poetry is based on nostalgia.

cited in Kahlush 2007, 68). This idea was explored further by Kahlush in her analysis of the first verse of the following poem by Imru' al-Qays:<sup>63</sup>

قفا نبك من ذكرى حبيب ومنزل

بسقط اللوى بين الدخول فحومل.

(as cited in Kahlush 2007, 70)

Stop! let us cry at the remembrance of a beloved and her lodgings

At the extremity of winding sand between *al-Dakhūl* and *Ḥawmal*.

(Jusoh 1990, 3)

Kahlush maintains that the verb *qifā* (to stand up) is the key to stopping time and that it abolishes the tangible place in order to recall the house of the past, the home of the beloved (ibid., 70). This method results in going beyond the current structure of home through the memory. Eventually, the poet realises the absence of his beloved and this moves him to tears (ibid., 71). This feeling ends the opening line of his poem.

The writer believes that this situation is fundamentally generated by recapturing the beloved's memory due to her absence (ibid.). Balqasim confirms that the book of *Mawāqif* is, in fact, a

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<sup>63</sup> A prince of the tribe of Kinda and one of the most significant pre-Islamic poets. He was famous for his wandering reckless life. Known as the "most erring prince," he died of poisoning in Ancyra (Clouston 1986, xxxvii).

response to the Divine's permission to write them<sup>64</sup> and an outcome of returning<sup>65</sup> (Balqasim 2012, 234). In accordance with these concepts, I suggest that the verb *awqafanī* plays a similar role to the verb *qifā* in the *at̤lāl*. The poet stands in front of the now-demolished home, a home devoid of the beloved. In a similar stance, al-Niffari stands in front of the Divine when he is devoid of *siwā*. *At̤lāl* agglomerates past and present and writing the *waqfa* includes both "now" and "then." Through recollection, the poet travels beyond the place to what it used to be and through *waqfa*, al-Niffari transcends from the cosmos to the Absolute.

In addition to the duality of present and past and absence and presence, the duality of connection and separation also links the two. In his study on the philosophy of space in Arabic poetry, Munsī presents a brief analysis of the modern approaches to *at̤lāl* in a poem entitled *ṭalal* by 'Umar Abu Risha.<sup>66</sup> The poet starts his poem with this verse:

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<sup>64</sup> In his book, Balqasim explains what he means by permission in a section entitled *min ḥudūd al-'idhn 'ilā ḥudūd al-luḡha* (from the limitation of permission to the limitation of language). In this section, Balqasim states that the permission to write does not depend only on the topic of writing but on the methodology of the presupposed recipient of the book as well. However, this recipient is one of the elites that the Divine allows al-Niffari to write to or tell about Him. Having said that, the recipient acquires only what the permission allows. He clarifies his point through an example from *Mawqif Maḥḍar al-Quds al-Nāṭiq (Mawqif of The Presence-Chamber Of Eloquent Sanctity* [Balqasim 2012, 228]), in which the Divine says to al-Niffari: "I have given thee permission concerning thy companions as to the "He stayed me," and I have given thee permission concerning thy companions as to the "O my servant." I have not given thee permission to reveal Me, nor to make mention of how thou seest Me" (al-Niffari 1987, 105). The Author believes that permission refers to al-Niffari's ability to write about the vision he was granted, however, he postpones doing so (Balqasim 2012, 230) due to the fact that vision is not a linguistic matter (ibid., 231). This discussion by Balqasim was an attempt to analyse the controversial stance of al-Niffari regarding writing the *waqfa*.

<sup>65</sup> The Author expands more on this by stating that al-Niffari could not speak until he returned from his experience, because what he acquired from *waqfa* was achieved beyond the realm of language and words. Moreover *ru'ya*'s essence is *infilāt* (vanishing) (ibid., 234), therefore, when al-Niffari attempts to write about his experience, he multiplies this tendency to end up writing a trace, an absence that witnesses *infilāt* (ibid., 235).

<sup>66</sup> A Syrian poet born in 1910 near Aleppo. He comes from a highly educated family and studied at the American University in Beirut. He published various poetic collections and is considered to be one of the representatives of Arab romanticism in modern Arabic literature (Badawi 1975, 172).

قفي قدمي إن هذا المكان

يغيب به المرء عن حسّه.

(Abu Risha 1998, 125)

Oh! Stand my foot, for this place is  
where man absents himself from his senses.

Munsi maintains that through the first section of Abu Risha's text, the poet separates himself from the observed object, which is the description of the ruins. This seclusion enables the poet to describe the scene sensuously. On the other hand, when the self connects with the object, it enables the poet to obtain a deeper perspective on the place; instead of describing the stones, the poet turns to explore the pain of builders who lost their life for the sake of others' pride (Munsi 2001, 36).

حوافر خيل الزمان المشتّ

تكاد تحدّث عن بؤسه.

(Abu Risha 1998, 126)

The separating hooves of the horses of time  
almost speak of this place's misery.

It appears that here, the poet stands in an in-between state,<sup>67</sup> a situation that equals al-Niffari's case when he says:

”و قال لي: البلاء بلاء من رأني، لا يستطيع مداومتي، ولا يستطيع مفارقتة“ (al-Niffari 2007, 102)

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<sup>67</sup> Between being separated and connected.

(and he said to me: the tribulation is the tribulation of him who sees Me: he cannot endure my persistence, and cannot endure its discontinuance [al-Niffari 1987, 61]). Balqasim comments on this phrase by stating that it is both an inability to persist as well as an inability to free himself from dreaming of *waqfa* because it became his destiny (Balqasim 2012, 158).

Furthermore, the aforementioned examples from Imru' al-Qays and Abu Risha contain a dialogical discourse. However, the addressees of their dialogue do not respond, while in contrast, al-Niffari stands, speaks to the Divine and obtains a response, all of which will be illustrated by selected examples later.

### ***Waqfa and Wuqūf in 'Arafāt***

Hajj (pilgrimage) is one of the five bases of Islam.<sup>68</sup> Al-Ghazali states that hajj cannot be achieved without these five elements: *iḥrām* (a state of ritual consecration), *ṭawāf* (circumambulation), *sa'y* (hastening), *wuqūf bi'Arafa* (staying at 'Arafa) and *ḥalq* (shaving) (al-Ghazali 1977, 52). Nevertheless, standing in 'Arafa is considered to be the vital aspect of hajj. The Prophet Muhammad himself said:

(al-Karmani 2003, 319) “الحج عرفة فمن جاء ليلة جمع قبل طلوع الفجر فقد أدرك الحج”

(Hajj is 'Arafa, and he who came during the night of *jam* ' before dawn, has performed hajj).

The ritual starts with the pilgrim reaching Namira to wash in preparation for the *wuqūf*. As the sun begins to set, the imam gives a brief speech and is followed by a muezzin who calls for *ḍuhr* (noon) and *'aṣr* (evening) prayers (al-Ghazali 1977, 90). After praying, pilgrims are allowed to stand at 'Arafa but not at the valley of 'Arafa. On this day, pilgrims are not allowed to fast. They

<sup>68</sup> According to the hadith that states:

International) “بني الإسلام على خمس : شهادة أن لا إله إلا الله ، وأن محمدا رسول الله ، وإقام الصلاة ، وإيتاء الزكاة ، وحج البيت ، وصوم رمضان”

(Institute of Islamic Thought 1991, 200

(Islam is built on five pillars: bearing witness that there is no god but Allah, establishing regular worship, paying *zakā*, pilgrimage and fasting in Ramadan [Hussain 2012, 125]).

have to stand in front of the *qibla* to praise the Divine, glorify His name and ask for his forgiveness. It is also desirable to maintain *talbiyya* (compliance) and to immerse oneself in supplication (ibid., 91) and anyone who misses *wuqūf* before the immolation day dawns misses hajj entirely (ibid.). The prayers recited by worshippers contain direct speech with the Divine.

According to Abi ‘Abdullah for instance: “If you leave early morning towards ‘*Arafa*, then say: O! Allah, only you I unify, only you I depend on and only your face I desire. I ask you to bless my journey to you, and to fulfil my need” (Abi ‘Abdullah, as cited in al-‘Amili 1993, 29).<sup>69</sup>

I believe that this tradition has several similarities with al-Niffari's *waqfa*. *Wuqūf* ‘*Arafa* requires a complete ablution<sup>70</sup> as a gesture of purifying the body and the soul in order to stand at the mountain with a heart empty of sin and a mouth that only speaks of the Divine remembrance to obtain His blessings and acceptance. In addition, complete ablution incorporates *wuḍū’*,<sup>71</sup> a ritual that Muslims perform and repeat before praying. In *Mawqif al-Waqfa*, al-Niffari states:

"وقال لي: تطهر للوقفه وإلا نفضتكَ" (al-Niffari 2007, 67)

([and he said to me:] purify thyself for staying, else it will shake thee off [Arberry 1987, 33]).

Balqasim (2012, 114) notes that the concept of purifying the soul to reach *waqfa* requires abandoning everything. He affirms that purification is one of the ethics which predates and accompanies *waqfa* and yet, purification does not necessarily lead to *waqfa*, a matter that makes the road to *waqfa* fraught with risk. Thus, the *wāqif* needs to renew his purification, since *waqfa* is in fact renewable (ibid., 115). To have been purified before *waqfa* means to be prepared for contiguity

<sup>69</sup>

”عن أبي عبدالله عليه السلام قال: إذا غدوت إلى عرفة فقل وأنت متوجه إليها: ”اللهم إياك صمدت وإياك اعتمدت، و وجهك أردت، فأسألك أن تبارك لي في رحلتي، وأن تقضي لي حاجتي“ (al-‘Amili 1993, 29).

<sup>70</sup> *Ghusl*: involves passing water over the skin and hair of the entire body (Katz 2013, 22).

<sup>71</sup> A minor ablution: one of the conditions for the validity of prayer, which involves washing the hands, face and feet and wiping the head with water (ibid.).

and direct meeting with the Divine. By contiguity, Balqasim means obtaining traits and by direct meeting, he means vision without a mediator. Eventually, these notions, in addition to purification, all engage with the concept of *siwā*, in order to emphasise *waqfa* as a total separation from otherness (ibid., 116). The pilgrim purifies his heart of sin and the *wāqif* purifies himself of *siwā*. The *wāqif* prepares himself to meet the Divine and the pilgrim prepares himself to stand and pray. The pilgrim wears his garment as a sign of total seclusion from objects and the *wāqif* continues to purify his heart to achieve total separation from *siwā*.

*Wuqūf* at *ʿArafa* is a destination that pilgrims head towards once they have performed the previously mentioned stages.<sup>72</sup> Standing at *ʿArafa* constitutes the peak of the hajj journey. Nevertheless, hajj does not finish here. The ritual continues and ends with *tawāf al-wadāʿ* (farewell circumambulation). Staying at *ʿArafa* comes after the journey of hajj and standing at the mountain enables the pilgrim to initiate the direct speech that addresses the Divine in order to obey his demand and call. On the other hand, al-Niffari's *waqfa* comes after the journey of knowledge and gnosis. It is the destination that the *wāqif* dreams of attaining, but while it allows the *wāqif* to pass towards the Absolute, it is not a final destination. Reaching *waqfa* enables the *wāqif* to have a direct conversation with God, which indicates that he obeys the Divine command and subsequently, the Divine responds. Standing in the presence of the Divine generates discourse in both situations and both positions are considered to be the milestones of each meeting. In order to complete *wuqūf bi ʿArafa*, the pilgrim has to speak and to achieve the Divine vision, whereas the *wāqif* has to speak in order to be rewarded with a vision of the Divine.

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<sup>72</sup> The basis of hajj as I previously mentioned.

## ***Waqfa and du 'ā'***

The act of calling out is what *du 'ā'* simply refers to (Katz 2013, 29). Lexically, Ibn Manzur alleges that the word *du 'ā'* contains several meanings. One of them is the concept of asking for rescue (Ibn Manzur 2016) based on this verse from the Qur'an:

"إن كنتم في ريب مما نزلنا على عبدنا فأتوا بسورة من مثله وادعوا شهداءكم إن كنتم صادقين" (Qur'an 2:23)

(If you have doubts about the revelation We have sent down to Our servant, then produce a single sura like it – enlist whatever supporters you have other than God – if you truly [think you can]. [Abdel Haleem 2005, 6]). Ibn Manzur interprets this verse by mentioning Abu Ishaq's explanation: "Call for one whose obedience you believed and whose aid you hope for" (Ibn Manzur 2016).

Secondly, he maintains that *du 'ā'* is worship based on these words from the Divine:

"إن الذين تدعون من دون الله عباد أمثالكم فادعوهم فليستجيبوا لكم إن كنتم صادقين" (Qur'an 7: 194)

(Those [idolaters] you call upon instead of God are created beings like you. Call upon them, then, and let them respond to you if what you say is true [Abdel Haleem 2005, 108]).

Ibn Manzur further classifies *du 'ā' li-l Allāh* (praying for the Divine) into three different types of prayers: affirmation and praising of His oneness, asking for His mercy and forgiveness and requesting worldly desires (Ibn Manzur 2016). However, this could be applied to any sort of invocation. Katz argues that studies which examine *ṣalāt* (praying) may consider every utterance directed to the Divine as *du 'ā'* (Katz 2013, 29). It hence becomes crucial to clarify the difference between these concepts. Katz mentions several definitions for *du 'ā'* from classical sources that concur with the lexical ones. Most definitions appear to be grounded on principles of supplication: seeking good things from the Divine, imploring Him earnestly and appealing for His rescue. Addressing the Divine is the essence of *du 'ā'*, motivated by human distress and need. In contrast, *ṣalāt* is a verbal phenomenon that includes significant physical postures (ibid.). It remains noteworthy that this difference between rituals does not make them entirely separate from each

other. *Du‘ā* constitutes most of *ṣalāt*’s rites (Katz 2013, 31). The *Fātiḥa*<sup>73</sup> contains verses glorifying the Divine and praising Him, while in *rukū‘* the worshipper proclaims:

( al-Tabarani 1987, 1046) “سبحان ربي العظيم، سبحان ربي الأعلى”

(Glory to my Lord the Greatest, glory to my Lord the Highest).

In *sujūd* (prostration), the worshipper will be in the closest position to the Creator and should therefore implore with *du‘ā* as much as possible (ibid., 1074). It is also significant to note that the importance of *du‘ā* lies in being the “the marrow of prayer”<sup>74</sup> (Katz 2013, 30). Whether it is used for lamenting or requesting, *du‘ā* creates a constant dialogical conversation and connection between man and the Divine. It also happens to integrate with al-Niffari’s *waqfa* in certain aspects. In *du‘ā*, the petitioner prepares by performing *wuḍū‘* and standing in front of the *qibla*<sup>75</sup> (Katz 2013, 22). In *waqfa*, al-Niffari prepares himself by purification.<sup>76</sup> *Du‘ā* is the essence of worshipping and *waqfa* is the basis of *ru‘ya*. The Prophet urges the suppliant to start his *du‘ā* by praising the Divine before daring to ask for anything (al-Tabarani 1987, 822),<sup>77</sup> which confirms that supplication is a method of communicating with the Divine, not only a ritual of requesting. On the other hand, the *wāqif* must empty his heart of any wish and approach the Divine with the purpose of

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<sup>73</sup> The first sura, or chapter, in the Qur’an that must be recited in each *rak‘a* (bowing) during prayer (Katz 2013, 24).

<sup>74</sup> Katz’s translation for “*al-du‘ā’ mukhkh al-‘ibādah*” (ibid., 30).

<sup>75</sup> The direction that Muslims face while performing their prayer and which indicates the direction of the Ka‘ba in Mecca (Katz 2013, 22)

<sup>76</sup> As mentioned in the previous comparison between *waqfa* and *wuqūf bi‘Arafa*.

<sup>77</sup> According to the incident narrated by Fudala ibn ‘Ubayd: “While the Prophet – peace be upon him – was sitting, a man came and started praying saying: “O! lord have mercy on me and forgive me.” Then, the Prophet – peace be upon him – said: “O! Petitioner you have accelerated! If you prayed and sat, then, praise the Divine as He deserves to be praised for. Then, recite prayers for me. Later, another worshipper prayed, praised the One and recited prayers for the Prophet. Then the Prophet – peace be upon him – said to him: “Ask, and you shall get what you asked for” (ibn ‘Ubayd, as cited in al-Tabarani 1987, 822).

witnessing his oneness.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, both *waqfa* and *du‘ā* share the crucial element of glorifying Him. I find this similarity is further brought to light in al-Marzuqi’s description of al-Niffari’s *Mawāqif* as “singing in monotheism”<sup>79</sup> (al-Marzuqi 2007, 45). He maintains that al-Niffari’s *waqfa* means that the mystic is separated from *siwā* and free from the cosmic since he is filled with the truth and therefore only witnesses the Divine presence. In this state, all forms vanish and the dualism between the universe and the One are unveiled, so the mystic is absorbed in monotheism (ibid.). This state illustrates the *wāqif* as a person who emphasises the Divine’s oneness, which I believe is the core of *ḥamd* (praise). According to Lane, in Arabic, *ḥamd* "signifies a praiseworthy quality or a quality for which one is praised" (Lane 1968, 638). When the petitioner praises the Lord, he mentions his attributes, the names that refer to and represent the One who created the cosmos. The following idea was first revealed to Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, in the first released verse of the Qur’an:

"اقرأ باسم ربك الذي خلق" (Qur’an 96:1)

(Read! In the name of your Lord who created [Abdel Haleem 2005, 428]). To believe that He is the One who creates, means to confess that He is One.

أَوَلَيْسَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِقَادِرٍ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَخْلُقَ مِثْلَهُمْ ۗ بَلَىٰ وَهُوَ الْخَلَّاقُ الْعَلِيمُ، إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ، فَسُبْحَانَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ مَلَكُوتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ. (Quran 36:81–83)

<sup>78</sup> Al-Niffari classifies *du‘ā* according to three levels: the level of *‘ilm*, *ma‘rifa* and *waqfa*. In the first level, the mystic asks the Divine to fulfil his desires. In the second one, where he is not fully separated from *siwā*, the mystic obtains the privilege of asking the Divine. In the third, the mystic reaches the blessed stage of not having to ask, since requesting at this stage would be considered derision (al-Marzuqi 2007, 113).

<sup>79</sup> “الغناء في التوحيد.”

Is He who created the heavens and earth not able to create the likes of these people?  
Of course He is! He is the All Knowing Creator: when He wills something to be,  
His way is to say, “Be”—and it is! So glory be to Him in whose Hand lies control  
over all things. It is to Him that you will all be brought back.  
(Abdel Haleem 2005, 284).

This is precisely the praiseworthy quality that the *waqfa* glorifies. As a further example, in the *Mawaqif*, al-Niffari speaks these words in reference to Oneness: “Listen to the tongues of the worlds of abiding in the spiritual manifests. And lo, they were saying: Allah, Allah” (al-Niffari 1987, 85). In light of all the above, I suggest that *waqfa* praises the Divine as *du‘ā’* does, albeit in an indirect way.

Whereas *du‘ā’* is an element of ritual, a rite that seeks acceptance and a method that the petitioner attempts in order to obtain a sign from God, *waqfa* is a privilege resulting from suffering brought on by the barrier that knowledge and gnosis create. Here, *waqfa* can be interpreted as the Divine acceptance of al-Niffari’s continuous effort to free his soul from *siwā*. After *du‘ā’*, the suppliant obtains relief (Katz 2013, 36) while paradoxically, after *waqfa*, al-Niffari suffers from the sorrow of separation. Furthermore, the closest that the suppliant can get to the Divine is in *sujūd*. In contrast, *wuqūf* is the position that allows al-Niffari to be near the Divine and makes it possible for him to be rewarded by his vision.

To conclude briefly, I believe that al-Niffari’s *waqfa* is the outcome of the fusion of lexical, religious and literary traditions. However, he was successful in going beyond the stagnant accepted meaning of phrases in order to create a language of his own.

## ***Siwā and ḥarf***

Otherness<sup>80</sup> is the gateway to *waqfa*. Each study about al-Nriffari tends to categorise these two concepts separately. However, I believe that the discussion should include both notions, *siwā* and *ḥarf*, due to their being interlaced, on the condition that *siwā*, as a concept, leans towards being more comprehensive. In the following deliberation, I intend to explore *siwā* and *ḥarf* individually and to expand more on my approach by bringing to prominence the intertwining aspects between these two notions by dividing them into three characteristics, namely the lexical relation, the transcendental aspect and the element of contradiction. I will then present an examination of how *siwā* and *ḥarf* are understood, in order to conclude that these terminologies are not only mystical, but also a method for al-Niffari to claim an authoritative role for himself in his interaction with the Divine.

## ***Siwā***

*Siwā* constitutes the foundation of al-Niffari's doctrine (al-Marzuqi 2007, 72). Al-Yusuf believes that al-Niffari was the first mystic to use the term *siwā* defined by the article “al”<sup>81</sup> in Arabic. This article converts *siwā* from a preposition used to denote exception, to a noun (al-Yusuf 1997, 45). While *waqfa* is the path to reach the Divine by being totally separated from anything but the One, *siwā* contains various paths that lead to any destination except that of the Divine. Everything other than the One is *siwā*. Subsequently, all except the One is considered a material or an embodied

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<sup>80</sup> "Otherness" is Arberry's translation for the word *siwā* in Arabic (al-Niffari 1987, 20). His translation for *ghayr* was also "other" (ibid., 21).

It is worth mentioning that the notion of *siwā*, in al-Niffari's discourse, intersects with other concepts such as *ghayr* (otherness), *wahm* (illusion), *ḥijab* (veil) and *ḥadd* (limit) (Balqasim 2012, 117). In addition, I believe that the concept of *kawn* (cosmos) can also be added to the aforementioned notions.

<sup>81</sup> An article used to render the noun into a definite one, which is then called “defined by an article” (Wahbah and al-Muhandis 1984, 373).

object (ibid.). The entire *kawn* (cosmos) is otherness; otherness is a letter and the letter itself is also otherness. The true servant of the Divine is the person who liberates himself from *siwā*; the Divine's confidante is the one who restores everything other than the Divine to the Divine, and the man who declines all invitations but the Divine's, the One inscribes him as his *jalīs* (companion) (al-Niffari 1987, 20). *Siwā* is the cosmos, the enemy and the prison, a pathway, not a destination, wherein the true purpose is the Divine. He who is attached to the One cannot love another, whereas he who loves another cannot adjoin the One (al-Marzuqi 2007, 139).

### ***Ḥarf***

On the other hand, *ḥarf* is the Divine's treasury and whoever passes into it conveys the trust of the One. It is the Divine's fire, His order, destiny and His secret's treasury (al-Niffari 1987, 21). *Ḥarf* is a veil. *ʿIlm* is *ḥarf* and *maʿrifa* is *ḥarf* and the Sufi will not succeed until he passes *ḥarf*, acknowledging the fact that doubt dwells in letter and so does "howness."<sup>82</sup> According to al-Niffari's dogma, one cannot "tell"<sup>83</sup> of the Divine (ibid., 22). *Ḥarf* conveys nothing and even when it does, it is only concrete things or *siwā*. In fact, *siwā* and *ḥarf* are two nouns indicating one concept (al-Yusuf 1997, 59). Al-Tilimsani maintains that al-Niffari considers every formal object a *ḥarf*, whether it is spiritual, embodied or even incorporeal images which are tangible. Therefore, all that which is other than the Divine is *ḥarf* (al-Tilimsani, as cited in Balqasim 2012, 141). This definition echoes that of *siwā* mentioned earlier, which emphasises the integration of otherness and letter. It shines brightly in this significant quote by Balqasim (2010, 144):

"اللغة مسكونة بالغير"

(language is haunted by otherness).

<sup>82</sup> Arberry's translation for the word *kayfiyya* in Arabic (al-Niffari 1987, 22). He offers no further explanation for his choice of word, which seems sensical to me personally, given its Arabic meaning, which has no direct translation. However, for further details, you may refer to his translation of al-Niffari's book directly.

<sup>83</sup> Arberry's translation for the word *yukhbir* in Arabic (al-Niffari 1987, 22).

As previously acknowledged,<sup>84</sup> the notion of *siwā* in al-Niffari's discourse also merges with other concepts. Similar expressions are used by al-Niffari when he describes *ḥarf*, setting forth that *al-ḥarf hijāb wa-l-hijab ḥarf* (a letter is a veil and a veil is a letter [al-Niffari 1987, 111]). Balqasim comments on this quote by stating that here, language is revealed as a component of the general meaning of *ḥarf* and as another feature of *siwā* (Balqasim 2012, 141). However, this raises another crucial question: how can the Sufi discover how *siwā* and *ḥarf* disguise themselves? Balqasim confirms that *siwā*'s mechanism lies in its permanent change and return (Balqasim 2012, 117). He therefore agrees with Nwyia on the fact that *ḥarf* is the foundation of *siwā*. Just as language, habit, distance, cosmos and the self are forms of *siwā*, *ilm* and *ma'rifa* are also modes of *ḥarf* (ibid., 120), which ultimately alludes to *siwā*. These different aspects of otherness create a continuous presence of *siwā* that tempts the mystic to affiliate himself with it, which only leads to more *siwā* and nothing further (ibid., 119)

### Lexical Relation

In order to demonstrate the integration of *ḥarf* and *siwā*, I believe it is pivotal to explore the lexical relations between *siwā* and its other synonyms. In his book *Lisan al-'Arab*, Ibn Manzur (2017) asserts:

“هذا سِوَى ذلك، أي غيرُهُ، فهو من الباب؛ لأنَّه إذا كان سِوَاهُ فهُمَا كُلُّ وَاحِدٍ مِنْهُمَا فِي حَيْزِهِ عَلَى سِوَاءِ”

(This is other than that which means another and accordingly, if it is something other, then both are in His realm equally). The lexical definition uses *ghayr* (other) as an explanation for *siwā*.

Accordingly, if we search for *ghayr* in *Lisan al-'Arab*, we will first find this definition:

“غَيْرٌ مِنْ حُرُوفِ الْمَعَانِي، تَكُونُ نَعْتًا وَتَكُونُ بِمَعْنَى لَا، وَلَهُ بَابٌ عَلِ جِدَّةٌ” (ibid. 2017)

<sup>84</sup> See footnote no. 52 on page 80.

(*ghayr* is one of the letters of meaning; it is an adjective and it means “no,” and it has a different section, separate meaning). As shown by the previous quotation, *ghayr*<sup>85</sup> is actually *ḥarf* expressing negation, which ultimately theologically affirms the solid correlation between *siwā* and *ḥarf*, based on the lexical integration that constitutes the texture of a language.

Furthermore, I believe that in the doctrine of al-Niffari, *ḥarf*, being a veil, took its inferior value from the negative lexical indications. The word *ḥarf* and its derivatives in *Lisan al-‘Arab* identify with concepts of language that have a one-sided view and deficiency, fluctuation, doubt and other abstractions that lead to negativity. There is, however, a single instance in which *ḥarf* lexically carries a positive meaning that happens to relate to wealth: *ahrafā al-rajulu iḥrafan* (Ibn Manzur 2017), (a man whose property increases, and becomes in a good state [Lane 1968, 550]). Introducing these meanings will demonstrate the relation between philosophy and language, which I believe al-Niffari derives his notion of *ḥarf* from.

*Ḥarf* is a letter, an entity produced by the alphabet. It is a tool called *rābiṭa* (link), because it relates the noun to another noun, the verb to another verb and the preposition to another preposition. Each word in the Qur’an that is read according to a certain dialect<sup>86</sup> is called *ḥarf*. Ibn Manzur maintains that *ḥarf* originally means side, margin and edge.<sup>87</sup> The word *ḥarf* even expands to further objects and meanings,<sup>88</sup> such as *ḥarfā*<sup>89</sup> *al-ra’s*, which refers to the two lateral halves of the head.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Lane states that *ghayr* signifies *siwā*, other than; exclusively of; or not. Moreover, it is used to qualify a substitute (Lane 1968, 2315).

<sup>86</sup> Lane’s translation for Prophet Muhammad’s hadith – peace be upon him – “*nazala al-Qur’ān ‘alā sab‘ati aḥruf*” is “the Qur’an has revealed according to seven dialects, of the dialects of the Arabs” (Lane 1968, 550).

<sup>87</sup> Lane’s translation for *ṭaraf* and *jānib* (ibid.).

<sup>88</sup> Such as ship, mountain and a she-camel. For the first two, it indicates sides and with the female camel it alludes to weakness and poor health (Ibn Manzur 2017).

<sup>89</sup> The dual of *ḥarf*.

<sup>90</sup> Lane’s translation for *shiqqā* (Lane 1986, 550).

I suggest that when al-Niffari says that “*ḥarf* is a veil” (al-Niffari 1987, 111), he might be referring to the risk of looking at the meaning of the word from a single side, which hides the complete truth, thereby increasing ignorance and eventually leading further away from *waqfa* and the Divine. Furthermore, *ḥarf* is the foundation of language and language itself is limited, since it is incapable of expressing *ru`ya*.<sup>91</sup> In consequence, as a single-sided tool and an instrument of language, *ḥarf* lexically serves the theological thought of al-Niffari of *ḥarf* regarding leading to veils. I believe that the idea of creating a veil also merges with the expression *ḥarafa*<sup>92</sup> ‘*an al-shay*’,<sup>93</sup> which means to turn away,<sup>94</sup> and which affirms the relation between *ḥarf* and illusion. Therefore, the concept of *ḥarf* is highly related to the concept of changing, which the word *ḥarf* itself conveys lexically. As a further example, *tahrīf al-kalim* ‘*an mawāḍi`ih*’<sup>95</sup> means to alter words from their proper meanings (Lane 1986, 549), and *yuharrīf al-qulūb* indicates turning the hearts away from confidence and rendering them inclined to removal and flight (ibid.). When Arberry writes: “For the mystic does not stay in the vision of God, until he emerges from *ḥarf* and *mahrūf* (1987, 21–22), it means that he who cannot transcend from *ḥarf* loses the Divine vision. The concept of loss is also lexically related to *ḥarf*. According to Ibn Manzur (2017), the *muḥarraḥ* is he who has lost his money and *muḥārīf* is he who has suffered the loss of part of his property (Lane 1986, 549). What is more, being kept away from seeing the Divine portends to the fact that man is still captivated by *ḥarf* and cannot be liberated from it, which correlates with two meanings in the dictionary. The first is contained in *mālī* ‘*an hāthā al-`amri maḥraḥ*’ (Ibn Manzur 2017), (I have no place to which to turn away, or back, from this thing [Lane 1986, 550]) and the impossibility of

<sup>91</sup> According to al-Niffari’s quote: “The more the vision increases, the more the expression decreases” (al-Niffari 1987, 64).

<sup>92</sup> The verb for *ḥarf*.

<sup>93</sup> He turned aside (Lane 1986, 550).

<sup>94</sup> Lane’s translation for ‘*adala*’ (ibid., 1972).

<sup>95</sup> According to the following verse in the Qur’an: “من الذين هادوا يحرّفون الكلم عن مواضعه” (Qur’an 4: 46), (there are some among the Jews who pervert words from their proper places [Maulawi Sher 2004, 90]).

escape or the feeling of being somehow trapped. The second is *rajulun muḥāraf* and refers to he who is limited and deprived, which is the opposite of being blessed (ibid.). By the same token, when Ibn Manzur describes *ḥarf* as a link between words, it obviously correlates with the following statement by al-Niffari (2007, 52):

"الله ألف بين كل حرفين بصفة من صفاته، فتكونت الأكوام بتأليف الصفات لها"

(God joined every pair of letters with one of His qualities, and so brought into existence the existences through the qualities joining them together [al-Niffari 1987, 21]).

Of similar relevance, the word *ḥarf* in Arabic expresses the emotional state of a person. When, for example, Ibn Sida states: *fulānun ‘alā ḥarfin min amrih* (such a one is standing aloof with respect to his affair in suspense [ibid.]), it means that a person waits in expectation when looking forward to something they like. If they did not do so however, they would be turning away from it. According to al-Zajjaj, *‘alā ḥarf* also indicates doubt regarding a verse in the Qur’an (al-Zajjaj, as cited in Ibn Manzur 2017) where the Divine declares: "ومن الناس من يعبد الله على حرف" (Qur’an 22: 11), (And among men there is he who worships Allah, standing as it were on the verge [Maulawi Sher 2004, 379]), indicating the state of a worshipper who only serves the Divine when in a state of prosperity and abjures when in distress (Ibn Manzur 2017). Moreover, Ibn ‘Arafa believes that *‘alā ḥarf* means without peace, or fluctuating (ibid.). The link shines brightly here with the aforementioned definition of *ḥarf* by al-Niffari when he states: "Doubt dwells in letter" (al-Niffari 1987, 22).<sup>96</sup>

### **A threshold**

*Siwā* and *ḥarf* share the quality of being the threshold to reach *waqfa* and in this respect, they have similar characteristics. Arberry is of the opinion that the Sufi must eliminate the ecstasy of *siwā* from his soul by *mujāhada* (mortification) (al-Niffari 1987, 20). This method is called *mujāhada* because of its arduousness, as the process of deserting otherness in one go is unmanageable and

<sup>96</sup> See footnote 83 on page 99.

requires gradual progression (al-Marzuqi 2007, 139). Consequently, banishing *siwā* transfers the mystic from one stage to another just like those who emerge from letters; the letters that create names, which articulate attributes and depart from names and themselves in order to rescue themselves from magic to attain the Divine's friendship (al-Niffari 1987, 22). To make this even clearer, *siwā* and *ḥarf* require the mystic to fight their temptations in order to achieve adjacency with the Divine (al-Marzuqi 2007, 143), which demands alienation, an aspect that sustains the kinship between *ḥarf* and *siwā*.

### **Contradiction**

What further supports my assumption that *ḥarf* and *siwā* are two sides of one coin is the element of contradiction. Al-Niffari has a dual stance regarding *ḥarf*, as al-Yusuf attests. The first is positive and as he describes it, al-Niffari considers *ḥarf* a sacred treasury of the One's mysteries and only that which is sanctified can treasure these secrets. Yet at the same time, *ḥarf* has negative connotations, such as when al-Niffari states:

(ibid.,59) "الحرف فج إبليس"

(letter is the pass to *Iblīs* [al-Niffari 1987, 22]).

*Ḥarf* does not acknowledge God and is incapable of explaining itself, how then can it tell of the Divine? (al-Niffari 1987, 22). It seems that the letter is a contrastive concept in al-Niffari's philosophy. It is God's fire and the devil's path at the same time. It is a mode of otherness, but also a guide to knowledge (ibid.). This characteristic of opposition also applies to *siwā*. Notwithstanding the fact that *siwā* is the chronic disease that hunts the *wāqif* and prevents him from *ru'ya* (vision). For his part, Balqasim believes that confronting otherness can only be practicable through consciousness, which determines the human truth in *waqfa* (Balqasim 2012, 117). In addition, he asserts that an awareness of *siwā* is a noble knowledge that is not available to the masses (ibid.,

118). As a result, *siwā* appears to be the enemy of the mystic and a quality of superiority at the same time.

### **Beyond spirituality**

Permanent conflict and tension dominate the relation between the seeker and otherness in al-Niffari's discourse. The more the otherness varies and differs, the more the seeker endeavours to disengage himself from it. This issue makes seclusion an existential emotional state that allows the mystic to emerge from generality to particularity, as *waqfa* exceeds the grasp of the masses (ibid., 117). This emergence cannot be obtained without acknowledging *siwā*, which is an arcane sort of knowledge that is inaccessible to the masses. Therefore, without it, the ecstasy of *siwā* would become an alternative to separating from it (ibid., 118). Longing for otherness is the masses' ultimate goal and purpose. In contrast, the elite aim for total seclusion from *siwā*. Balqasim (2012, 118) specifies:

"من سوى إلى سوى هي رحلة العامة"

(from otherness to otherness is the masses' journey). He further concurs with Ibn 'Ata' al-Sikandari's thought that this journey leads them only to illusion (ibid.). He urges that only the elite acknowledge *siwā* as otherness, even if they have different relations with it. With this acknowledgment, they consider *siwā* a consolidation of forgetfulness or heedlessness. He believes that this tendency made *dhikr* (remembrance) their method for resisting forgetfulness. However, al-Niffari considers *dhikr* a veil and believes that *wird* (supplication) holds a lesser status than they who have gone beyond *dhikr* (ibid.). It seems that in this context, al-Niffari is creating a social hierarchy to distinguish elites from the masses, using spiritual theology. Awareness of *siwā* is a standard that al-Niffari attempts to establish in order to provide his dogma with a higher stance than other Sufis' doctrines, by revolting against language and spiritual knowledge. *Dhikr* holds an exalted significance in the mystical philosophy. Nasr goes as far as to assert that "*dhikr* is the

central method of spiritual realisation” (Nasr 1986, 197). However, al-Niffari negates that by according *dhikr*<sup>97</sup> less importance, considering it to be a veil. I believe that *siwā* is not only a theological term but also a position of power that provides al-Niffari with an underlying position of authority.

This phenomenon applies to the concept of *ḥarf*, which can be further clarified by making a comparison between al-Niffari’s perspective and the traditional mystical one. Al-Niffari continues to tackle mystical tradition by deconstructing the inviolability of *ḥarf*. Nwyia delineates two moments of the letter experience that the mystic witnessed. In the first moment, the letter is assigned to what is other than the Divine, no matter what its form is. He realises in this case that otherness commences from the One Himself, since the altruism of attributes is only manifested through the names they hold and the Divine’s names cannot exist without the letters that constitute them (Balqasim 2012, 140). The second moment is when the altruism of letters is addressed as being unable to reach the Absolute (ibid., 141). Nwyia maintains that this approach to *ḥarf* was not associated exclusively with al-Niffari, nonetheless, he provides a different dimension (ibid., 140). In

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<sup>97</sup> The importance of mentioning *dhikr* here lies in its relation with language, which eventually leads to *ḥarf*, which will be clear from Lane’s lexical definition. According to Lane: “*Dhikr* signifies memory; a certain quality of the mind by which a man is able to remember what he cares to know, like *ḥifẓ*. Moreover, it indicates mentioning and saying. *Dhikr Allāh* is the praise and glorification of God, the celebration or declaration of his remoteness, or freedom from every impurity or imperfection, or from everything derogatory from his glory. To magnify Him and assert His unity, by saying: *subḥān Allāh*, glory be to Allah, *al-ḥamdu li-Llāh*, thanks to Allah, and *lā ilāha illā Allāh*, there is no God but Allah, and uttering all the forms of his praise: a reading or reciting of the Qur’an; thanking God, obedience to God, supplication” (Lane 1968, 969). In addition, he includes praising, good speech and eulogy to forms of *dhikr* (ibid.). On the other hand, al-Marzuqī maintains that al-Niffari has a negative perspective towards *dhikr*: He believes that a Sufī should be occupied by the *madhkūr* (the mentioned one), not by *dhikr* (remembrance or mentioning), otherwise, it would lead the seeker to be attached to *siwā* (al-Marzuqī 2007, 111). He believes that in *ru’ya*, the seeker could not practice *dhikr*, because if he did, he would be affirming that there will be a *dhākir*, a reciter of *dhikr* and *madhkūr*, which then creates a veil between the seeker and the Divine (ibid., 113). In conclusion, *dhikr* is performed by words and a language which are constituted of *ḥarf*. Despite the fact that *dhikr* uses *ḥarf* to praise the Divine, in the end, it leads only to *ḥarf* and *siwā*. Therefore, using *ḥarf* to speak of the Divine actually veils the Divine.

*Sufism and Surrealism*, Adonis discusses the importance accorded to *ḥarf* in the Sufi tradition. He states that the alphabet is a designation that refers to the unknowable and not to the reality. It therefore creates an area where the One's abstraction meets the expressional abstraction of words, and the linguistic sign is analogous to a divine sign due to the fact that Allah is not an image, but a word. The One cannot be acknowledged with images, however, He can be acknowledged with words which are abstract, whether they be of "heart or of mind"<sup>98</sup> (Adonis 2005, 164). *Bayān* (rhetoric), does not create an alternative for the image, in spite of being a more declarative method of truth. Here, the meaning of beauty and aesthetic in Islam is being revealed and the beauty in Islam is what cannot be visualised (ibid., 165). In order to reveal the infinity of meanings, calligraphy exterminates image in all forms (ibid., 170). Regardless of this vital significance of the letter, as Adonis illustrates, Balqasim asserts that al-Niffari's perspective is different and cannot be found among any other mystics. Since *ḥarf*, from the point of view of al-Niffari, arises as hypostasis, it symbolises the entire human discourse. Based on this opinion, Nwyia tends to believe that letters make up the fabric of existence, since speech is what actually provides objects with names that reveal their meanings, and this clarifies what Nwyia believes that al-Niffari means by:

(Balqasim 2012, 140) "كل شيء حرف"

(everything is a letter). Delving into al-Niffari's approach and Adonis' thoughts on the letter makes it clearer to see how al-Niffari creates his theological hierarchy, which converts what is sacred in the mystical inheritance to a veil that exiles the worshipper from the Divine and increases the distance between them. This is in order for al-Niffari to assign himself a certain stance of exclusive knowledge that challenges the spiritual circle and provides him with significant authority due to the fact that he is the one who goes beyond *ḥarf*, *mahrūf* and *siwā*, and reaches *waqfa*.

### ***ʿIlm and maʿrifa***

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<sup>98</sup> According to Adonis's translation for "qalbiyya and 'aqliyya" (Adonis 2005, 164).

*ʿIlm* (knowledge) and *maʿrifa* (gnosis) are deeply discussed concepts in the Islamic mystical tradition. According to Murad, *ʿilm* is one of the aims that Islam urges people to reach. He emphasises his point by mentioning several exegeses for this quotation from the Qurʿan (Murad, 2007, 63):

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ، قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ. (Qurʿan 2:31–32)

And He taught Adam all the names, then he put the objects of these names before the angels and said: "Tell Me the names of these, if you are right." They said: "Holy art thou! No knowledge have we except what Thou hast taught us; surely, Thou art the all-Knowing, the Wise." (Maulawi Sher 2004, 6)

He maintains that *ʿilm* draws its virtue from being a synonym of wisdom, which implies understanding, sermons and prophecy<sup>99</sup> (ibid., 65). In the Sufi tradition, *ʿilm* consists of two factors: *sharīʿa* (legislation) and *ḥaqīqa* (truth). These elements include knowledge of the Qurʿan and knowledge of *sunan*<sup>100</sup> and *ḥaqāʾiq al-ʿīmān* (truths of faith). On the other hand, Sufis believe that their truths are based on four aspects: gnosis of the Divine, His names, attributes and deeds, gnosis of the evilness and motivations of the soul, gnosis of the enemy's insinuations and stratagem and gnosis of life, its temptations and seductions (ibid., 68). Moreover, *maʿrifa* is related to the concept of *ʿurfān*, the knowledge that predates ignorance and denies doubt due to the fact that its objective is the core of the Divine and His attributes. *Maʿrifa* has two classifications: the first is the one that is based on signs and revealed to those who are exposed to the Unseen. The second is known as

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<sup>99</sup> These meanings are based on several verses in the Qurʿan; 2: 231, 19: 12 and 4: 54.

<sup>100</sup> Prophet Muhammad's practices, sayings and manners.

*shuhūdiyya* (Arnaldez, 2017) and is a *maʿrifā* that depends on evidence through direct testimony, which provides the seeker with the acknowledgement of the signs through Him. *ʿĀrif*, according to Ibn Muʿadh, “is he who is there without being there” and Junayd adds “he who is distinct without separation” (Ibn Muʿadh and Junayd, as cited in Arnaldez 2017). Moreover, Abu Hafs maintains that *maʿrifā* makes self-consciousness vanish in the “empirical self” and initiates self and heart absence. By this, he means that receiving *maʿrifā* from the Divine demands *ghayba*, where the *ʿārif* will see nothing but Him and will turn to no one and to nothing other than Him so he can see with His Lord, not with his heart (Arnaldez, 2017). On the contrary, al-Niffari builds his philosophy on this rich tradition. He nonetheless seeks to go against tradition by including another dimension to both terms and revolting against language. In this section, I start by examining *ʿilm* and *maʿrifā* in al-Niffari’s theology and continue by exploring the significant correlation that exists between both concepts. This is achieved by explaining their relation to *siwā*, language and ignorance, in order to conclude that al-Niffari’s glorification of ignorance echoes the concept of prophecy by tackling the significance of being an *ummī* as a prophet.

### ***ʿIlm* according to al-Niffari’s philosophy**

Dualism appears to be the phenomenon of al-Niffari’s writing style. By exploring his thoughts on *ʿilm* and looking at the various and contradictory definitions of *ʿilm* in his work, it will become as clear as daylight that he maintains two different and opposing views on the subject: a positive and a negative one.

Following his thoughts on *siwā* and *ḥarf*, he suggests that *ʿilm* is the first step into the path of *ruʿya* and purports that *ʿilm* “is the spirit of life,”<sup>101</sup> which elevates its owner above the level of animality and bestiality. In the absence of *ʿilm*, life becomes bestial but its presence makes life human again. On the other hand, *ʿilm* is a feature of *siwā*, a limited tool that could only be deceitful

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<sup>101</sup> Arberry’s translation for “*al-ʿilmu rūḥū al-ḥayāh*” (al-Niffari 1987, 35).

and incomplete (al-Marzuqi 2007, 151) and hence veils the Divine because it prevents *ru'ya*. *Ilm* is the One's evidence for every mind, where the intellect becomes steady. However, if *'ilm* becomes circumscribed, then it is no longer *'ilm*. It is considered to be the door towards the Divine but at the same time, it causes separation from Him when He calls his servant during prayers (al-Niffari 1987, 17). It could only acknowledge partial movements and laws that recognise quantities, relations and measurements. Ignorant and veiled scholars whose will ceases at realising things and their relations aim to reach *'ilm*. Yet those who have diligence consider it a method to reach *ma'rifa* (al-Marzuqi 2007, 151). It is more harmful to he who sees the Divine than *jahl* (ignorance) is because it contains nothing but absence and no *ru'ya*. The light of *'ilm* illuminates the Sufi for his own sake but not for that of the One. The risk of *'ilm* lies in its coherence due to its attachment to *ḥarf*, because *ḥarf* constitutes the essence of *'ilm*. It is just a medium that should be put aside along with *ma'rifa*, that one may reach the Divine. For if the seeker were driven by them, he would be slipping into *'ilm* and would be converted into *nakira* (nobody)<sup>102</sup> by the *ma'rifa*. *Ilm* ruins he who attains *ru'ya* as vinegar ruins honey. When the mystic sees the Divine in *'ilm*, then he has found the path unto Him, but if he does not, it indicates that *'ilm* has taken the form of a deceitful veil that precludes him from reaching the Divine. When the mystic meets the One, he will see *'ilm* and *ma'rifa* as repelling from His presence, in which case he cannot see God and cannot benefit from his *'ilm* (al-Niffari 1987, 18).

The limitations of *'ilm* can be demonstrated by its incapability to acquire the truth of the Divine's existence because it relies on visuals, which restrict it to two limited attributes: sensible and intellectual, whereas the Divine cannot be confined to any of them (al-Marzuqi, 156). Subsequently, al-Niffari (2017, 121) declares:

“وقال لي أنا القريب الذي لا يحسه العلم، وأنا البعيد الذي لا يدركه العلم”

<sup>102</sup> “Nobody. A person who has no importance or authority”. Translation quoted from Mas'ud 2018.

(and he said to me: I am the Near, Whom knowledge does not touch: I am the Far, Whom Knowledge does not attain [al-Niffari 1987, 76]).

### Types of *'ilm*

Balqasim distinguishes between two types of *'ilm*: *al-'ilm al-ghayrī* (knowledge of the otherness) and *al-'ilm al-mutaḥaṣṣil min tilqā' al-nafs* (knowledge obtained from the soul). The first type depends on *ghayr* thoughts, not on the live contact between essence and *ma'lūm* (concept).<sup>103</sup> As a result, it creates a veil between the *'ālim* (savant)<sup>104</sup> and *ma'lūm*, since it draws a distance between them. This classification is cold and deprived of life because it is obtained from *ghayr* as opposed to experience and is based on a veiled criterion, which measures the absence according to the witness. Measuring can only weave a veil between *'ilm* and *ma'lūm*, which leads to the alienation of the *'ālim*. Knowledge that is based on tradition emphasises the oblivion of existence, accumulates mediums and empowers *siwā*, since *siwā* works within measuring. If the concept is the possibility and the horizon of knowledge, then it only experiences its limitation because the Absolute that the *wāqif* seeks is *lā ma'lūm* (non-conceptual) (Balqasim 2012, 122). Moreover, it is not only tradition that makes *al-'ilm al-ghayrī* a *siwā*, but also its dependence on *naẓr* (to view). *'Ilm al-naẓar* is *siwā* because it comprises an element which prevents nearness from *ma'lūm*. Thus the *'ālim* comes under the control of his *'ilm*, which veils him and lets him see only what *'ilm* allows him to see. Al-Niffari believes that the *'ālim* is a slave who is chained by the cuffs of thought. He also maintains that *al-'ilm al-ghayrī* is divisional from existence and separated from it at the same time, which only produces more veils (ibid., 123). On the other hand, the second type of *'ilm* is obtained from reaching the unknown of *waqfa* and witnessing its enormity. Having said this, it will still be below the level of *waqfa*'s truth (ibid., 122).

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<sup>103</sup> This translation is quoted from *Mawsū'at Mustalahat al-Tasawwuf al-Islami* (al-'Ajam 1999, 1151)

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 1141.

### ***Ma'rifa according to al-Niffari's philosophy***

According to al-Niffari and other Sufis, *ma'rifa* is recognising something as it is. It is the knowledge that cannot be doubted if the Divine's essence and attributes are known. The will of the *'arif* should be in accordance with the Divine, so he asks nothing but Him. The *'arif*'s will is the power that motivates him to march in the Sufi path until the end (al-Marzuqi 2007, 138). It is believed to be a voice, while *ru'ya* is an image (al-Yusuf 1997, 73) and because it traces the truth with the Divine's light, it is also seen as an intuition. *Ma'rifa* was first in reaching out to the One in advance and therefore, the Divine released not only the secrets of all creatures to *ma'rifa* but also led it to the secret that lies behind all creatures, to the extent that this secret goes beyond all creatures and rises above them (ibid.,74). Arberry maintains that the vital purpose of *ma'rifa* is to preserve the *ḥāl* (spiritual state)<sup>105</sup> of the Sufi. Where *'ilm* is the door to the Divine, *ma'rifa* is the doorkeeper. It is the “tongue of singleness,” which erases all except itself once it speaks, and which causes to vanish what makes itself known once it is silent. *Ma'rifa* is a fire that consumes love yet is nevertheless consumed by the fire of *waqfa*, which acknowledges *ma'rifa* as *siwā* (al-Niffari 1987, 16). In contrast, the *'arif* is he who annihilates some of his remains while the rest is still pending. He is considered to be one of the *khawwaṣ* (elite – in the spiritual domain) for what he annihilated from, and one of the *'awāmm* (public savants)<sup>106</sup> for what it is that still remains. Therefore, he is in a middle stage where he is attached to *ḥaqq*<sup>107</sup> and to *khalq* (creatures)<sup>108</sup> (al-Marzuqi 2007, 163). Consequently, he is not worthy to be in the Divine's presence, since the path to Him is abolishment not affirmation (ibid., 166).

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<sup>105</sup> Translation by Arberry (al-Niffari 1987, 16).

<sup>106</sup> Translation quoted from al-'Ajam 1999, 1140.

<sup>107</sup> “The Divine.” Translation quoted from *Mawsū' al-Mustalahat al-Tasawwuf al-Islami* (al-'Ajam 1999, 1129).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 1130.

## Methods of *maʿrifa*

The criteria that *al-maʿrifa al-ʿilāhiyya* (gnosis of the Divine) depends on is *kashf* (unveiling),<sup>109</sup> which is a direct sentimental recognition that differs from the sensual or the intellectual direct one. According to al-Niffari, there are three methods to obtain *maʿrifa*. The lowest two are *nafs* (soul) and character, because of their relation with acknowledging sensed objects. The third is the mind. The wisdom of building things is the utmost that the mind can reach, therefore if the *ʿarif* outdistanced his mind in search of the light of *ḥaḍra* (divine presence),<sup>110</sup> his mind would not be capable of processing it because it is beyond his domain. Consequently, the heart has a superior capability to comprehend *maʿrifa* (al-Marzuqi 2007, 149). Additionally, there are two more types of *maʿrifa*: *maʿrifat al-thabāt*<sup>111</sup> and *maʿrifat al-jawāz*<sup>112</sup> (Balqasim 2012, 128).

## Between *ʿilm* and *maʿrifa*

Most of the sources that examine al-Niffari tend to constantly make a comparison between *ʿilm* and *maʿrifa*, based on the belief that they are philosophically related. There are, however, some points that I significantly believe sustain their relationship, which will be discussed later in this section. An example of this comes from al-Marzuqi, who states that *ʿilm* searches into the cosmos and things but that *maʿrifa* seeks the Creator. *ʿIlm* explores multiplicity, whereas *maʿrifa* examines the One. *ʿIlm* studies materialism, yet *maʿrifa* seeks the Unseen. In his *Mawāqif*, al-Niffari emphasises the superior status that *maʿrifa* obtains thanks to its capacity of acknowledging the ultimate truths, while *ʿilm* recognises only partial matters (al-Marzuqi 2007, 146). If the seeker follows their paths,

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 1146.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 1128.

<sup>111</sup> Gnosis of stability: the gnosis that cannot reach the Divine (Balqasim 2012, 128).

<sup>112</sup> Gnosis of passing: a type of gnosis that allows al-Niffari to be in the presence of the Divine. The definition is mentioned in a *mawqif* called *Mawqif Ghurbatī*, which is one of al-Niffari's unpublished mystical texts (ibid.).

he will be trapped in them. Nonetheless, the superiority of *maʿrifa* denies the fact that it is deficient. Indeed although *maʿrifa* is superior to *ʿilm*, *mushāhada* (contemplation)<sup>113</sup> is an even higher level than *maʿrifa* is. Therefore, *maʿrifa* remains as long as *khāṭir* (thought)<sup>114</sup> does. *Mushāhada* first exiles thought and eventually deports *maʿrifa* (al-Niffari 1987, 16). Moreover, al-Marzuqi suggests that there is a stage between *ʿilm* and *maʿrifa* that is called *maʿrifat al-ʿārif* (gnosis of he who knows). He maintains that it is a stage higher than *ʿilm* and below *maʿrifa*, for *maʿrifa* is the stage of acknowledging the Divine Himself and his attributes gradually. On the other hand, *maʿrifat al-ʿārif* is actually recognising this *maʿrifa*, which means that it is related to types of the Divine's *maʿrifa* and not to the Divine Himself. Consequently, it is an isthmus between the veiled knowledge and gnosis of the Divine. The isthmus is a limit between what is manifested, *ʿilm*, and what is interior, *maʿrifa* (al-Marzuqi 2007, 159). *Maʿrifat al-naḥs* (soul gnosis), as al-Niffari believes, is the door to Divine gnosis, since he who has no path to his soul has no path to acknowledge the Divine. The seeker cannot recognise the One or any of the cosmic secrets if he cannot find them all in his own soul, because it is precisely in his knowledge of his soul that the acknowledgement of the Divine lies and by acknowledging the Divine, he knows his own self since the Divine is closer to everything than a thing acknowledging itself (ibid., 167). *Al-maʿrifa al-ʿilāhiyya* (Divine gnosis) is gifted, not gained, for the *maqām al-Ḥaqq* (the station of the Divine)<sup>115</sup> cannot be obtained for a reason, due to the fact that *taʿarruf*<sup>116</sup> is endowment (ibid., 168).

### **Regarding *siwā***

Both *ʿilm* and *maʿrifa* are inferior to *waqfa* because of the remains of *siwā* contained in them. The correlation between *ʿilm* and *siwā* was previously discussed through the examination of the

<sup>113</sup> Translation by Arberry (al-Niffari 1987, 16).

<sup>114</sup> Translation quoted from al-Ghanmi 2007, 49.

<sup>115</sup> Translation quoted from al-ʿAjam 1999, 1151.

<sup>116</sup> "It was or became known" (Lane 1986, 2014).

different types of *‘ilm* that exist. While *siwā* is limited in *ma‘rifa* and because of the remains of vestige in it, *waqfa* holds a superior position (Balqasim 2012, 126). For that reason, according to al-Niffari, transcending from *‘ilm* to *ma‘rifa* and from *ma‘rifa* to *waqfa* depends on the degree of hijab (veil). *Ma‘rifa* is highly regarded in the Sufi tradition as it has never been criticised. In consequence, Nwya states that al-Niffari was the first in daring to question *ma‘rifa* with the urge to demonstrate its limitation. Without encroaching upon and transcending its boundaries, *waqfa* could not be accomplished. *Al-ma‘rifa bi-l-Allāh* (gnosis of the Divine) is not the Divine, regardless of how complete it might be. It is other than the Divine, it is *siwā*. *‘Ilm* is slavery and *ma‘rifa* is the contract, so since *waqfa* constitutes freedom, it would ensue that *ma‘rifa* is a middle level between slavery and freedom. Consequently, the *‘arif* is prepared for *waqfa* and this is precisely where *ma‘rifa* obtained its superiority to *‘ilm* and inferiority to *waqfa*. That is how al-Niffari considers *ma‘rifa* as prospecting a hopeful freedom that does not occur, since al-Tilimsani states that "*ma‘rifa* abolishes some vestige and keeps some" (as cited in Balqasim 2010, 127). Being attached to *ma‘rifa* does not imply attachment to the Absolute. It is but a mediator which arises only in *waqfa*. Al-Niffari's comparison between *waqfa* and *ma‘rifa* glosses on their relation with language. He believes that *ma‘rifa* is the end of language and that regardless of how we get involved with it, it will still be under the law of saying and all its potential can be realised by language. On the other hand, he emphasises that language is fortified from *waqfa*, since *waqfa* is beyond the capacity of language. It is therefore compulsory to pass *ma‘rifa* because it contains remains of *siwā* (ibid., 128).

### **The lexical relation**

Despite the humble status that it is given in al-Niffari's philosophical hierarchy, *‘ilm* acquires a positive lexical meaning. By examining both notions through language, we will moreover discover that dictionaries use the word *‘arafa* to explain *‘alima* and vice versa (two words that translate as "acknowledge" and "know"). According to Ibn Manzur, *‘ilm* is simply the opposite of *jahl* (Ibn

Manzur 2017). *ʿIlm* or *ʿalimahu* means he knew it or, he was or became acquainted with it, *ʿarafahu* (Lane 1986, 2138). In addition, *ʿalīm* is one of the Divine's attributes that was mentioned several times in the Qur'an (Ibn Manzur 2017), such as in the following example:

"وهو الخلاق العليم" (Qur'an 36:81)

(He is the All Knowing Creator) [Abdelhaleem 2005, ]. It is also allowed to call a person who was taught by the Divine a *ʿalīm* (Ibn Manzur 2017), as the Prophet Joseph describes himself to the king in the Qur'an (12: 55):

"إني حفيظ عليم"

(I shall manage them prudently and carefully [Abdel Haleem 2005, 149]). In addition, *ʿilm* alludes to experience, such as in *ʿalima al-rajjula*, which means *khabarahu* (Ibn Manzur 2017) and translates as "to know the man with respect to his internal, or real state" (Lane 1986, 695). In contrast, there are lexical indications that affirm al-Niffari's thoughts on the inferior level of *ʿilm* because of its relation with veils.<sup>117</sup> Further examples of this are *ʿalima bi-l-shayʿ*, which means *shaʿara* and which Lane translates as "he knew something signifies that he perceived it by means of any senses" (Lane 1986, 2139); *al-maʿlam*, which signifies *al-ʿathar* or "the indication or indicator of the road or away" (ibid., 2141) and *ʿalamahu*, which means *wasamahu* (Ibn Manzur 2017) and translates as "to mark, to sign, or the token by which a person or a thing is known" (Lane 1986, 2140). I would offer my suggestion that *ʿilm* obtains its inferior stance from these lexical meanings. As I mentioned previously, *ʿilm* is related to tangible and sensible recognition. Since trace, marks and emotions are the foundation of *siwā*, from the lexical perspective, *ʿilm* holds a subordinate position in al-Niffari's path.

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<sup>117</sup> Since acknowledging with senses leads to the incapability of the Divine's acknowledgement, as was previously mentioned.

On the other hand, *maʿrifa* comes from the root *ʿarafa* which means to know.<sup>118</sup> To give an even broader range of examples, *ʿirfān* signifies *ʿilm* and *ʿarrafahu al-ʿamr* (he made him to know the affair)<sup>119</sup> means *ʿaʿlamahu ʿiyyāh* (he acquainted him with it)<sup>120</sup> (Ibn Manzur 2017). Moreover, *maʿrifa*’s engagement is the basis of *ʿilm* due to the similar connotations that they both hold. To clarify more, *ʿarrafahu bihi* (he made him to know it)<sup>121</sup> means *wasamahu* (making known)<sup>122</sup> and *al-taʿrīf* signifies *al-ʿiʿlām* (notification, notice, announcement and advertising)<sup>123</sup> (ibid.). Just like *ʿilm*, *maʿrifa* has positive lexical indications as well. For example, *maʿrūf* (goodness, gentleness or lenity)<sup>124</sup> is a comprehensive word that includes all methods of devoting oneself to and worshiping the Divine (ibid.). However, there are some lexical definitions that agree with al-Niffari’s theology regarding the integration of *maʿrifa* with *siwā*. *ʿArrafa al-dālla* means *nashadahā* (to ask or to request), *ʿiʿtarafa al-qawma* means *saʿalahum*, which Lane explains as “to ask the people,” respecting a subject of information in order that he might know it” (Lane 1986, 2014) and *taʿarraftu mā ʿindā fulān*<sup>125</sup> means I requested until I knew (Ibn Manzur 2017), since a *wāqif* is he who is purified of requests and questions because they are features of *siwā*. In this particular case, *maʿrifa* appears to be related to those concepts, which bestow an inferior position to it. Moreover, *maʿrifa* is an in-between stage that separates *ʿilm* from *waqfa* and which constitutes the hope of freedom but not the freedom that I talked about earlier. Ibn Manzur lexically mentions this implication when he explains the notion of *ʿaṣḥāb al-ʿaʿrāf* (the occupants of the *ʿaʿrāf*).<sup>126</sup> According to him, they are

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<sup>118</sup> Translation for *ʿalima* (Lane 1986, 2013).

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 2139.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 2014.

<sup>125</sup> “I sought leisurely or repeatedly after the knowledge of what such a one possessed until I knew it” (ibid.).

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 2015.

people whose evil and good deeds are even, which leaves them in a limbo where they can neither attain paradise with their good actions nor do they deserve to be in hell. They will hence be in a suspended state between heaven and hell (ibid.). Another interesting example that addresses the lexical and philosophical meaning of *ma'rifa* is the reason behind naming the mountain of 'Arafa, or Mount Arafat, which is mentioned in *Lisan al-'Arab*. Ibn Manzur claims that when the Prophet Adam landed from heaven and suffered from Eve's separation, he met her at this point where they knew (*ta'ārafā*) each other (ibid.).<sup>127</sup> I believe that this story is indirectly related to the inferior position of *ma'rifa*. This place symbolises an inferior meeting point after having lived in paradise, which of course, exemplifies happiness. *Ma'rifa* is a stage where the 'arif is guided by the Divine's light and yet is separated from Him because he is not totally purified of *siwā*. Moreover, Adam acknowledges Eve on Mount Arafat regarding the Divine's punishment for their mistake and therefore in this instance, *ma'rifa* alludes to a penalty which indicates negativity. I suggest that it is related to the lexical indication where Ibn Manzur states that when someone says *la'u'arrifannaka*, it means *la'ujazyannaka* (used in threatening)<sup>128</sup> (ibid.).

Nonetheless, it is worthy of mention that 'ilm is lexically related to the Divine's attributes but *ma'rifa* is not. Therefore, it can be said that the One is 'ālim but not 'arif (Arnaldez 2017) as in this Qur'anic verse:

"عالم الغيب والشهادة" (Qur'an 6: 73)

(He knows the unseen and the seen [Abdel Haleem 2005, 85]).

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<sup>127</sup> This explanation is based on the story mentioned in the Qur'an in *Sūrat Tāhā*, when Adam and Eve disobeyed the Divine and ate from the immortality tree, as Satan suggested they do. Afterwards, they both regretted their action and the Divine forgave them. However, He ordained them to land on Earth and live on Earth until the Divine assigns the Day of Judgment (Qur'an 20: 116–123).

<sup>128</sup> Translation is quoted from Lane 1986, 2013.

## Regarding *jahl*

Before exploring the meaning of *jahl* and its relation to *‘ilm* and *ma‘rifa*, I believe that it is crucial to illustrate its lexical meaning to demonstrate how al-Niffari is revolting against language.

*Jahl* is the opposite of *‘ilm* and *jahāla* is to do something without knowledge (Ibn Manzur 2017). There are three types of *jahl*: the first is simply the “nonexistence of knowledge of what should be known,” the second is “believing a thing to be different from what it is” and the third is “doing a thing in a manner that is different from that in which it ought to be done” (Lane 1986, 477). Moreover, *majhala*<sup>129</sup> is what pushes you towards ignorance (Ibn Manzur 2017). *Jahl*, however, is not only related to knowledge, as can be seen in the examples that follow, such as this verse from the Qur’an, in which the Divine says:

(Qur’an 2: 273) “يَحْسِبُهُمُ الْجَاهِلُ أَغْنِيَاءُ”

(the unknowing might think them rich [Abdel Haleem 2005, 31]), in which instance *jahl* indicates a lack of experience (Ibn Manzur, 2017). Likewise, when the Prophet Muhammad states:

(al-Suyuti 2016, 236) “إِنَّكَ امْرُؤٌ فِيكَ جَاهِلِيَّةٌ”

(you are a person who still has [in him the remnants] of the days of Ignorance [Sunnah 2017]), the word *jāhilyya* refers to the state of the Arab people before Islam, when they were ignorant of the Divine and His laws and obsessed with arrogance and oppression (ibid.). The word also has further connotations that include other objects such as she-camels and lands. For instance, *arḍun majhūla* is a land devoid of signs or mountains (ibid.) and *nāqatun majhūla* is a she-camel that has never been milked or branded (Lane 1986, 478).

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<sup>129</sup> “A cause of, or an incitement to, ignorant, silly, foolish or wrong conduct” (Lane 1986, 478).

The engagement between *'ilm* and *ma'rifa* could be emphasised by exploring their correlation with ignorance. However, in an unpublished work<sup>130</sup>, al-Niffari states:

” وإن دخلت العلوم فادخلها عابراً، إنما هي طريق من طرقائك فلا تقف فيه“ (Balqasim 2012, 124)

(If you should enter *'ulūm*, then enter as a wayfarer; it is but a single path of your many paths, so do not stop at it). This quotation helps us to realise why al-Niffari glorifies *jahl* since by the word *jahl*, he does not mean the deprivation of *'ilm*<sup>131</sup> but only its concealment. Concealment as in hiding and covering what was existent before, which corresponds to the ephemeral entrance experience of *'ilm*, which means practicing abandonment. Therefore, the *jahl* we are referring to here is the one resulting from *'ilm*. Hence the *jahl* that comes prior to *'ilm* cannot be acted presumptuously towards, what we depend on is the *jahl* that comes afterwards. *Jahl* is an experience in *'ilm*, a stage that lies after it. He who has not followed the path of *'ilm* cannot experience *jahl*. It is he who is loaded with *'ilm* that can reach the stage of *jahl*. Therefore, reviving *jahl* results from and goes hand in hand with reviving *'ilm*. Whoever does not renew his *'ilm* cannot expand his *jahl*. If the connection to *'ilm* is based on *'ubūr* (passing) and transcending is based on purifying and emptying, then the wayfarer's extensiveness comes from the capacity of his *'ilm*. *'Ilm*'s permanent and expanding change amplifies *jahl*, which in turn leads to an even further expansion of *'ilm*. *'Ilm* does not exclusively affect *jahl*, the second can also affect the first because *jahl* is in itself *'ilm* (ibid.,125). Be that as it may, al-Niffari urges us not to enter *'ilm*. His prohibition is however not general and he essentially warns against entering with *yaqīn* (certainty), because entering *'ilm* is crucial to reach *waqfa*, but only under the condition of crossing through it temporarily. This is mainly due to the fact that being aware of illusion, which stems from *siwā*, is not intellectual and

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<sup>130</sup> The unpublished work referred to by Balqasim in his own book is the following:

*Nusus Sufiyya Ghayr Manshura (Shaqiq al-Bulkhi – Ibn 'Attar al-Adami – al-Niffari) Tahqiq Bulus Nuri al-Yasu'i*. Beirut: Dar al-Mashriq (208).

نصوص صوفية غير منشورة (شقيق البلخي - ابن عطار الأدمي - النفرّي) - تحقيق بولس نوريا اليسوعي. دار المشرق، بيروت.

<sup>131</sup> Or the afore-mentioned lexical meaning.

yet is the result of experience. Therefore, the more the relation with *'ilm* is built on certainty and assent, the more *'ilm* turns into a veil of illusion. On this note, Balqasim (2012, 122) reminds us that al-Niffari insisted that:

“العلم المستقر، هو الجهل المستقر” (al-Niffari 2007, 162)

(reposting knowledge is reposting ignorance [al-Niffari 1987, 112]). On the other hand, al-Yusuf maintains that al-Niffari believes that *ma'rifa* is the *balā'* (curse) of all and that ignorance is the only path of salvation for creatures. The *'arif* has a responsibility towards the Divine for his *ma'rifa*, whereas the *jāhil* is free of responsibilities (al-Yusuf 1997, 74). *Ma'rifa* is an affliction to all creatures and *jahl* is the path to survival. *Ma'rifa* harms all except those who stand by their *ma'rifa* in the Divine and ignorance is vital to *ma'rifa* because it cannot be established without it (al-Niffari 1987, 17).

### **Conclusion on *'ilm* and *ma'rifa***

*'Ilm* and *ma'rifa* are vital integrated notions of the Sufi tradition. Nonetheless, al-Niffari succeeded in reviving these two concepts by revolting against both the language and spiritual tradition. Furthermore, al-Niffari provided these concepts with different dimensions and depreciated the position held by *ma'rifa* in order to glorify the value of *waqfa* and *ru'ya*.

I believe that al-Niffari's concentration on *'ilm* and *ma'rifa* stems from the need to be purified and empty of them. According to al-Yusuf, there is no *ma'rifa* without quietism (al-Yusuf 1997, 75). By leaving what the mind acknowledges and what the heart desires, the seeker marches upon the path of purification.

According to Kafuri, there are three stages to reaching purification: “to purge, to enlighten and to unify” (Kafuri 2014, 20). When the seeker reaches the third stage, he will be able to obtain permanent unification between his will and that of the Divine. Where his thoughts, words and sayings are united with the One, the seeker will be maintaining a pure heart in the presence of the

Divine (ibid. 21). I suggest that this idea<sup>132</sup> merges feasibly with al-Niffari’s glorification of *jahl*. However, I believe that both ideas: purification and *jahl*, intersect with the concept of being *’ummī*,<sup>133</sup> one of the prevalent attributes of the Prophet Muhammad due to the fact that the Arabs were a people who could neither read nor write and the Divine sent him when he could neither read nor write either. This attribute was therefore considered as sacred as it was deemed a miracle that he was able to recite the Divine’s words without being able to read them (Ibn Manzur 2017). This verse from the Qur’an (29: 48) affirms this idea:

” وَمَا كُنْتَ تَتْلُو مِنْ قَبْلِهِ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَلَا تَخُطُّهُ بِيَمِينِكَ إِذًا لَأَرْثَابَ الْمُبْطُلُونَ“

(you never recited any Scripture before We revealed this one to you; you never wrote one down with your hand. If you had done so, those who follow falsehood might have had cause to doubt [Abdel Haleem 2005, 255]).

Being *’ummī* does not mean being ignorant because this would contradict the first verse that Muhammad receives from the Divine, *Sūrat al-’Alaq*, where he commands him to read:

”اقرأ باسم ربك الذي خلق“ (Qur’an 96:1)

(Read! In the name of your Lord who created (Abdel Haleem 2005, 428). This verse emphasises the importance of obtaining knowledge, but on condition that it should only be from the Divine, the source of creation. My suggestion is hence that what al-Niffari attempts to achieve by *jahl* is significantly related to the concept of *ummī*, in light of the fact that both are results of acquiring knowledge and leaving it behind and not the other way around. In other words, being aware of one’s own ignorance and limitations in order to be prepared to receive the Divine’s light and vision. As Günther explains, in Christianity, Christ was a method through which the Divine revealed Himself, “the word made flesh.” Consequently, his mother’s virginity was a requirement in order to create

<sup>132</sup> It is worth mentioning that Kafuri’s idea is based on the Christian tradition. He states that the first step is derived from the apostolic literature, precisely St John of the Cross and St. Augustine (Kafuri 2014, 20).

<sup>133</sup> “The quality of being in the natural condition of the nation to which one belongs or as brought forth by one’s mother in respect of not having learned the art of writing nor the reading thereof” (Lane 1986, 92).

“an immaculate vessel” that would contain the word of the Divine and help spread it. Similarly, in Islam, the One revealed His existence to the world via the Qur’an, whence Muhammad became “a vessel that was unpolluted by intellectual knowledge of word and script,” in order to be trusted to obtain the Divine’s revelation through his “perfect purity” (Günther 2002, 16).

### ***Ru`ya***

The highest stage atop al-Niffari’s hierarchy is *ru`ya*. It is the destination that the seeker would offer his life to reach and yet, it is not the final one, for al-Niffari emphasises through his *Mawāqif* that reaching *ru`ya* is not eternal. It is a purpose that the seeker has to continue achieving. *Ru`ya* is a stage that extinguishes language, as it cannot fully express its essence. In this section, I explore the concept of *ru`ya* in al-Niffari’s philosophy by exposing its definitions and conditions, explaining its relation to the notion of hearing and seeing, as well as bringing to light the hidden lines between perception and *ru`ya*, tackling the concept of opposition to clarify the superiority of *ru`ya* and also examining the oppositional relation between *ru`ya* and language. Finally, by drawing on the ideas of Balqasim, I demonstrate that the ultimate meaning and purpose of *ru`ya* is to liberate the senses and allow them to perform further and beyond themselves to the point of letting go of all control and allowing themselves to be entirely powered by the Absolute. Once this happens, it will be an indication that the Divine has granted the seer a certain authority.

When the worshipper transcends from *siwā*, he becomes a cheerful companion to whom the Divine reveals the light of His delightful face. At this point, the structure becomes love and the spoken language turns into a language of *wijdān* (conscience) (al-Marzuqi 2007, 182). Al-Yusuf maintains that *ru`ya* is one of the soul’s desires, without which man cannot be liberated from his misery (al-Yusuf 1997, 35). Seeing the Divine helps to efface existence and establish the heart. *Ru`ya* is the door to *ḥaḍra* (presence)<sup>134</sup> since names are established in *ru`ya* and effaced in *ḥaḍra*

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<sup>134</sup> Translation by Arberry (al-Niffari 1987, 19).

by the Divine. When a man sees the Divine, he will be blessed with a fortune that has no opposite. In *ru`ya*, there is neither silence nor speaking, neither light nor shadow. *Ru`ya* is to see Him in everything, whereas *ghayba* (absence)<sup>135</sup> is to not see Him in anything at all. It is a matter for the elite while *ghayba* is the interest of the masses. Indeed *ghayba* is the mortal life and afterlife but *ru`ya* is neither this nor that (al-Niffari 1987, 19). According to al-Niffari, *mushāhada* (contemplation)<sup>136</sup> is the righteous stage for the Sufi, where he sees the Divine in everything and where opposites disappear and reach the level of *waqfa*. He who stands at *ru`ya* is an immortal who can control the cosmos. *Mushāhada* is the presence of the One, with neither accusation nor suspicion. The witness is effaced by his gnosis. Moreover, He who sees the Divine with his heart empties it of everything else and only the One remains in it (al-Marzuqi 2007, 182).

### **Conditions of *ru`ya***

It is said that the *wāqif* will be consumed if he emerges from *ru`ya* and that remembrance (*dhikr*) during *ru`ya* is an outrage (al-Niffari 1987, 18). The Sufi cannot see the Divine unless he emerges from *ḥarf* and *mahrūf*. *Ru`ya* demolishes the bond between the seeker and all things but absence renews it (ibid., 19). According to al-Niffari, transcending from *siwā* is the precondition for achieving *ru`ya* and yet, he does not state that the *wāqif* entirely outstrips the cosmos. Hence *ru`ya* is considered to be an internal undertaking that one should spend his life and effort accomplishing without any guarantee that this will ultimately happen, since *ru`ya* will only be attained once one has risen above one's sensual existence and mental entity as one transcends from otherness, that is to say, once one has surpassed *siwā* completely, with all of its materialism and incorporeality (al-Marzuqi 2007, 184).

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<sup>135</sup> ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Al-'Ajam 1999, 1150.

## Between listening and seeing

Al-Niffari's discourse determines three aspects of the relation between vision and hearing. The first element is cause, a phenomenon in which hearing from the Absolute leads to seeing Him and where conversation with Him that occurs from listening to Him is causative of *ru'ya* (Balqasim 2012, 170). Speaking is the cause of *ru'ya* and the first leads to the second. Despite the fact that this relationship maintains its questions, *ru'ya* is not accomplished through conversation and if it is attained, speaking will revoke it and cause it to cease. This means that the reader becomes aware of the fact that the senses that al-Niffari is writing about are liberated from the masses and are not sensual. This is quite clearly expressed in this passage from *Mawqif Before Him*<sup>137</sup> (ibid.), when he says:

(al-Niffari 2007, 139) “تعرفني إليك بعبارة، توطئة لتعرفني إليك بلا عبارة”

(My making Myself Known unto thee by means of an expression, is a preparation for my making Myself known unto thee without an expression [al-Niffari 1987, 93]).

The second aspect is that of superiority in excellence, in which *ru'ya* uncovers the veil of hearing, where it identifies with *mujālasa* (sitting with someone and interacting with him or her),<sup>138</sup> which is considered to be a central concept in al-Niffari's discourse. To have a *mujālasa* with the Absolute, according to al-Niffari, cannot be achieved by speaking but can be reached through *ru'ya*. *Mujālasa* is the uppermost stage in the *wāqif's* transcendence. *Jalīsu L-lāh* (the Divine's companion) is the one who obtains *al-ru'ya al-kubrā* (the "Greater" *ru'ya*).<sup>139</sup> This concept is related to the classification of *ru'ā* (plural of *ru'ya*, visions). Al-Niffari believes that there are levels of *ru'ya* such as *ru'ya qawlāniyya* (related to saying), which is considered to be below *al-ru'ya al-kubrā* (ibid., 171). Despite the fact that conversation is the cause of *ru'ya*, as noted in the first

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<sup>137</sup> Arberry's translation for *Mawqif Bayna Yadayh*.

<sup>138</sup> Translation quoted from Lane 1986, 443.

<sup>139</sup> Translation quoted from Lane 1986, 2587.

aspect, in this case *ru`ya* appears to be above the possibility of conversation. That is to say, *ru`ya* is superior to speaking. An example of this can be seen in *Mawqif of Stay*<sup>140</sup> when the mystic says (ibid., 172):

أوقفني في قف وقال لي: إذا قلتُ لكُ قفُ، فقف لي لا لك، ولا لأخاطبك، ولا لأمرك، ولا لتسمع مني، ولا لما تعرف مني،  
ولا لما لاتعرف، ولا لأوقفني، ولا ليا عبد، قف لا لأخاطبك ولا لتخاطبني، بل أنظر إليك وتتنظر إلي.

(al-Niffari 2007, 159)

He stayed me in ‘Stay’, and said to me: when I say to thee, ‘stay’, stay for Me, not for thyself, nor that I may address thee, nor that I may command thee, nor that thou mayest listen to Me, nor for what thou knowest of Me, nor for what thou dost not know of Me, nor for ‘He stayed me’, nor for ‘O my servant’. Stay for Me, not that I may address thee: and do not thou dare Me. Nay, but I shall regard thee, and thou wilt regard Me.

(al-Niffari 1987, 109)

*Ru`ya* is the emptiness of everything after which nothing comes. It inactivates speaking and transcends it at the same time (Balqasim 2012, 172).

Last but not least, the third aspect of *ru`ya* is identification. The first feature of this element appears in the integration between hearing and seeing in the beginning of each *mawqif*. Most of the *Mawāqif* start with *awqafanī wa qāla lī* (He stayed me and said to me)<sup>141</sup> but there are a few *Mawāqif* in which this phrase, which implies hearing, was changed to *ra`aytu* (I saw) which leads to the interpretation that both hearing and seeing are types of perception (ibid., 173). The mystic who

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<sup>140</sup> Arberry’s translation for *Mawqif Qif* (al-Niffari 1987, 109).

<sup>141</sup> Translation quoted from Arberry (ibid., 27).

attains the greater vision is the only one who can unveil the cover.<sup>142</sup> The veil does not exist in this state because it transcends discourse and speaking, which demonstrates that *ru'ya* is above and beyond *waqfa* (ibid., 174). *Waqfa* appears to be plausibly related to hearing, as the phrase *qāla lī* indicates, while *ru'ya* is significantly correlated with annihilating hearing (ibid., 175). Nonetheless, *ru'ya* can only be achieved by *waqfa* (ibid., 177). According to al-Niffari:

"الواقف يراني ولا يرى سواي"

(al-Niffari 2007, 71), (the stayer sees Me, and does not see other than Me [al-Niffari 1987, 36]). A statement further supported by another quotation from al-Niffari (Balqasim 2012, 177), in which he declares:

"لا يرى حقيقة إلا الواقف" (Niffari 2007, 71-al)

(none sees the reality save the stayer [al-Niffari 1987, 36]).

### ***Ru'ya* and perception**

Asking about the Visible is, in fact, the same thing as asking about the Absolute. To wonder about the Visible (The Absolute) means to limit Him. The question should therefore not be about visualising but about the immanence of the method of perceiving that the experience provides, by looking closely at al-Niffari's sayings and attempting to use them as an approach to decipher what he did not say, or at least to assume it, since obstructing requires being occupied with the approach of perception, not with what is being seen. Some of al-Niffari's texts affirm the possibility of seeing the Absolute and others contradict it. However, al-Niffari believes that the Absolute does not manifest or exemplify, for He cannot be visible to the naked eye or acknowledged by hearts (Balqasim 2012, 178).

*Ru'ya* is beyond authority and command and is, as al-Niffari emphasises, the possibility of defeating opposition. Before *ru'ya* became a departure from the consecrated approaches of

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<sup>142</sup> *Al-Sitr* (al-'Ajam 1999, 1134).

perception in absence, it was basically an experience that was established from *wajd* (ecstasy). The seer should transcend from opposition as an experience in order to see Him who has no opposite, or to see beyond the two opposites with one vision. This leads us to the discussion of two inseparable aspects of perception: the achievement of abolishing opposition and liberating *ru`ya* to reach what lies beyond it (ibid., 181).

## Opposition

The stillness of opposites halts judgement and prepares the senses. The importance of this cessation lies in leaving what is added to the thing and veiling it, in other words departing from its name, description and understanding and considering that which has been added to it as a mere set of verdicts and otherworldliness. This issue is significantly related to refraining from judging any thing, including the opposite of that thing, in order to arrive at a perfect state of equanimity. *Ru`ya* is in itself stability, a frame of mind in which the seer perceives the illusion of difference that is consecrated by the judgement of opposition through an experience that is based on *muṣābara* (to vie with something in patience)<sup>143</sup> (ibid., 182). Aside from opposition being a veil, it is also at best a slavery of the mind and freedom lies in departing from it to reach a pure and analogous space (al-Yusuf 1997, 35).

Conversation does not measure *ru`ya* by the opposition of positivity and negativity, for *ru`ya* is beyond the potential of *‘ilm*. *Al-ru`ya al-wāḥida* (the one vision) is not to see the Absolute manifested from one angle and immanent from another but to see Him manifested and immanent with one eye: both visible in absence and immanent in appearance. This can only be achieved by seeing the Absolute in everything, without negligence, with wholeness and with all that awakening can represent (Balqasim 2012, 183). The eternity of *ru`ya* is impossible because absence is the nature of he who seeks it. Any perception that includes opposition is not *ru`ya* for *ru`ya* is

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<sup>143</sup> Translation quoted from Lane 1986, 1644.

monotheism<sup>144</sup>. It is the moment in which the Divine is seen as non-analogous and unopposable, which provides the *wāqif* with the possibility of equalising oppositions, since the Absolute is beyond opposition. This is a matter that is impossible for language to achieve, unless it dons the garment of metaphor, only according to al-Niffari, metaphor does not exist in *ru'ya* (ibid., 184).

### ***Ru'ya* and the problematic of language**

Being aware of *siwā* is the first step on the path towards *ru'ya*. For this is what prepares the seeker to endure the struggle in order to transcend from *siwā*. The *wāqif* will discover that he is heading towards truth, not metaphor, assuming that the cosmos is *siwā*. Therefore, any judgement that is based on this will also be considered *siwā* and will hinder and prevent the accession to *ru'ya*. Consequently, the metaphor that al-Niffari discusses is not rhetorical but existential. He is hence not referring to metaphor in language but in the cosmos, with its judgements and its methods of perception, because according to him, language is a veil. Acquiring perception is therefore achieved outside the potential of language, not by expanding it through metaphors in linguistic terms, because what is being seen by the *wāqif* cannot be expressed by language, for narrowness includes *ḥarf* whether or not it uses the help of metaphors. Al-Niffari believes that language does not reveal the mystical truth but exposes the rhetorical one (ibid., 185).

Metaphor in al-Niffari's discourse does not expand the horizon of language or outstrip its boundaries, it is but the trace of the failure of language to speak the truth that *ru'ya* seeks. *Ru'ya* does not amplify language, it can only witness its narrowness. It is an experience that obtains the truth through *mujāhada* (to fight in the way of God or for the cause of religion),<sup>145</sup> whereas the metaphor is the method of he who did not live the experience; it is an external judgement. The

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<sup>144</sup> The original Arabic sentence is "الرؤية توحيد" and although the word "توحيد" is very often translated as "unification" or "consolidation," in this context, it seems obvious that it is "monotheism" that is referred to.

<sup>145</sup> Translation quoted from Lane 1986, 473.

descriptive discourse of al-Niffari's experience emphasises a reading that depends on metaphor. However, it is a discourse that somehow forgot that he who lived the experience obtained a truth beyond thought, language and judgement and when attempting to express it, language shrouded it with a veil. During this veiling, the *wāqif* explored the relationship between language and the Absolute after completing the experience of *ru'ya* on transcending from *ḥarf* and its judgements. Al-Niffari himself states that the *Mawāqif and Mukhāṭabāt* are the possibility of keeping secrets without infiltration (ibid., 186). What man lives on a daily basis is a metaphor, not a truth. As a result of that, when he goes beyond *siwā* and reaches the truth, he attempts to write about it but finds himself falling into metaphor again. Balqasim maintains that al-Niffari did not intend to write his experience by means of metaphor so much as metaphor leaked into his language, which corroborates the failure of language in terms of speaking of *ru'ya* or, as al-Niffari says: "to say what is unsaid" (ibid., 188). He confirms that metaphor is absence (*ghayba*), for it is related to *siwā*, whereas *ru'ya* is a meeting without a mediator. This encourages the *wāqif* to uncover the veil that hides the truth. The *wāqif* does not seek to see the cosmos symbolically but rather to clear himself of it entirely to see the truth. In order to achieve this, he must be aware that the cosmos is *siwā*, a veil that covers the truth. If the *wāqif* succeeds in losing the vision of *siwā*, *ru'ya* would be furthestmost from turning things into symbols. It enables the seer to release things from their names, descriptions and judgements and to disconnect and disentangle himself from them, for things are barren (ibid., 187). Draining them of all meaning allows the seer to separate from them. Moreover, each attachment to these things means falling into *ghayba* again and receding back into *siwā*. That is why al-Niffari presents *ru'ya* and *waqfa* as a fire that burns *siwā* (ibid.).

## Conclusion on al-Niffari's theology

*Ru'ya* is not conditional upon the eye as an organ, in fact, it liberates the organ from its physical constraints, which turns the eye into something that prevents us from seeing, instead of being an instrument of *ru'ya* (ibid.).

*Ru'ya* causes the perception of eyesight to disintegrate and enables us to advance beyond it, since the Absolute is limitless and untraceable. Therefore, metaphor lies in transferring the experience, not in what was acquired from it. Al-Niffari maintains that *'iyān* (to view with an eye or to face or to confront)<sup>146</sup> is related to the heart; by this attribution, the concept of the eye expands. According to Sufis, the heart is the space of expansion that correlates with emptiness, for there is no breadth without emptiness. Consequently, through the context of this experience, *mujāhada* liberates the senses and purifies them of obstacles, most importantly habit (ibid., 189). By deactivating the habit, the senses are freed from their encumbrances, a liberation that seeks emptiness of everything. Provided that *ru'ya* renders thought to transcend from it, all that remains in the *waqfa* as a result of this transcendence are senses, which al-Niffari refers to as *samā'* and *ru'ya*. Perception can only be accomplished by liberating the senses, unless the *wāqif* can hear through the Absolute and from Him and see by Him. This is what al-Niffari names perception through power because, according to his expression, emptiness is power (ibid., 192).

In al-Niffari's experience, detachment and separation from things are based on defeating them. A mystic cannot rid himself of otherness unless he is able to defeat it and liberate himself from its trap and traces, because thinking about something is basically derived from this very thing. Therefore, this derivation is the extent of the obtainer's knowledge, which becomes an alternative for the Absolute (ibid.).

Perception through nothingness is hearing from and by the Absolute. It is an empty organ that establishes its superiority, which means departing from veils and manacles in order to achieve

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<sup>146</sup> Translation quoted from Lane 1986, 2214.

perception through the Absolute, not by *siwā*. This superiority is considered to be liberating and powerful. For this reason, Balqasim tends to interpret *waqfa* as *ru`ya* and *samā`*: it is an immersion through the senses and a cession of thought. Those senses are derived from the Absolute, since *Baṣīr* (The All-seeing; He who sees all things, both what are apparent thereof and what are occult, without any organ of vision)<sup>147</sup> and *Samī`* (He whose hearing comprehends everything; who hears everything)<sup>148</sup> are the Divine's attributes (ibid.). This is what Balqasim meant by *mujāwarat al-Muṭlaq* (the Absolute's adjacency), that is to say, *muqāsamat ṣifātih* (sharing the attributes of the Absolute) (ibid., 192).

*Ru`ya* is an ascription to the Absolute or a search for it. It is, in light of this, tackling the furthest with the requirement of emptiness, purification and superiority. *Ru`ya* is an experience that reaches the impossible where the *wāqif* confronts his extreme possibility (ibid., 194). If *waqfa* is *ru`ya*, then each *ru`ya* is based on a relationship with the veil. Balqasim maintains that this struggling relationship with the veil does not aim to abolish it, since abolition is a veil in itself, but rather to renew its transcendence and its continuous confrontation (ibid., 195). *Ru`ya* is not an isolated experience, it is a relationship that the self experiences with an other that dwells inside it. Thus, *ru`ya* is the establishment of a correlation between an inner power and an internal light. The self cannot reach this authority and this light unless it empties its senses of thought, habit and *‘āmm* (mass). Because self-veiling is what prevents *ru`ya*, al-Niffari calls it *ḥijāb al-ḥujub* (the veil of veils) (ibid., 198). The purpose is not what a *wāqif* can see but what he sees through, since what he sees is conditioned by what he sees through, which means to see through the Absolute. When he does, he will see the Absolute in everything he lays his sight upon and will therefore see only Him (ibid., 199).

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<sup>147</sup> Translation quoted from Lane 1986, 211.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 1429.

## Chapter Two

### Section Three

#### An Analysis of al-Niffari's Texts

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, al-Niffari's book entitled *The Mawaqif and Mukhatabat* consists of seventy-seven texts, each beginning with the sentence *awqafanī wa qāla lī* (he stayed me and said to me).<sup>149</sup> Most of these texts, or *Mawāqif*, include unusual dialogues, which might best be described as monologues framed as dialogues, in which al-Niffari maintains that the Divine addresses words to him. Only four texts in the *Mawāqif*<sup>150</sup> mention direct dynamic dialogues, where the Divine speaks and al-Niffari actually responds and vice-versa. In this section, I will be looking in close detail at two of said texts, namely *Mawqif al-Mahḍar wa-l-Ḥarf* and *Mawqif al-'Islām*. The reason for selecting the first text is the inclusion of several passages that relate a vivid conversation between the Sufi and the Divine, where the Absolute asks him questions that explore vital notions in the Islamic-mystical belief system. Moreover, this text demonstrates the One's articulation of *ḥarf* (letter; language), a vital aspect of al-Niffari's theology. In this *mawqif*, the Divine poses a question to al-Niffari and the latter replies. The conversation generates various questions and the Sufi ascends from one answer to another until he responds to the last question with *anta* (you) and claims that the reply was dictated to him by the One, an occurrence that happens twice in this specific text. In *Mawqif al-'Islām*, the roles are reversed and it is the Sufi who directs questions to the Divine and the Absolute who replies.

I will therefore examine these texts closely through my previous findings on al-Niffari's theology, Western and Eastern philosophical theories and by raising questions regarding power and

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<sup>149</sup> Translation by Arberry (al-Niffari 1987, 29).

<sup>150</sup> These four texts are: *al-Mahdar wa-l-Ḥarf*, *al-'Islām*, *al-Kanaf* and *Huwa Dhā Tanṣarif*.

the use of voice and tones as tools to acquire a stance of power, the echo of prophecy and dogmatic heritage. I will engage speech act theory and grammatical shifts and will argue my points by applying Foucault's perspective on self-mastery and its relation to power in order to answer the questions raised and to arrive at a plausible conclusion.

As previously established, there is a difference between experiencing the *waqfa* and writing the *waqfa*. The first is an experience of ecstasy, where the mystic connects with the Divine, dissociating himself from everything but Him. In this state, language fades and the Sufi transcends to a superior dimension. Nevertheless, writing the *waqfa* implies the existence of *ḥarf* and *siwā*. It becomes an attempt to trace the untraceable using the veil of language to unveil the evanescent. In order to achieve an adequate analysis of both texts, there are vital questions that need to be answered.

First and foremost is the question of identifying who is really speaking in the text. Is it truly the voice of the Divine and if that is the case, who recorded it? Could it rather be a dialogue between two entities, one Divine and the other human, or is it a purely Divine or purely human voice speaking, which would make it a monologue after all?

Assuming it was a dialogue between two different entities, why would most of the *Mawāqif* be dominated by what appears to be a soliloquy, where one of the supposed interlocutors only ever speaks as a witness or an observer, uttering sentences such as *awqafanī, qāla lī, anta qawwātanī* (it is Thou that didst make me to speak)?<sup>151</sup>

Another question that needs to be raised regards the assumption that the Absolute spoke to al-Niffari and this latter documented it, a notion that seems strange, given the fact that the Divine is The Self-Sufficient and one that makes it pertinent to wonder why He would need al-Niffari to act as his medium.

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<sup>151</sup> Translation by Arberry (al-Niffari 1987, 114).

Of equal relevance is an attempt to understand why, if language is *ḥarf*, *siwā* or veil, would the mystic use it to document a dialogue between himself and the Divine, when it appears like just another manner of veiling? According to the Qur'an (42:51):

"وما كان لبشر أن يكلمه الله إلا وحيا أو من وراء حجاب أو يرسل رسولا فيوحي بإذنه ما يشاء إنه علي حكيم"

(It is not granted to any mortal that God should speak to him except through revelation or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal by His command what He will: He is exalted and authoritative [Adbel Haleem 2005, 314]).

With the above statement in mind, it becomes essential to query how al-Niffari managed to communicate directly with the Divine when he was not a prophet and to inquire whether it was direct or veiled communication. If veil there was, we must also ponder upon the form this veil may have taken. If, on the other hand, what he experienced was a revelation or an inspiration, would it mean that he was exclusively chosen to be spoken to? If that is so, the research must then pry into the reasons why he, al-Niffari, of all possible people, was selected and whether this entitled him to significant privileges and prerogatives?

Once we have tackled the above, we will explore how our findings could be relevant to the afore-mentioned outcomes regarding al-Niffari 's theology and what he and al-Suhrawardi have in common. Answering these numerous but essential questions will help frame the analysis of these texts. Each question will be considered and answered separately in order to reach a compelling conclusion.

## The question of voice

أوقفني في المحضر وقال لي: الحرف حجاب، والحجاب حرف  
وقال لي: قف في العرش، فرأيتُ الحرم لا يسلكه النطقُ ولا تدخله هموم.

(al-Niffari, as cited in al-Ghanmi 2007, 160)

He stayed me in the Presence-chamber, and said to me: The letter is a veil, and the veil is a letter. Stay in the Throne and I saw the sanctuary untrodden by the speech, and unentered by the attentions. (al-Niffari 1987, 111)

The first text under study, *Mawqif al-Maḥḍar wa-l-Ḥarf*, starts with the sentence above. As already explained, the verb *awqafanī* relates to several other concepts such as silence, cessation of speech and prevention.<sup>152</sup> In addition, al-Niffari does not limit himself to lexical allusions and goes beyond language, which leaves a lot of room for interpretation. I therefore suggest that in this case, *awqafanī* alludes to the cessation of speech, or in other words, the death of *ḥarf* due to the status of being in the presence of the Divine, which prevents any face of *siwā*. Moreover, writing the *waqfa* is not equivalent to experiencing the *waqfa*, since the first includes *siwā* and the second does not, as previously stressed.

### Exploring the meaning of *qāla lī*

After the statement *awqafanī*, al-Niffari mentions the name of the *mawqif*, which is *al-Maḥḍar wa-l-Ḥarf*. He continues by declaring: *qāla lī*, an utterance that defines and is at the core of al-Niffari's

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<sup>152</sup> See chapter two, section two (under "*Waqfa* and other traditions"), page 86.

work, since it is the phrase that sparks the most controversial questions. Who speaks to whom? In order to answer this question I believe it is necessary to start by scrutinising the expression itself.

It is clear by now how inferior *harf* and language are in al-Niffari's perspective and yet he states that the Divine said these words to him. It is surprising that al-Niffari chose this particular word to refer to the Divine when it lexically indicates deficiency.

According to Ibn Manzur, *qāla* is from the root *qawl* (a saying, something said, speech or diction),<sup>153</sup> which means *kalām* (something spoken, language, discourse)<sup>154</sup> that follows a certain system, or every word uttered by the lips whether it was whole or not.<sup>155</sup> *Qawl* cannot be meaningful unless it is attached to another *qawl*. For example, if we say *qāma* (to stand) without continuing the phrase, the verb cannot fulfil its meaning without a subject attached to it. Moreover, a *qawl* is used to indicate opinions and dogmas, since they are hidden concepts that cannot be made clear without some form of verbalisation. Interestingly, Ibn Manzur points out a significant meaning for *qawl* when he states that *qālat lahū al 'ainān sam 'an wa ṭā 'atan* ("I hear and obey," the eyes said to him) can be achieved without a sound or a speech, since in this context, it alludes to the concept of permission, meaning that if the eyes could speak, they would say: "I hear and obey."

What is more, he maintains that *qawl* is not whole unto itself (Ibn Manzur 2019). By contrast, al-Niffari did not use the word *kalām*, which means an integral saying or "the sentence."<sup>156</sup> According to him, this is the reason for which the Qur'an was called *kalāmu l-Lāh* as opposed to

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<sup>153</sup> Lane 1986, 2995.

<sup>154</sup> The full translation is: "Speech; something spoken; diction; language; parlance; talk; discourse. A saying: a say: something said: in grammar or a sentence" (Lane 2019). This translation is quoted from a digital copy on Perseus Digital Library Project, which belongs to Tufts University. I used the digital copy of Lane's dictionary due to the non-existence of the page that contains the root *كلم* in the copy used throughout this chapter.

<sup>155</sup> "القول: الكلام على الترتيب، وهو عند المحقق كل لفظ قال به اللسان، تاماً كان أو ناقصاً" (Ibn Manzur 2019).

<sup>156</sup> "الكلام ما كان مكتفياً بنفسه وهو الجملة" (Ibn Manzur 2019).

*qawlu l-Lāh*, since the second name would indicate deficiency and incompleteness of meaning<sup>157</sup> (ibid).

My research has already established that writing the *waqfa* is different from experiencing it, since *ḥarf* dies in *waqfa* and silence settles over the situation. Writing the *waqfa* would therefore be an attempt to recall its events. Although recapturing those moments would be as attempting to catch the wind, al-Niffari defies this impossibility by writing down what he remembers. I therefore believe that al-Niffari's use of the word *qāla* (he said) could explain the inconsistency of the structure of the *Mawāqif* due to the deficiency and the flaw that the word *qāla* indicates.

*Qāla* and *qultu* are the same verb conjugated in two different forms, indicating two subjects: "He" or the third person singular, which refers to the Divine and "I" or the first person singular, in reference to al-Niffari. The existence of two subjects may suggest the assumption of the duality of voice. As simple as it may seem, two subjects means two voices. Nevertheless, if there are indeed two voices, would that not be in contradiction to what al-Niffari attempts to emphasise through his book, namely rejecting duality and achieving unity? In order to answer this question, we need to begin by identifying these voices, to know who is speaking to whom.

قال: ما الذات؟ قلتُ أنتَ الله، قال: قلتَ الحق، قلتُ: أنتَ قولتني، قال: لتري نعمتي.

(al-Niffari 2007, 166)

He said: What is essence? I answered: Thyself, O God. He said: Thou hast spoken the truth.

I answered: It is Thou that didst make me to speak. He said: That thou mayest see my kindness. (al-Niffari 1987, 115)

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<sup>157</sup> Since the Qur'an is the speech of the Divine, according to Islamic doctrine, *qawl* would therefore be an inferior word to relate it with.

In *al-Maḥḍar wa-l-Ḥarf*, al-Niffari clearly claims that the dialogues in his books occurred between the Divine and himself, as the previous quotation confirms. Furthermore, Nwyia appears to agree with this claim. In his paper about al-Niffari, he mentions al-Shushtari's description of the *Mawāqif*, which states that this book was written in the form of revelations made by God through al-Niffari, who interwove visions and dialogues that al-Shushtari calls "Dialogues between their essence, those of God and al-Niffari's" (as cited in Nwyia 1965, 16). In addition, al-Shushtari maintains that the revelation of the *Mawāqif* was composed as if it had been written under dictation in a state of rapture of the *waqfa* (ibid, 18). Balqasim agrees with this claim by affirming that dialogue is not only an aspect of structuring the *Mawāqif* but also a mystical experience through which al-Niffari creates an identity based on the relationship between the Divine and the human. As a result, this identity changes due to separation from *siwā*. In addition to being a method of verbal seclusion, the dialogue in the *Mawāqif* is the result of an experience and a sign that proves the sufferance of writing it. Al-Niffari's dialogue has two ascriptions: the first is engaged with the mystical horizon and the second relates to the mode of communicating or speaking about it, which turns the dialogue into a writing experience. In order to do so, it is necessary to listen to the dialogue's tendencies to unveil its allusions (Balqasim 2012, 224). According to Nwyia, the dialogue in the *Mawāqif* represents the transcendence of the mystical consciousness from speaking to the self to speaking to the Divine. As much as this conversation reveals the relation between the Absolute and the constrained, it also includes the limitations and the pain of writing (ibid.). Furthermore, Nwyia believes that al-Niffari wrote what God communicated to him and the manner in which it was communicated without seeking another expression than that of God, thus setting down the flash of the initial agitation that shook up his consciousness (Nwyia 1965, 18). It therefore appears that both Nwyia and Balqasim confirm that the conversation in the *Mawāqif* took place

between two entities. However, Balqasim presents a detailed analysis of the *Mawāqif*'s dialogue by dividing it into two types: one that occurs between a speaker and a silent listener and one that happens between two speakers (ibid.).

Dialogue clearly dominates the *Mawāqif*, yet some of them are designated to describe the Absolute while others highlight the gap between the speaker and the speechless addressee. On the other hand, some of them appear to emphasise several facts or to address authorisation and forbiddance to the addressee. In *Mawqif Ma'rifat al-Ma'arif*, al-Niffari declares:

”وقال لي: سئلني و قل يا ربَّ كيفَ أتمسكُ بِكَ“ (al-Niffari 2007, 78)

(and He said to me: Entreat Me, and say: O Lord, how shall I lay hold on Thee [al-Niffari 1987, 42]). In this instance, the verb *qul* was pronounced by the speechless addressee, despite the fact it appears to be said by the speaker. This tendency illustrates the ambiguous identity of the speaker and source of the words' origin. The speaker here is but one, yet he speaks with two voices. The silent addressee does not speak with his own words but through those of another. In the beginning of the *mawqif*, he speaks in the first person singular, which results in a conversation that attributes the phrase *awqafanī wa qāla lī* to the third person. The speaker does not speak unless he is made to speak by the writer, who is always hidden behind the opening sentence (ibid, 245). The writer anticipates the speech and is the producer of the discourse based on the previous sentence, where his presence is indicated by initially speaking in the first person before turning into a speechless receptacle of words. Therefore, the strategic use of the first and third person singular designates al-Niffari's writing as *samā'* (hearing). This is one of the key issues that aligns with the problematic of the written form in the *Mawāqif* and *Mukhāṭabāt*. A form that is based on dialogue as a twofold voice, which is embodied through the multiplicity of pronouns in the *Mukhāṭabāt* (ibid, 246). Regarding the concept of hearing, Nwyia confirms this suggestion. He believes that al-Niffari's dialogue leads a man to an authentic existence which commits him to "listen," in silence, to the

creative word of God (Nwyia 1965, 18). In the first type of dialogue, the one between a speaker and a voiceless addressee, the latter participates in the conversation by using the speaker's voice itself. In some of the texts, there is an interlacing of voices which is clearly exemplified in *Mawqif Qulūb al-ʿĀrifīn* (The Hearts of the Gnostics)<sup>158</sup> (Balqasim 2012, 246), below:

و قال لي: قل لقلوب العارفين أنصتوا له لا لتعرفوا، و اصمتوا له لا لتعرفوا، فإنه يتعرف إليكم كيف تُقيمون عنده.

(al-Niffari 2007, 146)

And he said to me: Say to the hearts of the gnostics: Give ear to Him, not that ye may know; and be silent for Him, not that ye may know. For He makes Himself known unto you: how should ye abide with Him? (al-Niffari 1987, 98)

The words that follow *qul liqulūb al-ʿārifīn* are shared between the speaker and the speechless receptacle. The addressee later narrates what the Master commands him to say through the word *qul* (say) by using the third latent pronoun. The shift from speaker to spoken to hence occurs through the use of the third person singular. On the other hand, in the second, fourth and sixth phrases, the shared speech shifts back to the Master by reverting to the use of the first person singular. There is a clear intersecting in the pronoun use and position which appears in the second phrase. It seems that after the word *qul* the Master makes the addressee articulate his own (the Master, the Divine) words as if they were the addressee's. However, the word *ʿibādī* (servants) in the sentence does not seem to be attributed to the speaker, even if the conjunction in the section claims the opposite. The imperative and prohibitive statements after *qul liqulūb al-ʿārifīn* are enunciated by the speechless

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<sup>158</sup> Translation by Arberry (al-Niffari 1987, 97).

listener, who heeds the command given to him through the imperative form to speak in the general discourse. To avoid ambiguity, the speaker should address his supposed listeners, who are the ones the command is really directed towards, by using the third person plural form instead of the first one, since in this particular case, the first person pronoun only alludes to the one who is addressed by the Divine (Balqasim 2012, 247).

In the second type of dialogue, which takes place between two speakers, we see a real exchange between two conversing entities. In this exchange, the conversation unfolds, from a written perspective, by repeating the structure of *qultu, qālā*, which was also found in *Mawqif al-Maḥḍar wa-l-Ḥarf* and *Mawqif al-ʿIslām*, with a difference between the texts in each speaker's role. The first *mawqif* includes two conversations, one about heaven and the other about hell. The dialogue adopts an interrogatory style followed by an answer, based on one rhythm and dependent on the condensation of questions and answers and on generating a question out of an answer. It is worth mentioning that both dialogues end with a similar conclusion, which creates an engagement between the structure's rhythm and form. In addition, the integration evolves to imagine the relation between the two speakers. The questioner ends both conversations by declaring that the addressee's answer was correct (ibid.):

”قال: قلتَ الحقَّ“ (al-Niffari 2007, 165)

(He said: "Thou hast spoken the truth" [al-Niffari 1987, 114]). The answerer replies that his answers are actually produced by the One who is asking the questions, despite the fact they were postulated by the responder. For example, he says:

”أنتَ قولتني“ ((al-Niffari 2007, 165

(It is Thou that didst make me to speak [al-Niffari 1987,114]). In *Mawqif al-ʿIslām*, the roles change. The questioner becomes the responder and vice-versa (Balqasim 2012, 248). In this text,

the speech and its attribution become the topic of the conversation. This issue emphasises the problematic of the attribution of speech without any suggested answer (ibid, 249).

“إني ابتليتك في كل شيء مني إليك بشيء منك إلي” (al-Niffari 2007, 182–183)

(I have made trials of thee in everything that proceeds from Me to thee, by means of something that proceeds from thee to Me [al-Niffari 1987, 128]).

The previous phrase highlights the distance between the two speakers in the field of *'ibtīlā'* (trying, proving or testing).<sup>159</sup> Moreover, this distance is an inherent and crucial part of the sentence. The word *kull* (all) alludes to a limitless comprehension. Balqasim believes that the experience of al-Niffari suffers from what Blanchot calls “the plural speech”<sup>160</sup> (as cited in Balqasim 2012, 249). Staying at the *'ibtīlā'* is the essence of *waqfa*'s experience. For that reason, Ibn 'Arabi describes the *wāqif* as *mat'ūb*<sup>161</sup> (ibid.). The *wāqif* lives the experience as though walking a path on which to find a middle ground or balance for the speech, which is the opposite of the warning in the previous example. Yet, what is the motivation for writing the *Mawāqif* on behalf of the Absolute which is, at the same time for al-Niffari, writing for the Absolute? Dialogue is a form that produces discourse. Blanchot believes that dialogue depends on the exchange of speech and the equality between the two speakers (ibid.). However, equality does not harmonise with al-Niffari's experience (ibid.) unless the first source of the dialogue is a direct divine speech<sup>162</sup>. This is what *Mawqif 'Iqbālīh* hints at (ibid., 250) when al-Niffari (2007, 173) states:

“وقال لي: إن قلت ما أقول، قلت ما تقول”

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<sup>159</sup> The full translation is: “Signifies the trying, proving or testing, wether by an oath or otherwise” (Lane 1986, 265).

<sup>160</sup> “It is the speech that can never be reduced to unmeaning, neither in the ideal sense of signification, nor with respect to the position of a single indemnified subject (Blanchot, as cited in Haase and Large 2005, 117).

<sup>161</sup> It is originally derivative from the root *ta'iba* (became tired). However, it is worth mentioning that Ibn Manzur does not include the word in his dictionary and considers it to be a wrong form (Ibn Manzur 2019). I believe inventing a word that is not lexically proven indicates manipulating the language, which is intentionally practiced by Sufis.

<sup>162</sup> For further explanation on this, see Balqasim 2012, chapter two section 1.1.

(and he said to me: If thou sayest what I say, I shall say what thou sayest [al-Niffari 1987, 120]). Here lies the main reason for which al-Niffari presents his discourse as hearing and "speaks" as a listener, thus producing the speech by hearing it from a private conversation that can only emphasise its unique character and illustrate its quality by recalling the experience of the *waqfa*. Through this recalling, the last quotation becomes more understandable and indicates fairly clearly that we should not assume that two separate parties are partaking in the dialogue. Indeed the dialogue in this instance is an exchange lived by a self that is distributed across two speeches. This confirms what was concluded about *ru'ya*, namely that it is a rising above the limits of the self. In the same manner, hearing is like *ru'ya*, it cannot occur because of an external aspect (Balqasim 2012, 250).

In both types of dialogues, we are facing two voices that do not belong to two separate entities. However, they are related to two positions lived by one self, or to two parts of a single self. By moving from one position to another, it could be possible to present this self through multiple pronouns. The *Mawāqif* were written in a form that presents the writer through multiple pronouns, thus suggesting multiplicity and giving the impression that the conversation takes place between two or more separate parties. The experience is based on monotheism. Nonetheless, the discourse cannot happen unless it takes place or at least appears to take place between two entities. This tendency demonstrates writing as a paradox. A same self takes part through the first person, second person and a latent pronoun (ibid.). The use of several pronouns does not relate to two different beings. This suggestion disagrees with that of Nwyia and Balqasim, who both claim, as seen earlier, that there is only one entity changing positions. It is impossible to be Him in *siwā* and in *ru'ya* at the same time. It is indeed Him in *siwā* but other than Him in *ru'ya*. Shifting from a pronoun to another is basically shifting from one field to another. When al-Niffari achieves a *waqfa*, he arrives at the status of speaking of the pronoun. This situation requires another pronoun to withdraw, which

means reaching another realm. There must be a speechless, silent listener in order for another speech to happen; the silence of the mortal and the resounding of the Absolute's voice. Since there are two voices, it is essential that one must fade away and withdraw for the other to rise and make itself heard. This characteristic could be pulled away if we take it off from the horizon of the Absolute that al-Niffari and other Sufis enclose around the act of writing itself. Writing experiences are excellent illustrations of the manner in which several writers have found themselves through another voice. Moreover, many are the writers who claim to have found, heard or felt more than just one voice and who have been inspired by multiple other voices. When the human voice withdraws, the conversation becomes possible. Conversation here does not mean an exchange of words between two parties but a voice that is born from a pregnant silence. Dialogue, according to al-Niffari, does not require "plural speech" to preserve difference and host it through the other. However, it witnesses an impossible unity.

The result of writing the dialogue guarantees that plural speech is active in the discourse. However, the writing self accepts this activity as pain and separation. The equality that the dialogue aims for does not target difference, because it is not its intention to expand the difference but instead to weaken it by silencing one voice for the sake of the other. This is made perfectly clear in the twenty-eighth *mukhāṭaba* (ibid, 251) in which al-Niffari makes the following declaration:

(al-Niffari 2007, 225) "يا عبدُ: لا تصحُ المحادثة إلا بين ناطقٍ و صامت"

([O Worshipper!] Conversation is rightly conducted only between one who speaks and one who is silent [al-Niffari 1987, 159]).

Even though we appear to witness two orators, one of them actually articulates what the other is telling him to say. Balqasim concludes that there is no difference between the first and the second type of dialogue even if the second one is structured differently.<sup>163</sup> After all, the boundaries between

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<sup>163</sup> "Qāla, qultu" (He said, I said).

the two voices in the second dialogue vanish to become one: the voice of the Absolute narrated through the responder's lips, who clearly admits and concedes that he is being spoken to by the Divine, or as al-Niffari puts it: *qawwalanī*. In order for the questioner to make the replier speak, the voice of the last-mentioned needs to recede in order for him to pronounce other words. One voice must be silenced so the *wāqif* can hear another one or can tell of a voice that he listens to. This is exemplified in *Mawqif al-'Islām*, where the replier becomes a questioner to clarify how he can let go of a speech to experience an ambivalent one. As was previously shown, the path to *waqfa* is based on this abandonment.

Overall, the dialogue aims to produce one speech in which each essence echoes what the other is saying, on the condition that the Absolute remains the source of the first speech. The dialogue aims to silence dualism and discard the burden of the plural speech instead of preserving it or ensuring its ambiguity (Balqasim 2012, 252). Balqasim believes that there is only One voice in the *Mawāqif*: the voice of the Absolute. The dualism that appears in the texts is solely the result of the discourse's structure and not that of the speaking essence and the only reason that duality is attributed to the words is the constant shifting in the use of pronouns. Balqasim asserts this is due to his belief that if al-Niffari had given the impression of duplexity in any way whatsoever, he might have given rise to a suspicion of dualism, which would totally contradict his efforts of reaching monotheism, since unity requires the purification of *siwā* and having two voices confirms it. Therefore, Balqasim maintains that the idea of the plural speech might justify how one voice could be divided into multiple pronouns.

The burden of the plural speech that is included in the verbal act makes the speech tiring, for it exhausts the speaker and feels like a divine punishment. Therefore, according to Blanchot, dialogue helps to divide this dualism, since through dialogue we become two to endure the plural speech, which becomes more bearable by division, especially in its sequence through a rotation that expands in time. However, Blanchot maintains that there is still a deficiency because he purports it

is impossible to have equality in a dialogue (as cited in Balqasim 2012, 252) where each speaker affirms his speech authority over the other. According to him, none of the speakers can see in the other anything but another self. He insists that this dialogue is impossible because "all speech is violence" (ibid.) and all speech is only the silencing of another speech, so even if we were to assume the occurrence of this perfect dialogue, there would still be something missing: the difference that stenography cannot achieve. It is difference that makes the two speakers speak and keeps them separated, for this separation is what assembles them. Therefore, when difference becomes the target of the dialogue, it enables the conversation to host the other as being an other and according to Blanchot, forbids the One to be the truth of all comprehension (ibid.). However, Balqasim disagrees with Blanchot on this point. He maintains that difference was not the base of al-Niffari's discourse, since he was directed by his dream of unity. This is why he did not attempt to make the two speakers speak. For the experience is based on silencing one of them and it only aims to silence from a position related to the deeper meaning of emptiness. Balqasim suggests that dualism in the dialogue is not a contradiction but is rather an unescapable *'ibtilā'*. If the sought after unity cannot be achieved in *waqfa*, it means that unification is impossible, for dualism is a condition of interlocution. A dialogue presumes conversation and conversation requires two interlocutors, so how could monotheism be achieved through such a process? A dialogue's requirement of two entities, regardless of whether or not it is the experience of a single and unique self, means that this attraction between two realms is an inescapable affliction. There is a plural speech that cannot be raised, in which writing is achieved as an experience of paradoxes. Juxtapositions can only be for those who are prepared to take the risk of attaining either fate or salvation, according to al-Niffari's expression, since he contends that plural speech is a risk, a test and an affliction (ibid, 253). At the end of the dialogue interpretation section, Balqasim ends his discussion by asking a vital question: who, he wonders, makes the other speak? He believes that the one who appears to be silent and listening is the one who makes the Absolute produce the discourse. Balqasim maintains that this is

one of the paradox features that al-Niffari practices through his writing (ibid, 256), and yet he does not develop this point any further. In the text analysis, I will therefore present a different suggestion as my answer to the previous question.

### Speaking essences

As I previously clarified, both Balqasim and Nwyia agree on the idea of the existence of two essences in the dialogue of the *Mawāqif*. However, each scholar identifies this issue differently. Balqasim maintains that there is one self that is divided into two voices. For his part, Nwyia claims that it is a revelation while al-Niffari states that the Divine dictated those words to him.

Before designating the speaking essences, I would like to voice my belief that the dialogue in the *Mawāqif* has a significant tendency and suggest that the conversation between the Divine and al-Niffari implies a prophetic echo. The structure of exchanging questions and answers and demanding orders echoes the conversation of the Prophet Moses with the Divine in the Qur'an.<sup>164</sup> In *Sūrat Ṭāhā*, the Divine asks:

وما تلك بيمينك يا موسى؟ قال هي عصاي أتوكأ عليها وأهش بها على غنمي ولي فيها مآرب أخرى، قال ألقها يا موسى، فألقاها فإذا هي حية تسعى، قال خذها ولا تخف سنعيدها سيرتها الأولى، واضمم يدك إلى جناحك تخرج بيضاء من غير سوء آية أخرى، اذهب إلى فرعون إنه طغى، قال رب اشرح لي صدري، ويسر لي أمري، واحلل عقدة من لساني، يفقهوا قولي. (Qur'an 20:18–28)

What is that in your right hand, Moses? He said, "It is my staff, on which I lean and with which I beat down leaves for my sheep, and for which I have other uses." HE said, "Cast it

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<sup>164</sup> Based on my in-depth research, the only author who mentions the dialogical factor in al-Niffari's texts is Balqasim. However, he does not mention any relationship between prophecy or its dialogues with the Divine in the Qur'an. I believe that examining al-Niffari via the prophetic echo adds new dimensions to the texts, especially with regards to the text analysis and tackling the notion of power. This is demonstrated in details in the analysis section.

down, Moses." So he cast it down, and, lo, it [turned into] a serpent moving over the ground. He said, "Grasp it and fear not. We shall restore it to its former state. And put your hand into your arm-pit, and it will come forth white, without harm – another sign. That We may show you some of our greatest signs. Go to Pharaoh. He has been insolent." He said, "My Lord, open my breast for me. And ease my task for me. Loose a knot from my tongue And they will understand what I say." (Jones 2007, 506)

Based on al-Niffari's Islamic tradition, it could be thought that the Prophet Muhammad – peace be upon him – would be the predictable example for al-Niffari to imitate. Nonetheless, the Qur'an does not mention any directly exchanged dialogue between Muhammad and the Divine, since he received the revelations of the Qur'anic verses through the medium of the angel Gabriel. This story was mentioned in detail in *Sūrat al-Qalam*. On the contrary, the Prophet Moses was known as *kalīmū l-Llāh* (or *Kalīm Allāh*).<sup>165</sup> Several Qur'anic verses mentioned situations where Moses speaks to the Divine directly and vice-versa. The Qur'an mentions another conversation that occurred between the Prophet Abraham and the Divine in *Sūrat al-Baqara*, when Abraham asked the Divine to show him His ability of creation. Nonetheless, the Prophet Moses had the lion's share of direct conversations with the Divine in the Qur'an. Therefore, exchanging dialogue directly with the Divine appears to be a concession exclusive to prophets. So if al-Niffari is not a prophet, how could he receive revelations? And were there people receiving revelations mentioned in the Qur'an?

Heinrichs states that there is a difference between *wahy* (revelation) and *ilhām* (inspiration); he believes that the first, *wahy*, is supposed to be addressed to a whole community, whereas the second

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<sup>165</sup> "*Kalīm Allāh* has become the special honorific title of Mūsā, 'He who spoke to Allāh', or, following the *Tahdhīb*, 'He to whom Allāh spoke', because of several passages in the Qur'an describing direct speech between Allāh and Mūsā." (Mcdonald 2020)

was rejected by intellectuals, who do not approve of mysticism (Heinrichs, as cited in Kugel 1990, 120). Nevertheless, this is in significant contradiction with this next example from the Qur'an.

In the Qur'anic verse that I previously mentioned, the Divine states that He only speaks to humans through revelations from behind a veil. However, there are several verses in the Qur'an where the Divine says the word *awḥaynā* (we revealed) to people who are not prophets. For example, He mentions this word in the story of Prophet Moses' mother:

ولقد متنا عليك مرة أخرى، إذ أوحينا إلى أمك ما يوحى، أن اقدفيه في التابوت فاقدفيه في اليم فليلقه اليم بالساحل يأخذه عدو لي وعدو له وألقيت عليك محبة مني ولتصنع على عيني. (Qur'an 20: 37–39)

We showed you favour on another occasion. When We revealed what was revealed to your mother, Saying: "Cast him into the casket and cast it into the sea, and the sea will throw it up on the shore. An enemy of Mine and of his will take him." And I bestowed on you love from Me, and [it was] so that you might be formed under My eye. (Jones 2007, 507).

Moreover, the Divine mentions that He sent a messenger<sup>166</sup> to Mary, Prophet Isa's mother as well.

واذكر في الكتاب مريم إذ انتبذت من أهلها مكانا شرقيا، فاتخذت من دونهم حجابا فأرسلنا إليها روحنا فتمثل لها بشرا سويا، قالت إني أعوذ بالرحمن منك إن كنت تقيا، قال إنما أنا رسول ربك لأهب لك غلاما زكيا. (Qur'an 19: 16–19)

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<sup>166</sup> The concept of receiving a messenger echoes Prophet Muhammad's situation. He did not have any instant conversation with the Divine. He only received revelation via a revealing agent, as the following verse confirms: (Qur'an 53: 4–6) "إن هو إلا وحي يوحى، علمه شديد القوى، ذو مرة فاستوى"

(This is naught but a revelation revealed to prophet Muhammad. Taught him by one (terrible) in power (Jibreel). Very strong; he stood poised" [Arberry 2003, 695]). I would like to express my disagreement with the selection of the word "terrible," I suggest "firmness" or "hardiness."

Mention Mary in the Scripture, when she withdrew from her folk to a place in the East. And she put between them and herself a barrier. And We sent to her Our Spirit [who] appeared to her as a perfect man. She said, "I seek refuge from you with the Merciful, if you are God-fearing." He said, "I am only the messenger of your Lord, that I may give you a pure son." (Jones 2007, 494)

Since revelation has happened to non-prophets, could al-Niffari claim that he received revelations from the Divine? Since it must also be noted that such texts ended up being mainly literary works, productions generated by inspiration as opposed to revelation, are they still similar and what exactly would al-Niffari attempt to achieve by those claims?

The word *wahy* (revelation) is derived from the root *wahaya*, which means signal, writing, message, inspiration, hidden speech and all that you tell or communicate to someone<sup>167</sup> (Ibn Manzur 2019). In the Islamic terminology, *wahy* indicates the Divine's words to his prophets (Daghtsi 2002, 295). Revelation does not summon fear, that is why it is feasibly related to prophecy that is derived from the word *naba'a* in Arabic, which means *khobar* (singular of "news"). On the other hand, revelation differentiates between the person who thinks by himself intellectually and the one who conveys on behalf of the Divine (ibid., 296–297).

On the contrary, *'ilhām* (inspiration) derives from the verb *alhamā*, which means to put something in someone's mind. Therefore, *alhamahu l-lāh* (to be inspired by the Divine)<sup>168</sup> indicates the Divine directing a person through inspiration to what is good or to prosperity (Lane 1986, 3014). Philosophically, *'ilhām* is what is planted in a person's heart or mind by virtue of emanation from the Divine (Daghtsi 2002, 344), as this Qur'anic verse asserts:

”ونفس وما سواها، فآلهمها فجورها وتقواها“ (Qur'an 91: 7–8)

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<sup>167</sup> ”الإشارة والكتابة والرّسالة والإلهام والكلام الخفيّ وكلُّ ما ألقينته إلى غيرك“ (Ibn Manzur 2019).

<sup>168</sup> Translation by Lane 1986, 3014.

(by the soul, and that which shaped it and inspired it to lewdness and God fearing [Arberry 2003, 802]). Conversely, Stefan Wild states that *'ilhām* is a divine act aimed at an individual, by which the Divine transmits a message to that particular individual, whereas *wahy* is akin to inspiration regarding being an individual, yet its message is sent to all human beings as a whole or to a wider number of receivers. Nonetheless, Wild contributes other notions to the previous two; those of *tanzīl* and *'inzāl* which, according to him, translate as "sending down." Yet, he observes that although *wahy* might indicate inter-human communication, *tanzīl* and *'inzāl* were never used in such a context. They were exclusively used to express the communication of the Divine with humans. He further asserts that these notions do not only designate the action, but also the ramification of the process (Wild 1996, 138).

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd has a different take on the notion of *wahy* and *'ilhām*. According to him, *wahy* does not only concern the Qur'an or sacred books but encompasses all Islamic and non Islamic texts. The notion represents all forms of discourse that the Divine addresses human beings with, for in the Arabic language before Islam, revelation indicates each communication process that includes any type of informing. Based on that, Abu Zayd believes that informing is the central purpose of revelation but that it occurs in a hidden and a secretive method (Abu Zayd 2017, 31). This agrees with Ibn Manzur's definition of *wahy* and *'ilhām* and his assertion on their secrecy and mystery.

Moreover, Abu Zayd states that revelation *wahy* is a communicative relation between two parties that includes delivering a secretive private message. This cannot be accomplished without a particular code. Therefore, it is vital that the notion of code is included in the notion of *wahy* and that the code used in the communication and informing process should be mutual to the sender and the receiver, meaning, to the dual parties of the *wahy* process of communication. Abu Zayd supports his argument via the analogy between the usage of the word *wahy* in the Qur'an and in Arabic poetry. As an example, he refers to a verse of poetry by 'Alqama al-Fahl describing a male ostrich

returning to its female companion and feeling anxious about her and their chicks because of a horrible storm. The male arrives and finds them safe (Abu Zayd 2017, 32), the poet says:

يوحي إليها بانقاض ونقطة  
كما تراطن في أقدانها الروم.

(‘Alqama al-Fahl 1969, 62)

He communicated to her, with clacking sounds,  
Like the incomprehensible talking of the Byzantines in their castle.

(Loynes 2021, 68)

Abu Zayd comments on this verse by stating that when the poet uses the verb *yūhī* (reveals to), he signifies a communicative relation between the male ostrich and its partner, a sender and a receiver, via a special code (the clacking sounds of the ostrich that the poet cannot understand), that is why he compares those sounds to the foreign language of the Byzantines. It is crucial to point out here that the third party, or the external observer of the communication process, *wahy*, does not understand the communicative code. Consequently, he cannot acknowledge the content of the message nor the informing aspect of it. However, he recognises that there is a type of communication being transmitted, which includes a message and a process of informing. In this frame, we can understand the analogy ‘Alqama al-Fahl makes between the communication of the male ostrich with its female and the revealing of the foreign language of the Byzantines, where the Arab onlooker is aware that they are speaking in a particular language that he has no knowledge of and therefore cannot understand and know the content of the conversation going on (Abu Zayd 2017, 32). A similar usage of this analogy can be found in the Qur’an, in particular in the story of

Zachary and Mary, when the first begs the Divine to bless him with a child and the Divine blesses him with an answer for his wish. The prophet asks for a sign (ibid, 33):

”قال رب اجعل لي آية قال آيتك ألا تكلم الناس ثلاثة أيام إلا رمزا واذكر ربك كثيرا وسبح بالعشي والإبكار“ (Quran 3: 41)

(“He said, ‘My Lord, give me a sign.’ ‘Your sign,’ [the angel] said, ‘is that you will not communicate with anyone for three days, except by gestures. Remember your Lord often; celebrate His glory in the evening and at dawn” [Abdel Haleem 2005, 37]).

By *ramz* (gesture or symbol), the Qur’an points out the hidden or secretive type of speech, which only the addressee can figure. This symbolic communication, *wahy*, was the same type of communication that happened between Mary and her people when she delivered Jesus and was afraid to confront them, hence she vowed to refrain from speaking, as she was required to (Abu Zayd 2017, 33):

فأنتت به قومها تحمله قالوا يا مريم لقد جننت شيئا فريا، يا أخت هارون ما كان أبوك امرأ سوء وما كانت أمك بغيا،

فأشارت إليه قالوا كيف نكلم من كان في المهد صبيا. (Qur’an 19:27–29)

She went back to her people carrying the child, and they said, ‘Mary! You have done something terrible! Sister of Aaron! Your father was not a bad man; your mother was not unchaste!’ She pointed at him. They said, ‘How can we converse with an infant?’

(Abdel Haleem 2005, 192)

Abu Zayd emphasises that here, Mary pointing at Jesus is a message that was acknowledged by the people and implies a content that states: "ask him and do not ask me." It is a message that the addressees understood and therefore replied to by asking in turn "how can we speak to an infant?" The message enclosed in Mary’s sign to her people makes her gesture a revelation, *wahy*, similar to Zachary’s when he asked his people to praise the Divine without speaking (Abu Zayd 2005, 32).

From the three former examples, Abu Zayd concludes that the communication process, *wahy*, consists of a sender, a receiver who belongs to the same existential level, i.e (the male ostrich and its female, Zachary and his people and Mary with her people) and a code used in the communication process that is understood by both parties: sounds and signs in the case of the ostriches and gestures only in the case of humans (ibid., 33). According to the Qur'an, the basic parties of the prophetic revelation are the Divine and the Prophet. The Qur'an refers to it as '*ilqā'*' and uses *qawl* to indicate *kalām* (ibid., 40), as the Divine says in the sura of *Al-Muzzammil*:

”إنا سنلقي عليك قولا ثقيلا“ (Qur'an 73:5)

(We shall send a momentous message down to you [Abdel Haleem 2005, 395]).

Abu Zayd divides *wahy* into three types: the first is inspiration, '*ilhām*' and this is where he differs from Heinrichs and Wild, for he believes that inspiration is not different from revelation since it is one of its methods. Abu Zayd argues that inspiration can be found in the case of Moses's mother<sup>169</sup> and in the verse of the bees<sup>170</sup> and that it applied to each and every private secretive *wahy*. The second type of *wahy* is when the Divine speaks to man from behind the veil, for example when he speaks to Moses from behind the tree, mountain and fire (Abu Zayd 2017, 40), i.e:

”فلما أتاه نودي يا موسى، إني أنا ربك فاخلع نعليك إنك بالواد المقدس طوى، وأنا اخترتك فاستمع لما يوحى“

(Qur'an 20:11-13), (When he came to the fire, he was called: 'Moses! I am your Lord. Take off your shoes: you are in the sacred valley of Tuwa. I have chosen you, so listen to what is being revealed [Arberry 2005, 196]).

”ونادينا من جانب الطور الأيمن وقربناه نجيا“ (Qur'an 19: 52)

<sup>169</sup> The verse from the Qur'an previously mentioned in this section.

<sup>170</sup>

”وَأَوْحَىٰ رَبُّكَ إِلَى النَّحْلِ أَنِ اتَّخِذِي مِنَ الْجِبَالِ بُيُوتًا وَمِنَ الشَّجَرِ وَمِمَّا يَعْرِشُونَ“ (Qur'an 16:68)

(And your Lord inspired the bee, saying, 'Build yourselves houses in the mountains and trees and what people construct' [Abdel Haleem 2005, 170]).

(We called to him from the right-hand side of the mountain and brought him close to Us in secret communion [Abdel Haleem 2005, 193]). Abu Zayd maintains that the first method of *wahy* consists of two parties who both understand its content, whereas in the second, the speech occurs without utterance or happens by way of a nonvocal code. On the other hand, in the case of Moses, the discourse of *wahy*, that the Qur'an refers to as "calling" or *nidā'*, occurs via a language that Moses could comprehend as a linguistic one, as can be confirmed by the dialogue in the vision scene (Abu Zayd 2017, 41).

وَلَمَّا جَاءَ مُوسَى لِمِيقَاتِنَا وَكَلَّمَهُ رَبُّهُ قَالَ رَبِّ أَرِنِي أَنظُرْ إِلَيْكَ قَالَ لَنْ نَرَاكَ فَإِنْ اسْتَقَرَّ مَكَانَهُ فَسَوْفَ تَرَانِي فَلَمَّا تَجَلَّى رَبُّهُ لِلْجَبَلِ جَعَلَهُ دَكًّا وَخَرَّ مُوسَى صَعِقًا. (Qur'an 7:143)

When Moses came for Our appointment, and his Lord spoke to him, he said, 'My Lord, show Yourself to me: let me see You!' He said, 'You will never see Me, but look at that mountain: if it remains standing firm, you will see Me,' and when his Lord revealed Himself to the mountain, He made it crumble: Moses fell down unconscious.

(Abdel Haleem 2005, 103)

Using the verb *qāla* (said) in this instance confirms the difference between the first case of *wahy* and the second one. In addition, it confirms the nature of the used language in the second case. At this point, it is vital to mention that the context of the Qur'anic verses that mention verbs such as *yūhī* (reveals to) or *'awhā* (revealed to) indicate a nonlinguistic communication, confirming that the content of revelation did not include a mutual communicative situation between the sender and the receiver as opposed to the situation of "speaking behind the veil" with Moses. On the contrary, in the case of Moses's mother and the bees, the revelation was nonlinguistic. In fact, the content only implied demanding an action or a deed and the receiver's reaction to the revelation was limited to

accomplishing that order. This is a crucial difference between the verbal communicative situation and the nonverbal one.

The third method of Divine speech to man is indirect revelation through a messenger, an angel, who reveals to the receiver, by the Divine's will, whatever He wishes. This is the method by which the Qur'an was revealed and is the method that reflects communication through a medium, who is the angelic messenger that the Qur'anic verse call *rawḥ* (angel)<sup>171</sup> (Abu Zayd 2017, 41). In addition, in the Qur'an, the word *wahy* was not used exclusively to refer to communication between the Divine and man, but also to that between human beings in reference to communication between demons and unbelievers (ibid., 38), as the Qur'an states:

”وإن الشياطين ليوحون إلى أوليائهم ليجادلوكم“ (Qur'an 6:121)

(The evil ones incite their followers to argue with you [Abdel Haleem 2005, 89]). Another Qur'anic verse says:

”يُوحِي بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَى بَعْضٍ زُخْرُفَ الْقَوْلِ غُرُورًا“ (Qur'an 6:112)

(They suggest alluring words to one another in order to deceive [Abdel Haleem 2005, 88]). If in these previous verses *wahy* means *waswasa* (speaking in a low, gentle, faint, or soft manner with confusedness),<sup>172</sup> then its vocal tempo indicates a mysterious secretive communication that cannot be acknowledged by a third party (Abu Zayd 2017, 38).

If the Divine is the source of both revelation and inspiration, would that mean that these are exclusive to prophets only, for it is documented and stated by the Absolute in the Qur'an?

*Qāla lī* and *'anta qawwaltanī* intersect with the idea of prophecy in several traditions. Kugel mentions the example of Balaam from the Hebrew tradition, who was inspired by the Divine, despite the fact of being engaged in cursing Israel and who uttered "the words that God puts in my mouth, that must I speak." He thereupon reverted to blessing instead of cursing. Another example is

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<sup>171</sup> Translation by Lane 1968, 1180.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 2939.

that of Isaiah, when he stated that "the Lord has given me the tongue of those who are taught (better, the language of learning) that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary" (Kugel 1990, 6). This idea also happens to be in line with Plato's philosophy. Indeed in one of his dialogues, Socrates discusses the topic of poetry and poets with Ion, affirming his belief that good poets produce beautiful art for they are possessed and inspired. He looks at poets through the eye of sacredness, since poets are unable to write unless they release control over their senses or minds. Socrates further states that the Divine uses poets in the same way He uses prophets, to manifest His words, and this could be discerned by the listeners who know that the Divine is speaking to them through the possessed poets. This idea agrees with the view that the Jewish people have regarding their own prophets. Philo maintains that when God possesses a prophet, he will manifest his prophetic oracles. The prophet will be barren of the power to apprehend his speech due to being under the control of the Divine's inspiration. His role in this instance will be that of a medium who promotes the Divine's teaching. Prophets interpret God's words who utilises their instruments of speech to set forth His will. Kugel also mentions another striking example for the correlation between poetry and prophecy through a statement by Tynnichus the Chalcidian. He maintains that the Prophet Moses composed one of the significant poems in history. In the poem, Moses attributes his ability of creativity to the Divine and negates any human craft in it since it is He who possesses and controls the Prophet's mind (ibid, 16).

In addition, the idea of being possessed correlates with a myth in the pre-Islamic heritage that insists on the tendency of poets and *kuhhān* (soothsayers) to exude supernatural powers. When they performed, the audience presumed that they were reciting their words since they were seen as being controlled by a mysterious entity who was directly and privately communicating with them and dictating to them words that they would not have been able to produce on their own. These words followed a difficult structure and style. They were cadenced periods and *saj'* (rhyming prose) for the *kāhin* (soothsayer) and isometric and rhymed for the poet (Zwettler 1990, 77). At that time,

people believed that these invisible creatures who inspired the poets and soothsayers could be jinn or *shayaṭīn* (demons) (ibid, 79).<sup>173</sup>

Subsequently, Arabs assumed the possibility of communication with the jinn due to their belief that both worlds, the jinn's and the human's, were adjacent. However, those who were capable of communicating with the jinn were meant to possess special characteristics that allowed them to connect with the different existential level the jinn belonged to. Since jinn were different from human beings, they were seen as creatures who were able to breach the boundaries that separated sky and earth and who were able to tell of the unknown and be acquainted with the hidden and the veiled. The jinn were said to have acquired this special knowledge by stealthily hearing from the sky and it was believed that humans who could achieve communication with the jinn could also acquire these abilities (Abu Zayd 2017, 33–34).

A common concept in Arabic culture is that the cosmos cannot consist of separate universes, however, communication and movement, as well as ascending and descending among the universes is an affective field, which enables man to communicate with some of these worlds, where soothsayers and prophets are equal. The only difference between the prophets' communication with the Divine and the second example is that the first is based on the type of *fiṭra* (nature) that depends on the choice and selection of the Divine, whereas the soothsayer needs tools to help him let go and transcend from the attachments and obstacles of the material world to connect with the metaphysical one. On the other hand, soothsayers depend on their mortal attempts and use tools to overcome the mortal human body, which is considered to be a materialistic obstacle. Due to the simplicity of their medium, which consists of animal bones and rhymed prose, their communication

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<sup>173</sup> This idea is originated from the valley of 'Abqar, which some maintain is located in Yemen and people attributed this place to the jinn. Poets claimed that there were jinn dwelling in this valley. The word '*abqariyya* (genius) is derived from it. Moreover, '*abqariyy* is an adjective used to express excellence in creativity (al-Tunji 1999, 616).

is not always effective and the information they obtain is as likely to be true as it is to be false, in fact, it might be a mixture of both (ibid., 37).

If what the soothsayer is receiving from a demon is *wahy*, it means that the communication includes a message, but in this case, the communication process would be achieved through a special code because both parties, sender and receiver, do not belong to the same existential level. Nonetheless, the special code that is implied by Ibn Khaldun is the soothsayer's rhymed prose, which remains a special method of linguistic phrasing and performance or a secondary code in the general linguistic system. Therefore, the difference between a prophet and a soothsayer is that the first conveys the message to the people after receiving it while the second foretells the message received. In all of this, the phenomenon of *wahy* becomes non-accidental (ibid., 38).

In contradiction, being possessed or inspirited by the Divine to utter words is emphasised in the Islamic tradition. In the early stages of Islamic missions in Mecca and due to the crucial role of poetry at that time, Meccan poets started a war of words against Prophet Muhammad. Several poets composed satirical poems against Muslims. The Prophet therefore encouraged his own poet, Hassan Ibn Thabit to respond to them confirming that he was supported by Gabriel, the Divine's messenger to Prophet Muhammad (Mahanna, as cited in Hassan bin Thabit 2011, 12–15), as the following quote shows:

"قال صلى الله عليه وسلم لحسان: اهجهم- أو هاجهم- وجبريل معك"

(al-Bukhari, as cited in al-'Ini 2016, 575), (The Prophet said to Hassan: "[satirise and]<sup>174</sup> lampoon them (the pagans) in your poems, and Gabriel is with you (i.e. Supports you)" (al-Bukhari 2019)].

Of noteworthiness is also the fact that the Qur'an allocates a sura to discuss the issue of the poets, *Sūrat al-Shu'arā'* (sura of the Poets), where the Divine states that they are *mukadhibīn* (crying-liars) towards His signs. However, before mentioning the poets, the sura remarks on several

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<sup>174</sup> I added the words "satirise and" to make the translation more accurate to the Arabic quotation, however please note that it was not part of the original translation.

events in some prophets' lives: Noah, Moses, Shu'ayb and Hud (Zwettler 1990, 94). Despite the fact that poets are illustrated negatively in the verse, apart from those who believed, we see that prophets and poets are paradoxically juxtaposed in the same sura, even though the sura aims to declare the honesty of the prophets and the *takdhīb* (denial) of the poets. Nonetheless, before the poets' description, the Qur'an presents the figure of revelation (Zwettler 1990, 118):

“وإنه لتنزيل رب العالمين، نزل به الروح الأمين، على قلبك لتكون من المنذرين” (Qur'an 26: 192–194)

(Truly it is the revelation of the Lord of all being, brought down by the Faithful Spirit, upon thy heart that thou mayest be one of the warners [Arberry 1998, 379]). *Al-rūḥ al-Amīn* is a direct reference to Gabriel, the messenger sent by the Divine to Muhammad. This noble figure is introduced in the Islamic tradition as a superior opponent to jinn and *shayṭān*, who are viewed as the poets' source of inspiration (Zwettler 1990, 118). Additionally, the Divine negates the poetic attributes of the Qur'an and equally negates the accusations against Prophet Muḥammad that he was a poet for reasons related to the particular purpose and source usually attributed to it by Arab people. The poet's role in his society is different from the role the Divine attributed to Muhammad. The poet represents and speaks on behalf of the tribe while Muhammad is a messenger of the Divine's message. Poetry is a text that speaks in the tribe's best interest, by satirising its enemies, supporting its allies or praising its men. The Qur'an, on the other hand, is a text that deals with the reconstruction of reality and how to change it into a better one. For this reason, the Qur'an urged that Muhammad was neither a poet nor a wizard or a soothsayer and that the Qur'an itself was not a work of poetry. This negation does not condemn poetry but denounces the poets of the Prophet's age, who attempted to classify the Qur'an under a poetic style that would turn the phenomenon of revelation into one that served the agenda of the dominant cultural system of the time, which expressed the interests of the minority at the expense of the majority. Therefore, the Qur'an leans towards supporting the type of poetry that helps to spread the Divine's message and opposes the type that creates obstacles in its path. It could be said that Islam has an ideological stance towards

poetry that has to be understood aside from the notions of *ḥalāl* (allowable)<sup>175</sup> and *ḥaram* (forbidden). The Qur'an clearly explained the difference between the poetry that unifies with it, which contains similar revelations and religious sources, and that which comes from other sources. Therefore, the poetry of Hassan ibn Thabit and 'Abdullah ibn Rawaha is supported by the *rūḥ al-qudus* (the Holy Spirit), as previously mentioned, the same source that revealed the Qur'an, whereas the contradictory poems were disclosed through Satan. That is why this type of poetry is considered to be worse than *qayḥ* (pus) in a believer's heart (Abu Zayd 2017, 140):

"قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: لئن يمتلئ جوف أحدكم قيحا حتى يريه، خير له من أن يمتلئ شعرا"

(al-'Asqalani 2011, 551), (It is better for the belly of any one of you to be stuffed with pus rather than to stuff (one's mind) with poetry [Sunnah 2021]). Consequently, there is no contradiction in Islam's perspective towards poetry. Yet it is an ideology that accepts what agrees with its principles and rejects what opposes them; the case was more dangerous than *tahḥīl* (allowing) or *tahṛīm* (forbidding), it was the Qur'an's attempt to force its domination on reality and culture. Therefore, it is logical that it rejected the poems that opposed or attacked it. For that reason, in each contemporaneous text, there are significances that confirm, accept and support certain texts (Abu Zayd 2017, 140) and significances that reject and condemn others. This is what the relation between the Qur'an and poetry was based on: selection, acceptance and rejection. The war on the Qur'an started due to way the text's function was understood by the common culture. The *jāhili* Arabs attacked the Qur'an partly because they were against the new reality that it was creating in terms of linguistic structure and partly because of the reality that was being created around it by people. When the Arabs accused Muhammad of poetry, magic and soothsaying, they were trying to turn the text of the Qur'an into a familiar form of narrative on one hand, and attempting to contain the message within the structured social occupations of poetry, soothsaying and magic in reality on another. This makes it clear that the Arabs' rejection of the revelation was not a rejection of the

<sup>175</sup> Translation by Lane 1968, 621.

process of communication between a man and an angel itself, it was a refusal of that revelation's content or of the person receiving it. Early Muslims recognised that the text of the Qur'an was not isolated from reality and they attempted to understand the Qur'an through other texts of poetry (ibid., 141). The principle was:

"إذا تعاجم عليكم شيء من القرآن فعليكم بالشعر، فإن الشعر ديوان العرب"

(‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Abbas as cited in Abu Zayd 2017, 141), (Should something in the Qur'an be difficult to grasp, use poetry instead, for poetry is the diwan of Arabs). This is how Arabic poetry became a reference for Qur'anic exegesis (ibid.). The relationship between the Qur'an and poetry should be understood by way of the correlation between texts within the culture. To understand a text through previous texts signifies *tamāthul* (homogeneity) between texts and acknowledging the *mukhālafā* (difference) between them as well. Turning poetry into a tool to understand the Qur'an indicates a shift from being owned by poetry to being owned by the Qur'an, which implies that the direction of Arabic culture also shifts power to the Qur'an. This might explain the weakness of poetry in the first age of Islam, when several poets stopped writing poetry (ibid., 142).

After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the idea of being exclusively chosen to receive Divine revelation died as well.<sup>176</sup> However, many centuries later, the Abbasid age brought forth a

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<sup>176</sup> According to Islamic dogma, Muhammad is believed to be the seal of the prophets and the Qur'an to be the last book sent down by the Divine to human beings, as the Qur'an states:

"مَا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِّن رِّجَالِكُمْ وَلَكِن رَّسُولَ اللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا" (Qur'an 33: 40)

(Muhammad is not the father of any one of you men; he is God's Messenger and the seal of the prophets: God knows everything [Abdel Haleem 2005, 269]).

"الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا" (Quran 5: 3)

(Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My blessing upon you, and chosen as your religion Islam [Abdel Haleem 2005, 68]).

poet who became known by the term *al-Mutanabbī*<sup>177</sup> (a person claiming to be a prophet), a denomination which eventually became interchangeable with his real name. In a chapter entitled "The meaning of Mutanabbi," Wolfhart Heinrichs explores the reason behind calling Abu al-Tayyib such a name. He closely examines the first reason – claiming prophecy – by evaluating stories from different resources. The second reason is provided by Ibn Jinni, who wrote the commentary on al-Mutanabbi's poetry. Ibn Jinni believes that the title came about as a consequence of the following verse from the poet (Heinrichs 1990, 126–127):

أنا في أمة تداركها الله  
غريب كصالح في ثمود.

(al-Mutanabbi 1997, 299)

I am in a community—which God may set aright!

– a stranger like Salih among the Thamud.

(Heinrichs 1990, 126)

What Abu al-Tayyib is saying here is that similarly to Salih, an Arabian prophet who came before Muhammad and who was rejected by his people and the community he was assigned to, the

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<sup>177</sup> Abu al-Tayyib Ahmad ibn al-Husayn, born in Kinda, a village in al-Kufa in Iraq in 915 AC, was a famous poet. Al-Mutanabbi is a nickname that he gained for claiming prophecy when he was in al-Samawa desert. He met the prince of Aleppo, Sayf al-Dawla al-Hamadani for the first time in 337H (949 AD) and composed various elegies about him, which led to several personal and financial rewards. However, this friendship did not last long due to the prince's silence in one of the fights that involved the poet and an opponent in one of Sayf al-Dawla's gatherings and in his presence. He spent the rest of his life between kings' palaces to win their rewards in return for his panegyrics. He was murdered in 965 AC for composing a satirical poem (al-Mutanabbi 1983, 5–6).

Thamud, the poet has feelings of loneliness and annoyance amidst a society that has gone completely awry (Heinrichs 1990, 127).

As can be seen, it appears that there is a halo of holiness surrounding the created word, a kinship that relates writers and poets to prophets who are preaching the Absolute's message to the world. This inevitably begs questioning the motive behind relating sanctity and the inspired word, whether it was dictated by the Divine or provided by invisible entities. Northrop Frye states that they who enjoy power of ecstasy are faced with reverence, caution and fright due to being geniuses. Possessing such excellency provides authority, which is difficult for certain societies to absorb. This authority is obtained by an ability to *perceive* more and differently from their fellows, which bestows upon them "a comprehensive view of the human situation" as Fryer puts it (as cited in Cooper 1990, 27).

It is crucial to assert the origin of a prophet's revelation to justify its ramifications. I suggest that the result of those origins is credibly related to the concept of power. Cooper confirms that true prophecy could be verified by its signs of miracles. Prophets are therefore given the capability to either conquer or change the elements of nature (Cooper 1990, 35). On the other hand, In *Sūrat al-Takwīr*; the Divine describes Gabriel as follows:

“إنه لقول رسول كريم، ذي قوة عند ذي العرش مكين، مطاع ثم أمين” (Qur'an 81: 19–21)

(Truly this is the word of a noble Messenger having power, with the Lord of the Throne secure, obeyed, moreover trusty [Arberry 1996, 632]). The terms used in the Qur'anic verses above are charged with political and social importance. They are imbued with a sense of authority, prestige, reliability and respect (Zwettler 1990, 83). Moreover, since the Prophet is the receiver of this revelation and his responsibility requires him to warn his folk of an imminent catastrophe, he needs to be considered as a convenient leader of his people. According to Willem Bijlefeld, the Prophet is the representative of the Divine in his community, he therefore has a significant responsibility combined with immense authority. Bijlefeld defends this view by stating that since the Prophet

speaks on behalf of the Divine and is connected to Him, who is Almighty and Obeyed, it follows that His messenger should be revered with obedience as well (ibid., 86). This agrees with Zwettler's conclusion regarding *Sūrat al-Shu'arā'*, which declares that the concept of granting obedience to the Prophet on account of his particular mantic engagements with the Divine and the communicated revelation he bears, achieve an ideological base in the significant elements that are included in the sura, which define the realised rule of Muhammad in Madina (ibid., 119).

I believe that the echo of prophecy in al-Niffari's text expands to comprehend his philosophy. Maimonides suggests that the case of the prophet demands a physical preparation that starts at the beginning of his existence. Moreover, he argues that a prophet should enjoy certain characteristics, such as wealth, strength and wisdom. He maintains that inspiration is exclusive to the pious upright man who attains the highest degree of morality and intellectuality. Therefore, it is impossible for less fortunate people to be prophets. On the other hand, Albo asserts that prophets who are inspired by God might achieve human perfection (Cooper 1990, 35). Thus, despite the claim of communicating with invisible powers, poets and *kuhhān* were not considered to be compatible with leadership, regardless of their incorporation with tribal leaders (Zwettler 1990, 83). My opinion is that Abu Zayd's discussion on the transformation of Prophet Muhammad to receive the revelation can be classified under the concept of preparation as well. Due to the fact that Gabriel and Prophet Muhammad belong to two different existential levels, he presumes that a certain transformation must have occurred to the Prophet to allow him to communicate with the angel. His assumption is based on al-Zarkashi's opinion that suggests the Prophet was stripped of his mortal image to acquire that of an angel in order to receive the revelation from Gabriel, or vice-versa. However, the first possibility is more difficult than the second. Abu Zayd mentions that Ibn Khaldun differentiates between the previous transformations and engages each status with a code used in the communication. Abu Zayd confirms, based on the aforementioned statements by al-Zarkashi and Ibn Khaldun, that in the case of prophets, the status of revelation requires a special preparation,

which occurs naturally by and based on the Divine's selection of those people. Through this preparation, prophets are able to shed their nature and transform into higher archangels to obtain what the angel wishes to reveal to them (Abu Zayd 2017, 46).

I suggest that the idea of preparation credibly correlates with the concept of purification that al-Niffari imposes as a condition to reach *waqfa*, since purification requires the *wāqif* to separate himself from *siwā* in order to meet the Divine. On this path, the seeker gains a certain type of knowledge, which I suggest has a form of analogy with the idea of preparation. Additionally, I argue that the idea of al-Niffari's preparation through purification intersects with Abu Zayd's interpretation of *Sūrat al-Muddathir*. The content of this sura includes certain commands to Muhammad, such as alerting people, praising the Divine, purifying his garments and avoiding sins. What matters here are the last two commands, where the purity of the physical appearance is linked to the incorporeal one. It is furthermore vital to mention that the command *fahjur* (avoid) means to leave the traditions and the conventions of his society. Moreover, it indicates the beginning of the separation between the new and the old. (ibid.,72). I believe this correlates with al-Niffari's purification of himself of *siwā*, which supports my claim of the mystic echo of prophecy.

Besides, al-Niffari presents himself as a wanderer-seeker of the Divine, whose only aim is to meet Him. This brings to mind the image of a wise, brave and ascetic mystic shaykh; an image that bears considerable resemblance to that of a prophet. The echo of prophecy does not cease here and extends to the structure of the examined *Mawāqif*, a point that will be discussed later in this section.

Having now inspected the relationship between inspiration and revelation, prophets and poets, the next step is to investigate the role of the writer who is inspired by the Divine. Is this role limited to being a medium that allows the writer to preach His message to the world or does it carry more entitlements?

Kugel raises the same question when quoting the following by Amos: "When a lion roars, who is not fearful? When God speaks, who does not prophesy?" He argues that if God puts words into a

prophet's mouth and the prophet delivers His message by turning it into a proclaimed balanced utterance, then the prophet appears to be more than just a messenger; he seems to be a maker himself. Kugel is also of the opinion that being a prophet apparently has something mechanical in it (Kugel 1990, 6). This invites us to explore the concept of *ḥadīth qudsī* (divine sayings) in the Islamic tradition. *Hādīth qudsī* is a direct discourse statement attributed to the Divine, which is not a part of the Qur'an, but is nonetheless reported in the format of a hadith authorised by Prophet Muhammad. This type of hadith is different from the Qur'anic revelations and other traditions of Muhammad (Graham 2020). Al-Siddiqi defines *ḥadīth qudsī* as the hadith which Prophet Muhammad added as a saying from the Divine. This hadith is narrated by the Prophet but is designated as the Divine's speech. Muhammad is therefore only the bearer of that message, despite it being composed with his very own words (al-Siddiqi 2005, 50). Therefore, despite the fact that the source of the *ḥadīth qudsī* is the Divine, it appears that the Prophet plays a role in formulating it, which means that there is a human factor in its composition. What could support this claim is Abu Zayd's comment on the aforementioned concept of the transformation of the Prophet to receive the revelation. He maintains that the transformation that occurred to Prophet Muhammad to communicate with Gabriel is not a physical one, despite the physical changes that were observed in him when he received *wahy*.<sup>178</sup> Abu Zayd proposes that this might be the spark that inspired philosophers and mystics to explore the notion of prophethood through the theory of *khayāl* (imagination). Explaining prophethood through the lens of *khayāl* means that transcending from the mortal world to the archangels' occurs through the efficiency of the imaginative human power that exists in prophets thanks to the Divine's nature and selection, which is more powerful in them than

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<sup>178</sup> According to the Hadith, "al-Harith bin Hisham asked the Prophet, 'How does the divine inspiration come to you?' He replied, 'In all these ways: The Angel sometimes comes to me with a voice which resembles the sound of a ringing bell, and when this state abandons me, I remember what the Angel has said, and this type of Divine Inspiration is the hardest on me; and sometimes the Angel comes to me in the shape of a man and talks to me, and I understand and remember what he says'" (al-Bukhari in Sunnah 2021).

in other human beings. If the efficiency of the imaginative power in regular people appears only in the sleeping state, when the senses are mostly deactivated from moving impressions from the external world to the eternal one, it follows that prophets, poets and mystics with gnosis are more able than anyone else to use their effective imaginative power in both states, vigilance and sleep. This does not imply that the imaginative power of the prophet, poet and mystic are equal by any means, for without any doubt, the prophet's is the most powerful, followed by the mystic and finally the poet. According to most scholars' general concept of existence, the human soul is part of the spiritual world. Based on this, all human beings are able to have a glimpse of that world through the experience of vision. However, when under the control of the sensual world, they cannot get close to this rich realm. Dreams represent the field of efficient imaginative power in all human beings, however, the significance of what a sleeper sees might be clear or obscure but in all cases, it indicates some aspects of the spiritual world that the human soul always belongs to (Abu Zayd 2017, 49). If receiving revelation from the higher archangels depends on the human soul's spirituality and purity, there is no doubt that prophets reach the most highly-placed ones. However, they do not become pure intellectual entities that turn into angels. It could be said that the first level of *wahy*, the level of intensity, immersion and transformation of the Prophet, was a state similar to a vision received by him from an angel with a coded message, which the Prophet turns into a linguistic or verbal one. Being familiar with the repeated occurrence of communication made the revelation possible in vigilance through ordinary verbal speech (ibid.,50). In other words, *ru'yā* (dream) is one of the methods of revelation, which is expressed through symbolic images laden with meanings that require expression and interpretation. To receive *wahy* in vigilance, a prophet has to be prepared and the Divine is the one responsible for that preparation. Therefore, if an ordinary person attempts to reach this state, he or she will fail due to the weakness caused by their visible senses. The only way for their veil to be lifted is through sleep, without which, according to Ibn Khaldun, they cannot attain the vision. Understanding the phenomenon of vision as a state of

connection between the soul and the spiritual world was part of creating the theoretical basis of the tendency of prophethood, which depends on common facts between all human beings (ibid., 51–52). I believe that Abu Zayd's point of view regarding dreams as an approach of communication with the Divine<sup>179</sup> could support al-Niffari's echo of prophecy, particularly in terms of his concept of *ru'ya*, as discussed in the first section of this chapter.

On the contrary, al-Niffari does not appear as a deputised speaker of God, he illustrates himself as commissioned to speak by the Divine, something that intersects with the prophetic image and the special gift of being a creature<sup>180</sup> inspired by the Divine, while he has no hand in it, as Nwyia and Balqasim suggest. Nonetheless, if the Prophet was more than just a messenger who delivered Divine revelation, why should al-Niffari be any different? It is my opinion that al-Niffari is the speaking essence in the *Mawāqif* and that the voice of the Divine was one of his dialogic characters. And yet, he attempted to convince the reader with the opposite idea by using certain techniques that I will be analysing in the following section.

I concluded my previous proposition by comparing the dialogue in the *Mawāqif* with the analysis of Plato's dialogues<sup>181</sup> by Nikulin. The latter states that Plato used contemporary names

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<sup>179</sup> Examples of *wahy* to prophets through dreams can be found in the story of Abraham and Samuel and in the story of Joseph. In the first, Abraham tells his son that he saw himself slaughtering him in his dream and when Samuel surrenders to his father's vision, the Divine ransoms Samuel's life with a sacrifice. In the second, Joseph tells his father of a vision he had of eleven planets prostrating to him along with the sun and the moon. His dream came true at the end of his story in the Qur'an (Abu Zayd 2017, 51).

<sup>180</sup> I refer here to the story of the she-camel of Prophet Muhammad. When the Prophet first migrated to Madina, the people there competed to offer him hospitality to achieve the honour of being Prophet Muhammad's host. With appreciation and gratitude, the Prophet replied, however, he said: "I will entrust Qaswa (the Prophet's she-camel) with the decision as to who is going to be my host... Qaswa is under Allah's command; wherever she stops, I will stay" (Moon 2013, 211–212).

<sup>181</sup> Plato's dialogues are a collection of conversations between historical characters that discuss philosophical topics and were written in the fourth century BCE. The book represents the literary fashion of that time that is known as *Sokratikoi logoi* (Press 2007, 55–56).

and historical characters as his dialogical voices and that some were the fruit of his imagination (Nikulin 2010, 11). He proposes that the dialogical figures and actors are similar but that they both wear masks, despite the fact that Plato's masked figures belong to the persons who ask and answer. Nevertheless, Socrates' character was exceptional. Socrates was described as someone who knew the truth of things and yet had an elusive personality. This created a mask of irony and satire that concealed his goodness (ibid., 12). Nikulin urges that it is beyond the bound of possibility to determine how much of that oral speech was said by Socrates and how much was changed, added onto and corrected by Plato. Therefore, in Plato's dialogue, Socrates is a figure reminiscent of another Socrates who is still unreachable in his true otherness. Moreover, Socrates presents the aspect of dialect and dialogue in Plato's text because of his ability to construct a valid argument and abolish a false one (ibid., 13–14). According to Nikulin, Plato's dialogues are dramatic because questioning is not represented through an abstract of justification and proposition, rather they are dramatic because they represent questions via vivid characters (ibid., 17). Confirming this proposal from another perspective, in his first volume of a collection entitled *The Masks of God*, Campbell presents Thomas Mann's conception of the eye of the artist in primitive mythology during their religious festivals. Wearing a mask in the carnival initiates an opportunity of pretending, or as he calls it, "a game of as if," where the celebration erases the rules of time; the dead can return to life and the present becomes what has supposedly happened in the past. In this type of atmosphere, a God can be summoned in multiple places like music, or through the tradition of the mask, when it is perceived as a realistic phantom of the myth, despite the fact that the audience is aware that a man is wearing the mask. However, he who is wearing it identifies himself with God in the time of the ceremony not as a person merely representing God, but as being God Himself. Campbell anatomises this image into three layers: (a) the mask, (b) the mythical being reference of it and (c) a person who is disassociated from cognisance (Campbell 1960, 21). It is similar to a play where the

viewers accept the actors' for their experiences following the law of making them believe or "as if" (ibid., 22).

I find these analyses analogous with the case of al-Niffari and argue against Nwyia's idea that the *Mawāqif* were dictated to the mystic by Divine revelation. Why could he not be, like Plato, portraying the Divine as a dominating character in order to voice his philosophy? In opposition to Balqasim, who argued that it is the Absolute self divided into two essences, why could al-Niffari not be the one behind the mask, borrowing the Divine discourse to express his philosophy and set himself as a helpless character who only witnesses and observes the Divine's presence?

To support my suggestion, I examine the characteristics of the structure of al-Niffari's texts and the purpose of veiling himself behind the Divine image.

### **When the Divine asks, al-Niffari answers**

The first case study under examination is *Mawqif al-Mahḍar wa-l-Ḥarf*, (Mawqif of the Presence-Chamber and the Letter).<sup>182</sup> The text has three direct dialogues between al-Niffari and the Divine, where the Absolute asks and the Sufi answers. The first explores the entity of hell, the second questions the essence of heaven and the last inquires about the characteristics of the inhabitants in the inferno. However, before studying them closely, it is vital to review the context of the *mawqif*, as it is my belief that it is considerably relevant to the analysis.

From the title of the text, it can be sensed that the relation between its words is conditional, due to the fact that the presence of the One is conditioned by the absence of *ḥarf*. Moreover, the title alludes to transcendence; in order to reach the presence of the Divine the seeker must leave and let

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<sup>182</sup> Translation by Arberry (al-Niffari 1987, 111).

go of *siwā*. I argue that this tendency of passing echoes the notion of *mi'raj*<sup>183</sup> in the Islamic tradition, in other words, this text is a representation of ascension from the bottom of *ḥarf* to the space of the Divine. To explain this idea in detail, it is essential to mention the main source of the tradition, so as to illustrate the analogies between the principle in Islam and the *mawqif* under analysis. The detailed story was mentioned by the Prophet Muhammad – peace be upon him – in one of his *aḥadīth*, which was narrated by al-Bukhari. The hadith states:

Malik bin Sasaa said that Allah's Messenger described to them his Night Journey saying, "While I was lying in Al-Hatim or Al-Hijr, suddenly someone came to me and cut my body open from here to here." I asked Al-Jarud who was by my side, "What does he mean?" He said, "It means from his throat to his pubic area," or said, "From the top of the chest." The

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<sup>183</sup> *Mi'raj* is a word that initially assigns a ladder, and later, an ascension of Prophet Muhammad to heaven. The phenomena are believed to have occurred separately and at different times. *Isrā'* happened on the 17th of *Rabi'* the first (third month of the Islamic calendar) and *mi'raj* took place on the 17th of Ramadan (ninth month of the Islamic calendar). The first event designates the night journey of the Prophet from Mecca to Jerusalem. Gabriel awakened Muhammad in the night and asked him to ride the *Burāq*: the winged animal that would carry him to Jerusalem, where he met Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Muhammad, being the imam, prayed with them, which implied his seniority over the other prophets. However, there are different rituals surrounding *mi'raj*. According to the hadith, while the Prophet was resting, he was visited by Gabriel and Michael. They made him lay on his back and cut his body from his throat to below his abdomen. Then, in a vessel made of gold, they brought water from the well of Zamzam and bathed him with it so as to wash away the doubt, error, idolatry and paganism founded in his body and fill it with belief and wisdom instead – a metaphor that indicates heart purification. Thereupon, he was ascended to the first heaven. The hadith states that Muhammad went to seven heavens, in each one he met a prophet: John, Jesus, Joseph, Idris, Aaron, Moses and Abraham. Each greeted him and lifted him to the next heaven. He was then ascended to *sidrat al-muntahā*, a tree in the seventh heaven. Finally, Muhammad reached the Divine's throne and had the conversation of the prayer of obligation. At first, the Divine imposed fifty prayers a day for Muslims. The Prophet Moses advised Muhammad to ask the Divine to alleviate the number of prayers. Muhammad did so accordingly several times and each time, he was granted his request. However, when Moses asked him once again to decrease the number of prayers to less than five, Muhammad objected, for he was embarrassed to ask for more (Schrieke et al. 2020).

Prophet further said, "He then took out my heart. Then a gold tray of Belief was brought to me and my heart was washed and was filled (with Belief) and then returned to its original place. Then a white animal which was smaller than a mule and bigger than a donkey was brought to me." (On this Al-Jarud asked, "Was it the Buraq, O Abu Hamza?" I (i.e. Anas) replied in the affirmative). The Prophet said, "The animal's step (was so wide that it) reached the farthest point within the reach of the animal's sight. I was carried on it, and Gabriel set out with me till we reached the nearest heaven. When he asked for the gate to be opened, it was asked, 'Who is it?' Gabriel answered, 'Gabriel.' It was asked, 'Who is accompanying you?' Gabriel replied, 'Muhammad.' It was asked, 'Has Muhammad been called?' Gabriel replied in the affirmative. Then it was said, 'He is welcome. What an excellent visit his is!' The gate was opened, and when I went over the first heaven, I saw Adam there. Gabriel said (to me). 'This is your father, Adam; pay him your greetings.' So I greeted him and he returned the greeting to me and said, 'You are welcomed, O pious son and pious Prophet.' Then Gabriel ascended with me till we reached the second heaven. Gabriel asked for the gate to be opened. It was asked, 'Who is it?' Gabriel answered, 'Gabriel.' It was asked, 'Who is accompanying you?' Gabriel replied, 'Muhammad.' It was asked, 'Has he been called?' Gabriel answered in the affirmative. Then it was said, 'He is welcomed. What an excellent visit his is!' The gate was opened. When I went over the second heaven, there I saw Yahya (i.e. John) and `Isa (i.e. Jesus) who were cousins of each other. Gabriel said (to me), 'These are John and Jesus; pay them your greetings.' So I greeted them and both of them returned my greetings to me and said, 'You are welcomed, O pious brother and pious Prophet.' Then Gabriel ascended with me to the third heaven and asked for its gate to be opened. It was asked, 'Who is it?' Gabriel replied, 'Gabriel.' It was asked, 'Who is accompanying you?' Gabriel replied, 'Muhammad.' It was asked, 'Has he been called?' Gabriel replied in the affirmative. Then it was said, 'He is welcomed, what an

excellent visit his is!' The gate was opened, and when I went over the third heaven there I saw Joseph. Gabriel said (to me), 'This is Joseph; pay him your greetings.' So I greeted him and he returned the greeting to me and said, 'You are welcomed, O pious brother and pious Prophet.' Then Gabriel ascended with me to the fourth heaven and asked for its gate to be opened. It was asked, 'Who is it?' Gabriel replied, 'Gabriel.' It was asked, 'Who is accompanying you?' Gabriel replied, 'Muhammad.' It was asked, 'Has he been called?' Gabriel replied in the affirmative. Then it was said, 'He is welcomed, what an excellent visit his is!' The gate was opened, and when I went over the fourth heaven, there I saw Idris. Gabriel said (to me), 'This is Idris; pay him your greetings.' So I greeted him and he returned the greeting to me and said, 'You are welcomed, O pious brother and pious Prophet.' Then Gabriel ascended with me to the fifth heaven and asked for its gate to be opened. It was asked, 'Who is it?' Gabriel replied, 'Gabriel.' It was asked, 'Who is accompanying you?' Gabriel replied, 'Muhammad.' It was asked, 'Has he been called?' Gabriel replied in the affirmative. Then it was said, 'He is welcomed, what an excellent visit his is!' So when I went over the fifth heaven, there I saw Harun (i.e. Aaron), Gabriel said, (to me). 'This is Aaron; pay him your greetings.' I greeted him and he returned the greeting to me and said, 'You are welcomed, O pious brother and pious Prophet.' Then Gabriel ascended with me to the sixth heaven and asked for its gate to be opened. It was asked, 'Who is it?' Gabriel replied, 'Gabriel.' It was asked, 'Who is accompanying you?' Gabriel replied, 'Muhammad.' It was asked, 'Has he been called?' Gabriel replied in the affirmative. It was said, 'He is welcomed. What an excellent visit his is!' When I went (over the sixth heaven), there I saw Moses. Gabriel said (to me), 'This is Moses; pay him your greeting. So I greeted him and he returned the greetings to me and said, 'You are welcomed, O pious brother and pious Prophet.' When I left him (i.e. Moses) he wept. Someone asked him, 'What makes you weep?' Moses said, 'I weep because after me there has been sent (as

Prophet) a young man whose followers will enter Paradise in greater numbers than my followers.' Then Gabriel ascended with me to the seventh heaven and asked for its gate to be opened. It was asked, 'Who is it?' Gabriel replied, 'Gabriel.' It was asked, 'Who is accompanying you?' Gabriel replied, 'Muhammad.' It was asked, 'Has he been called?' Gabriel replied in the affirmative. Then it was said, 'He is welcomed. What an excellent visit his is!' So when I went (over the seventh heaven), there I saw Abraham. Gabriel said (to me), 'This is your father; pay your greetings to him.' So I greeted him and he returned the greetings to me and said, 'You are welcomed, O pious son and pious Prophet.' Then I was made to ascend to Sidrat-ul-Muntaha (i.e. the Lote Tree of the utmost boundary) Behold! Its fruits were like the jars of Hajr (i.e. a place near Medina) and its leaves were as big as the ears of elephants. Gabriel said, 'This is the Lote Tree of the utmost boundary). Behold! There ran four rivers, two were hidden and two were visible, I asked, 'What are these two kinds of rivers, O Gabriel?' He replied, 'As for the hidden rivers, they are two rivers in Paradise and the visible rivers are the Nile and the Euphrates.' Then Al-Bait-ul-Ma'mur (i.e. the Sacred House) was shown to me and a container full of wine and another full of milk and a third full of honey were brought to me. I took the milk. Gabriel remarked, 'This is the Islamic religion which you and your followers are following.' Then the prayers were enjoined on me: They were fifty prayers a day. When I returned, I passed by Moses who asked (me), 'What have you been ordered to do?' I replied, 'I have been ordered to offer fifty prayers a day.' Moses said, 'Your followers cannot bear fifty prayers a day, and by Allah, I have tested people before you, and I have tried my level best with Bani Israel (in vain). Go back to your Lord and ask for reduction to lessen your followers' burden.' So I went back, and Allah reduced ten prayers for me. Then again I came to Moses, but he repeated the same as he had said before. Then again I went back to Allah and He reduced ten more prayers. When I came back to Moses he said the same, I went back to Allah and

He ordered me to observe ten prayers a day. When I came back to Moses, he repeated the same advice, so I went back to Allah and was ordered to observe five prayers a day. When I came back to Moses, he said, 'What have you been ordered?' I replied, 'I have been ordered to observe five prayers a day.' He said, 'Your followers cannot bear five prayers a day, and no doubt, I have got an experience of the people before you, and I have tried my level best with Bani Israel, so go back to your Lord and ask for reduction to lessen your followers' burden.' I said, 'I have requested so much of my Lord that I feel ashamed, but I am satisfied now and surrender to Allah's Order.' When I left, I heard a voice saying, 'I have passed My Order and have lessened the burden of My Worshipers'."

(al-Bukhari, as cited in Azad 1983, 65–69)

The story narrated by the Prophet includes several themes: transcending from one sky to the one above it, from an older prophet – chronologically – to a modern messenger and most crucially, from his own mortal heart to the gold of belief. The second theme is differentiation: the event of Moses crying due to the fact that Muhammad was sent after him and more members of his nation will be in heaven than Moses'. The third theme is witnessing the signs of the Divine: the description of *sidrat al-muntahā* (a tree in the seventh heaven) and the rivers. Finally, the proclamation of the obligation of prayer and mediating between Muslims and the Divine to reduce the number of prayers from fifty to five.

I maintain that these themes intersect with several concepts in al-Niffari's text. For instance, the theme of transcending is clearly demonstrated in this verse of his:

"وقال لي: الخارجون عن أنفسهم هم الخارجون عن الحرف"

(al-Niffari, as cited in al-Ghanmi 2007, 165), (and he said to me: those that depart from themselves are those that depart from letter [al-Niffari 1987, 114]).

The ascension happened to Prophet Muhammad because he was purified from the mortal state and transcended to the higher state to be prepared and able to receive the Divine revelation. Similarly, al-Niffari is required to elevate from the stage of *ḥarf* and to achieve this, he has to surpass his own self, for he who is capable of going beyond himself, his own *ḥarf* and own *siwā*, is the one who will be able to obtain the Divine light and this can only happen via *ru'ya*. The similarity here is not only limited to the nature of transition but also to other Muslim scholars regarding Prophet Muhammad's *mi'rāj*. Azad confirms that the majority of Muslim scholars believe that the ascension of the Prophet was a bodily one. Whereas others argue that it was a dream or a vision while Muhammad was awake. Their evidence was based on the Qur'anic verse that states:

”وما جعلنا الرؤيا التي أريناك إلا فتنة للناس“ (Qur'an 17: 60)

(and we made the vision that We showed thee... to be only a trial for men [Arbery 1996, 309]). Since the meaning of *ru'yā* in Arabic is a dream that contains a vision, it follows that the *mi'rāj* of the Prophet would not be a bodily one (Azad 1983, 63). Therefore, this *mawqif* could be considered as ascension assuming the dialogue occurred in *ru'ya*. As the Prophet rises from one sky to a higher one, from one prophet to another, al-Niffari experiences a similar elevation, however, it transfers him from one stage to another, for example:

وقال لي: اخرج من العلم تخرج من الجهل، و اخرج من العمل تخرج من المحاسبة، و اخرج من الإخلاص تخرج من الشرك، و اخرج من الاتحاد إلى الواحد، و اخرج من الوحدة تخرج من الوحشة، و اخرج من الذكر تخرج من الغفلة، و اخرج من الشكر تخرج من الكفر.

(al-Niffari, as cited in al-Ghanmi 2007, 165)

And he said to me: Depart from theory, and thou wilt depart from ignorance. Depart from practice, and thou wilt depart from reckoning. Depart from sincerity, and thou wilt depart from polytheism. Depart from unity, unto the one. Depart from oneness, and thou wilt

depart from estrangement. Depart from recollection, and thou wilt depart from forgetfulness. Depart from gratitude, and thou wilt depart from ingratitude.

(al-Niffari 1987, 114)

Moving on with the themes' intersection, the differentiation expressed by Moses in the original story is significantly reflected in the *mawqif* under discussion. The Divine says to al-Niffari:

"وقال لي: المحضر خاص ولكل خاص عام" (al-Niffari, as cited in al-Ghanmi 2007, 164)

(and he said to me: presence is elect: and every elect thing has a general aspect [al-Niffari 1987, 113]). In his commentary on this *mawqif*, al-Tilimsani states that al-Niffari was distinctively selected to witness the presence of the Divine. Therefore others are lacking compared to him (al-Tilimsani 1997, 485). However, the previous phrase holds an indication of generalisation. Therefore, a few lines later, this prestige is clearly and particularly bestowed upon al-Niffari by addressing the discourse directly to him using the second person pronoun:

"وقال لي: أجللتك فاستخلفتك، وعظمتك فاستعبدتك، وكرمتك فعاينتك، وأحبتك فابتليتك"

(al-Niffari, as cited in al-Ghanmi 2007, 167), (and he said to me: I have magnified thee and made thee lieutenant, exalted thee and made thee servant, favoured thee and seen thee face to face, loved thee and afflicted thee [al-Niffari 1987, 11]).

Al-Tilimsani explains this verse by stating that *khilāfa* (succession or governorship) was the prerogative of humans to practice on earth. Moreover, in this instance, *‘azama* (exaltedness) happened due to servitude and *mu‘āyana* (seeing) refers to the event of *ru‘ya*. On the other hand, affliction in this case is a milestone sign of differentiation, for the commenter confirms that it is an indication of *maḥabba*, or love. He states that the Beloved examines the lover because He cares for him and caring implies loving (al-Tilimsani 1997, 493). In regard to the third theme, during his ascension, Prophet Muhammad witnessed the signs of the Divine: the rivers and the holy tree. In the *mawqif* under study, al-Niffari experiences witnessing the Absolute's signs but in this case, the signs

are not visible things the eyes can see, they are topics and meanings that the Divine questions al-Niffari about and explains the hierarchy of the classes of the inhabitants to him. The signs in this text are akin to heaven and hell. And so, reading this *mawqif* as a journey of ascension provides us with a new approach of examination and corroborates my suggestion that al-Niffari's text is echoing prophecy.

To analyse the dialogues closely, I prefer to examine them integrally because they have a similar structure and compact differences that I will point out later. I opted for speech act theory as a method of analysis, based on the model used by Beatrice Gruendler in her book *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry*, where she combines speech act theory with dramatic discourse, an approach which I feel is the most convenient to explore these dialogues. I am however not following the exact method used by Gruendler due to the difference in genres between praise poetry and the *mawāqif* and the focus of the analysis; her examination concentrates on the persona of the patron and the speaker, whereas this analysis concentrates on the implicature of expression engaging other theory; Spirituality and power by Foucault.

What follows are the three dialogues in *Mawqif al-Mahḍar wa-l-Ḥarf* :

وقال لي: ما النار؟ قلت نور من أنوار السطوة، قال: ما السطوة؟ قلت: وصف من أوصاف العزة، قال: ما العزة؟ قلت: وصف من أوصاف الجبروت، قال: ما الجبروت؟ قلت وصف من أوصاف الكبرياء، قال: ما الكبرياء؟ قلت: وصف من أوصاف السلطان، قال: ما السلطان، قلت: وصف من أوصاف العظمة، قال: ما العظمة؟ قلت وصف من أوصاف الذات، قال ما الذات؟ قلت: أنت الله لا إله إلا أنت، قال: قلت الحق، قلت: أنت قولتني، قال: لترى بينتي.

(al-Niffari, as cited in al-Ghanmi 2007, 165)

And he said to me: What is the Fire? I answered: One of the lights of onslaught. He said: What is onslaught? I answered: One of the qualities of might. He said: What is might? I answered: One of the qualities of majesty. He said: What is majesty? I answered: One of the

qualities of greatness. He said: What is greatness? I answered: One of the qualities of authority. He said: What is authority? I answered: One of the qualities of power. He said: What is power? I answered: One of the qualities of essence. He said: What is essence? I answered: Thyself, O God; there is no God beside thee. He said: Thou hast spoken the truth. I answered: It is Thou that didst make me to speak. He said: That thou mayest see my clear evidence. (al-Niffari 1987, 114)

وقال لي: ما الجنة؟ قلت: وصف من أوصاف التنعيم، قال: ما التنعيم؟ قلت وصف من أوصاف اللطف، قال: ما اللطف؟ قلت: وصف من أوصاف الرحمة، قال: ما الرحمة؟ قلت: وصف من أوصاف الكرم، قال: ما الكرم؟ قلت: وصف من أوصاف العطف، قال: ما العطف؟ قلت: وصف من أوصاف الود، قال ما الود؟ قلت وصف من أوصاف الحب، قال: ما الحب؟ قلت: وصف من أوصاف الرضا، قال: ما الرضا؟ قلت: وصف من أوصاف الاصطفاء، قال: ما الاصطفاء؟ قلت: وصف من أوصاف النظر، قال: ما النظر؟ قلت: وصف من أوصاف الذات، قال: ما الذات؟ قلت أنت الله، قال: قلت الحق، قلت: أنت قولتني، قال: لترى نعمتي.

(al-Niffari, as cited in al-Ghanmi 2007, 166)

And he said to me: What is Paradise? I answered: One of the qualities of blessing. He said: What is blessing? I answered: One of the qualities of kindness. He said: What is kindness? I answered: One of the qualities of mercy. He said: What is mercy? I answered: One of the qualities of generosity. He said: What is generosity? I answered: One of the qualities of sympathy. He said: What is sympathy? I answered: One of the qualities of love. He said: What is love? I answered: One of the qualities of friendship. He said: What is friendship? I answered: One of the qualities of approval. He said: What is approval? I answered: One of the qualities of election. He said: What is election? I answered: One of the qualities of regard. He said: What is regard? I answered: One of the qualities of essence.

He said: What is essence? I answered: Thyself, o God. He said: Thou hast spoken the truth. I answered: It is Thou that didst make me to speak. He said: That thou mayest see my kindness. (al-Niffari 1987, 115)

وقال لي: من أهل النار؟ قلت: أهل الحرف الظاهر، قال من أهل الجنة؟ قلت: أهل الحرف الباطن، قال: ما الحرف الظاهر؟ قلت: علم لا يهدي إلى عمل، قال: ما الحرف الباطن؟ قلت: علم يهدي إلى الحقيقة، قال: ما العمل؟ قلت: الإخلاص، قال لي: ما الحقيقة؟ قلت: ما تعرّفَ به، قال لي: ما الإخلاص؟ قلتُ: لوجهك، قال: ما التعرف؟ قلت: ما تلقّيه في قلوب أوليائك. (al-Niffari, as cited in al-Ghanmi 2007, 167)

And he said to me: Who are the people of the Fire? I answered: The people of the letter manifest. He said: Who are the people of Paradise? I answered: The letter concealed. He said to me: What is the letter manifest? I answered: Theory that guides not unto practice. He said: What is the letter concealed? I answered: Theory that guides to reality. He said to me: What is practice? I answered: Sincerity. He said to me: What is reality? I answered: That whereby Thou makest Thyself known. He said to me: What is sincerity? I answered: To thy face. He said: What is self-revelation? I answered: What thou castest into the hearts of thy saints. (al-Niffari 1987, 115–116)

My opinion and suggestion is that these scenes are dramatic on account of the dramaturgical aspects contained in them (the personas, dialogues and actions). Building on this, I have borrowed Gruendler's method of schematising the dialogues (figure 1) because I find her method to be the simplest for readers to follow, as it clearly lays out the different aspects of the dialogue, making it easier to see and understand the links between the structure, uttered sentences and illocutionary act each performs. Having said this, I have used my own schematising criteria because, as already mentioned, the *mawāqif* are significantly divergent from praise poetry.

Figure 1

A: The Divine		B: al-Niffari	
steps	Structure	Phrase	Illocutionary act
1	B introduces A in third person pronoun	<i>Qāla</i> (he said)	Assertive (statement)
2	A questions B by addressing a direct question to B	<i>Ma al-nār</i> (what is the fire)	Interrogative (question)
3	B introduces B in first person pronoun	<i>Qultu</i> (I said)	Assertive (statement)
4	B answers the question	<i>Nūrun min</i> (One of the lights)	Assertive (statement)
Steps 1 to 4 keep repeating themselves until the Divine asks: <i>mā al-dhāt?</i> (what is essence)			
5	B answers the question in first person	<i>Qultu</i> (I said)	Assertive (statement)
6	B addresses A in second person pronoun	<i>Anta Allāh</i> (Thyself, O God)	Assertive (statement)
7	B negates all Gods but A by addressing A in second person	<i>Lā 'ilāha 'illā Ant</i> (there is no God beside thee)	Assertive (statement)
8	B introduces A in third person pronoun	<i>Qāla</i> (he said)	Assertive (statement)
9	A addresses B in second person pronoun	<i>Qulta al-ḥaqq</i> (thou hast spoken the truth)	Assertive (statement)
10	B introduces B in first person pronoun	<i>Qultu</i> (I said)	Assertive (statement)
11	B addresses A in second person pronoun	<i>Anta qawwaltanī</i> (It is Thou that didst make me to speak)	Assertive (statement)
12	A addresses B in second person pronoun	<i>Litarā</i> (That thou mayest see)	Declarative (reason)
13	A addresses A in first person pronoun	<i>Bayyinatī</i> (evidence) <i>Ni 'matī</i> (blessings)	Assertive (statement)
14	B addresses A in second person pronoun.	<i>Awliyā 'ik</i> (thy saints)	Assertive (statement)
15	B addresses B in third person pronoun	<i>Fī qulūbi awliyā 'ik</i> (into the hearts of thy saints)	Assertive (statement)

I argue that the action in the scenes occurs through speech, the conversation itself being dyadic and dynamic. This creates an effect that stimulates vividness and constitutes the scene. The structure of the dialogue provides three types of speech acts: assertive, declarative and interrogative. Despite the fact that these acts are locutionary, their influence is perlocutionary because the repetition of questions and answers generates more questions and thereby more answers until concluding that the Divine is the source of all speech, questions and answers. In the three dialogues, al-Niffari appears as a witness who narrates the words of the Divine to the reader.

When he speaks of Him, it provides the impression that the Absolute is absent, which is what *'iltifāt* (grammatical shift) is dedicated to in the texts. Thus, the witness controls most of the narratives in the dialogue, since we are reading it from his standpoint. To expand on this further, it is vital to explore the usage of *iltifāt* in the texts. *Iltifāt* literally means "to turn one's face to" or "to turn" (Abdel Haleem 1992, 409). This indication is clearly exemplified in this poetic verse:

وتَلَفَّتْ عَيْنِي فَمُدَّ خَفِيْتُ

عَنِّي الطَّلُوبُ، تَلَفَّتْ الْقَلْبُ.

(al-Sharif al-Radi, as cited in Ibrahim 2002, 70)

My eye turned to the remains of (my beloved's) encampment; when they passed out of sight, my heart turned to them.

(Abdel Haleem 1992, 409)

The notion then developed as a rhetorical expression that elucidated the speaker's departure from addressing to narrating or vice versa (ibid.). There are several reasons for using *iltifāt* in writing: to avoid frustrating the reader, to keep the listener fresh and captivated and to change the

speech from one mode to another (al-Zarkashi, as cited in Abdel Haleem 1992, 410). There are likewise various types of *iltifāt*, which can be used for the reasons detailed below:

- 1- Converting pronouns between the first, second and third person
- 2- Shifting from plural to singular and vice versa
- 3- Changing addressee
- 4- Changing case markers
- 5- Converting the verb's tense
- 6- Writing a noun instead of a pronoun

(Abdel Haleem 1992, 411).

For his part, al-Niffari uses three types: the first, third and sixth ones. At this stage, it is important to mention some examples of *iltifāt* that are used in the Qur'an, which Abdel Haleem mentions in the article in order to compare their uses with the ones in the *mawāqif*. One of the examples is the verse that states:

أم من خلق السماوات والأرض وأنزل لكم من السماء ماء فأنبئنا حدائق ذات بهجة ما كان لكم أن تنبتوا شجرها، أ إله مع الله. (Qur'an 27: 20)

Is He not the one Who has created the heavens and the Earth and sent down for you water from the sky, through which we have caused to grow gardens full of beauty whose trees you could not grow? Is there a God in addition to God? (Jones 2007, 617)<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> I would like to add the following additional translation by Abdel Haleem, which I believe is also worth mentioning: "Who created the heavens and earth? Who sent down water from the sky for you - with which We cause gardens of delight to grow: you have no power to make the trees grow in them - is it another God beside God?" (Abdel Haleem 2005, 242)

Abdel Haleem asserts that the shift in pronouns occurred here by virtue of the concept emphasised in the phrase, which is the exalted power of creation that is aesthetic and exclusive to the almighty Divine. Changing from the third person singular pronoun to the first person plural pronoun indicates reserving the power of the growth foundation to Himself. Hence, providing a heavier weight to the grammatical forms than they usually convey (Abdel Haleem 1992, 413). He points out that this tendency appears in the Qur'an in sentences that speak of the presence of God, mentioning water and the Divine's majesty and punishment (ibid., 413). In contrast, the grammatical shift in the previous dialogues does not occur in plural form when the Divine addresses Himself but appears in singular form only. The only position where the plural form is adhered to is when al-Niffari addresses himself passively in the third conversation. This was not to demonstrate himself as powerful, rather to illustrate himself passively to show humility, which I suggest opposes the meaning that the statement could indicate.

Moreover, the majority of the speech is controlled by the narration of al-Niffari speaking of the Divine as the witness of an absent entity. This is approved by the repetition of *qāla* (he said), which refers exclusively to the Absolute. Whereas when al-Niffari speaks of himself, he uses the first person pronoun *qultu* (I said), to indicate his presence. The only places where the writer uses the first person pronoun are at the end of the first and second dialogues, when the Divine declares the wisdom behind teaching al-Niffari the answers to His questions. The Divine justifies enriching him with knowledge so that he may see His evidence and blessings. I suggest that these statements are attempts to delude the reader that al-Niffari is helpless and only with the privilege of the Absolute inducing the knowledge to him, was he able to know the answers.

On the other hand, the technique changes in the third conversation, when for the first time al-Niffari speaks of himself passively by using the plural noun *awliyā'ik* (your saints), to appear with more modesty by incarnating a group of many whom the Divine selected to cherish His secret. Moreover, Benveniste highlights the difference between "I" and "he" by stating that the first and

second person pronouns represent "true" persons, whereas the third pronoun denotes a "non-person," something which is considered to be an exclusion from the language's intersubjectivity. He maintains that when a person says "I swear," the utterance of the phrase indicates the engagement between me and the act, which binds the ego and does not describe the accomplished deed. Thereby, the ramification of the promise does not appear in the verb's meaning, but emphasises the subjectivity of the speech that will make it possible. The "I" implies commitment, however, using "he" instead would only be a description that excludes what "I" represents (Benveniste, as cited in Gruendler 2002, 74).

From the usage of pronouns and the exclusivity of attributing the first and second pronouns to al-Niffari, I suggest that here is where what Gruendler calls "the co-operative principle"<sup>185</sup> adheres. I believe that the indirect meaning in this case is the "agent-self revelation," a concept that indicates revealing some factors of knowledge from the Divine. Wolterstoff explains this by using the example of someone who is forced to reveal a treasure's location under torture. The person could not be the one who hid the treasure, which would negate the fact that he was an agent. However, when a person knows the location, it means that the site belongs to an item of his knowledge and this connects him to the agent who revealed this information to him (Wolterstoff 1995, 27). If we were to compare, we would observe that the dialogue reveals to us that al-Niffari does not only know the answer to all questions, but he also obtains the sufficient knowledge to respond with the right answer. We know that his answer is the right one because of the Divine's confirmation to him through the utterance "*qulta al-haqq*" (thou hast spoken the truth). Moreover, we are informed of his special position when he says: "*'anta qawaltanī*" (it is Thou that didst make me to speak). My suggestion here is that the implicature of the dialogue expresses al-Niffari's claim of obtaining the excellence of communicating with the Divine, which enables him to speak to and answer Him, for

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<sup>185</sup> "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice, as cited in Gruendler 2002, 29).

he has a significant type of knowledge which he gained esoterically and which empowers him. This could be confirmed through the third part of the dialogue, when he answers the Divine's question about the inhabitants of heaven by referring to them as "the people of the letter concealed," one of whom we implicitly perceive al-Niffari to be. The final statement comes to confirm this premise, as I suggest, and to explain the nature of receiving the following revelation: "What thou castest into the hearts of thy saints."

### *Mawqif al-Islam*

The Second *Mawqif* under study is *Mawqif of Resignation*.<sup>186</sup> In this *mawqif*, the roles are exchanged. Al-Niffari becomes the interlocutor who asks and the Divine is the answerer. The *mawqif* is as follows:

قال: لا تعارضني برأيك ولا تطلب على حقي عليك دليلاً من قبل نفسك فإن نفسك لا تدلك على حقي أبداً ولا تلنترم حقي طوعاً، قلت: كيف لا أعارض، قال تتبع ولا تتبدع، قلت كيف لا أطلب على حقي دليلاً من قبل نفسي، قال: إذا قلت لك إن هذا لك تقول هذا لي وإذا قلت لك هذا لي تقول إن هذا لك فيكون أمري لك هو مخاطبك وهو المستحق عليك وهو دليلك فتستدل به عليه وتصل به إليه، قلت: فكيف أتبع، قال: تسمع قولي وتسلق طريقي، قلت: كيف لا أبتدع، قال: لا تسمع قولك ولا تسلك طريقك، قلت: ما قولك، قال: كلامي، قلت: أين طريقك، قال أحكامي، قلت: ما قولي، قال: تحريك، قلت ما طريقي، قال: تحمك، قلت: ما تحمكي، قال: قياسك، قلت: ما قياسي، قال عجزك في علمك، قلت كيف أعجز في علمي، قال إنني ابتليتك في كل شيء مني إليك بشيء منك إلي فابتليتك في علمي بعلمك لأنظر أ تتبع علمك أو علمي وابتليتك في حكمي بحمك لأنظر أتحكم بحمك أو بحكمي، قلت: كيف أتبع علمي وكيف أعمل بحكمي، قال: تنصرف عن الحكم بعلمي إلى الحكم بعلمك، قلت: كيف أنصرف عن الحكم بعلمك إلى الحكم بعلمي، قال: تحل بكلامك ما حرمة بكلامي وتحرم بكلامك ما حلته بكلامي وتدعي علي أن ذلك بإذني وتدعي علي أن ذلك عن أمري، قلت: كيف أدعي عليك، قال: تأتي بفعل لم أمرك به فتحمك له بحكمي في فعل أمرك به وتأتي بقول لم أمرك به فتحمك له بحكمي في قول أمرك به، قلت: لا آتي بفعل لم تأمرني به ولا آتي بقول لم تأمرني به، قال: إن أتيت به كما أمرتك فقولي وفعلي وبقولي وفعلي يقع

<sup>186</sup> Translated by Arberry 1987, 127.

حكيمي وإن أتيت به كما لم أمرك به فقولك وفعلك وبقولك وفعلك لا يقع حكيمي ولا يكون ديني وحدودي. وقال لي: إن سويت بين قولي وقولك أو سويت بين حكيمي وحكمك فقد عدلت في نفسك، قلت: لا حكم إلا لقولك وفعلك، قال: فقتهت؟ قلت: فقتهت، قال: لا تمل، قلت: لا أميل، قال: من فقه أمرى فقد فقهه ومن فقه رأي نفسه فما فقه.

(al-Niffari 2007, 182–183)

It is this, that thou shouldst resign to Me that which I decree for thee, and that which I decree against thee. I said: How shall I resign to Thee? He answered: Do not oppose Me with thy opinion, and do not seek any guide for my right over thee of thyself; for thyself will never guide thee to my right, nor will it embrace my right in obedience. I said: How shall I not oppose thee? He answered: Thou wilt follow, and not invent. I said: How shall I not seek any guide for thy right of myself? He answered: When I say to thee, "This is thine," thou wilt say "This is mine;" and when I say to thee, "This is mine," thou wilt say, "This is thine." Then will my command be thy addresser, and will have a right over thee: it will guide thee, and thou wilt seek guidance of it unto it, and by means of it attain to it. I said: How shall I follow? He answered: Thou wilt hear my word and tread my way. I said: How shall I not invent? He answered: Thou wilt not hear thy word nor tread thy way. I said: What is thy word? He answered: My doctrine. I said: Where is thy way? He answered: My ordinances. I said: What is my word? He answered: Thy bewilderment. I said: What is my way? He answered: Following thy own judgement. I said: What is following my own judgement? He answered: Thy analogy. I said: What is my analogy? He answered: Thy incapacity in thy theology. I said: How should I lack capacity in my theology? He answered: I have made trial of thee in everything that proceeds from Me to thee, by means of something that proceeds from thee to Me. I have tried thee in my theology by means of thy theology, that I might see whether thou followest thy theology or mine: and I have tried thee in my ordinance by means of thy ordinance, that I might see whether thou judgest by

my ordinance or thine. I said: How should I follow my theology, and how should I act according to my ordinance? He answered: Thou departest from the ordinance concerning my theology, to the ordinance concerning thine. I said: How do I depart from the ordinance concerning my theology, to the ordinance concerning thine? He answered: Thou makest lawful by thy doctrine what I have made unlawful by mine, and thou makest unlawful by thy doctrine what I have made lawful by mine: and thou claimest that that is by my leave, and that that proceeds from my command. I said: How do I make claim of thee? He answered: Thou comest with an act which I have never commanded thee, and makest judgement for it by my ordinance concerning an act which I did command thee: and thou comest with a word which I have never commanded thee, and makest judgement for it by my ordinance concerning a word which I did command thee. I said: I will not come with an act which Thou hast not commanded me, and I will not come with a word which Thou hast not commanded me. He said: If thou comest with it as I have commanded thee, it is my word and my act: and by my word and my act falls my ordinance. But if thou comest with it as I did not command thee, then it is thy word and thy act: and by thy word and thy act falls not my ordinance, nor do my religion and my commandments thereby live. If thou equatest my word and thy word, or if thou equatest my ordinance and thy ordinance, thou hast made thyself equal with Me. I said: There is no ordinance, save as belonging to thy word and thy act. He said: Thou hast understood. I said: I have understood. He said: Incline not. I said: I will not incline. He said: Whoso has understood my command, he has truly understood: but whoso understands the opinion of himself, he has not understood.

(al-Niffari 1987 127–129)

This text discusses Islam in the meaning of surrender, when the self hands over itself to The Higher Self. This summarises the true meaning of Islam, which is acquiring the true meaning of the self, based on the principle that states:

"من عرف نفسه، عرف ربه" (Ibn 'Arabi 2015, 3)

(He who knows himself, knows his Master). The key to understanding this *mawqif* is to start from its end; a self cannot obtain a judgment, if it cannot obtain the Creator's matter that only He can offer. In other words, man (meaning a human being) cannot reach a complete knowledge of any thing if he cannot acquire complete knowledge from the Divine. This intersects with the Sufi principle that Abu al-Hasan once stated to Abu al-'Abbas:

"ما صحبتك إلا لتكون أنت أنا وأنا أنت"

(al-Sikandari 2017, 184), (I did not accompany you, unless you became me and I became you).

In this sequence, al-Niffari appears as a student learning from his master to loyally demonstrate his obedience to the Almighty. In this text, I shall engage neither speech act theory nor *Itifāt*, since in this instance al-Niffari is illustrated as a man who does not know and asks the Divine about the path to obey Him. However, I argue that despite the tone of submission, the knowledge of the Divine matter that the mystic here seeks and receives from the source of all power, is not weak but is in actual fact powerful. Spirituality and searching for the truth to reach the knowledge of the Divine indicates "caring of the self," a term which indicates spirituality to Foucault and which he believes was one of the counter methods used to revolt against the Christian pastoral power in the Middle Ages (Foucault 2007, 208). According to him, it is a form of spirituality which aims to gain access to the truth through the experience, search and practices that cause the vital transformation for the mystic to do so. These practices include certain processes, such as purification, not in order to obtain knowledge but to pay the price for meeting the Divine. He maintains that spirituality has three characteristics. Firstly, that the spiritual path does not provide the mystic with truth, nor does it believe in the capability of the seeker to handle the truth, therefore, he or she needs to pass

through a road of transformation and change in order to have the right of accessing the truth and only in this way could they reach enlightenment. Secondly, it is vital to emphasise that these practices are performed by the self on the self; all these transformations are accomplished by a self in control of its own changes. Thirdly, when the "rebound" occurs between the mystic and the truth, the seeker becomes enlightened as a reward for accomplishing the act of knowledge (Foucault 2005, 15–16).

From Foucault's point of view, *ascesis*<sup>187</sup> is a type of "close combat" that an individual has with his own self that banishes any presence of someone else. It progressively grows in difficulty, starting with the easiest and escalating to the more difficult until it reaches ultimate suffering. This is inflicted by the subject on his own self in order to motivate himself to overcome it (Foucault 2007, 205). This image of internal challenge enables the mystic to reach a stage of mastery over his own sufferings, himself and his body, which defuses the ability of anything to disturb him (ibid., 206). Comparing it to Christianity, Foucault believes that spirituality directs the self towards humility, whereas religion emphasises obedience. He states that asceticism can be used via certain theologies as a tool against the structures of power (ibid., 207). Consequently, the self-mastery aspect is one of the reasons why Foucault sees spirituality as a rebellious counter against the system of authority. The second would be the tendency of individualism. Groups who oppose the Church and do not believe in the Christ see Rome, the centre of the church, as having a pastor who lives in a situation of sin, meaning that they question whether the pastor's power is distinguished from his ethical personality, one that reflects his internal behaviour in life. Foucault believes that this is an issue that affects the system of merits and faults (ibid., 208). There is a system of truth that is developed by the pastoral power through teaching individuals and examining them, whereby truth is

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<sup>187</sup> "(From Greek *askeō*: 'to exercise,' or 'to train'), the practice of the denial of physical or psychological desires in order to attain a spiritual ideal or goal. Hardly any religion has been without at least traces or some features of asceticism" (Britannica 2013).

being passed as a dogma to all believers. This truth is like a secret that lies deep in their souls and which is extracted from all of them. On the contrary, mysticism has a different approach to visibility. The soul has the ability to see itself without the need to offer itself to be examined by others through a confession system. In the mystical path "the soul sees itself in God and sees God in itself" and this is the reason why Foucault believes that mysticism avoids examination. In addition, the Divine's immediate revelation to the soul indicates that the teaching structure of passing on truth from one person to another does not apply to mysticism and therefore, the process of circulating the teaching of the truth is abbreviated. Despite the fact that mysticism is based on teaching, its progress differs; teaching usually follows a path from ignorance to knowledge through certain stages, however, mysticism is transferred via a "play of alternations" that indicates dualism, such as presence and absence, darkness and light and so on that is in continuous reversal. What is more, mysticism contains a sort of equivocation, since illumination occurs in secret and could blind, and ignorance might actually be knowing and vice versa (ibid., 212). In contradiction, in the pastoral system, the pastor's guidance of the individual's soul is vital and communication between the Divine and the soul is impossible without the control of the pastor, since he is the channel between the soul and the Divine, whereas mysticism enables the individual to instantly communicate with the Divine through a form of dialogue between mortals and the Absolute. The soul witnesses the Divine's presence through immediate inspiration and the communication between them might occur in complete silence, accompanied by the physical feeling experienced by the mystic, which makes him realise the presence of Christ in his body, this is what distances the mystical path from the pastoral, as emphasised by Foucault. Another aspect of mystical empowerment Foucault highlights is the dominance over the scriptures. He maintains that the pastoral system treats the scriptures as an exclusive book that can only be taught by pastors because ordinary readers are not capable enough to read it for themselves. In stark contrast, mysticism considers reading to be a spiritual act that assigns the soul to witness the presence of the Divine's word, which will lead to inner

illumination. When the faithful are exposed to the Divine's word, they will be able to understand and receive what God wishes to reveal to his worshippers (ibid., 213). Foucault mentions that his examination of the pastoral power and mysticism was an attempt to touch on the background and the inner depths of governmentality<sup>188</sup> (ibid., 215).

Despite the fact the French philosopher's examination focused on the power conflict between the Christian church and mysticism, I argue that his points are significantly relevant to al-Niffari's text. As I mentioned earlier, al-Niffari stresses the importance of liberating the soul from *siwā*, a term he uses to indicate otherness including himself and which, once purified from, could allow him to attain *ru'ya*. I suggest that pastoral power could be the equivalent of *siwā* and what Foucault calls spirituality can be applied to al-Niffari's theology. Moreover, what he calls a "close combat" with the self by itself can be integrated with al-Niffari's ascension from *'ilm* to *ma'rifa*, then to *ru'ya* and *waqfa*. Therefore, based on Foucault's explanation that the point when the mystic overcomes his own challenges indicates that he has reached a level where nothing can disturb him, which I believe can be referred to as a stance of power, al-Niffari challenges the spiritual hierarchy<sup>189</sup> by deconstructing the ladder of the spiritual structure and relegating the value of *'ilm* and *ma'rifa* to stages that require purification from before the Divine's vision can be attained. I hence maintain that al-Niffari applied the tendency of individualism to challenge the spiritual authorities, which I argue indicates pastoral power. With this, al-Niffari avoids examination by the authorities and escapes the spiritual structure of passing teachings, since his method does not follow the traditional spiritual one and does not need a medium to obtain revelation from the Divine, as he clearly expresses by writing his stations and addresses. What makes al-Niffari's writings challenge the authorities is what

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<sup>188</sup> A term created by Foucault that indicates an "approach to the study of power that emphasizes the governing of people's conduct through positive means rather than the sovereign power to formulate the law. In contrast to a disciplinarian form of power, governmentality is generally associated with the willing participation of the governed" (Huff, 2020).

<sup>189</sup> As mentioned in the section on al-Niffari's life on page 69, above and in Qudsi 2014.

Foucault calls the equivocation tone. The Sufi master writes in an ambiguous language that only he can comprehend, as an indication of the mysterious condition of the Divine's revelation to him, which challenges the reader and makes it difficult to prove otherwise. Finally, I find the point about the scriptures that Foucault highlights to be relevant to al-Niffari regarding writing the *waqfa*. I assert that al-Niffari was not attempting to have his own explanation of the Islamic scriptures, i.e., the Qur'an, but rather that he was writing his own *wahy* experience. As previously mentioned, Abu Zayd states that the Qur'an is the book of *wahy* (revelations) from the Divine to his prophet, which needs to be delivered to the people. However, this *mawqif* is precisely where al-Niffari documents a revelation from the Divine to him whose aim is not to be preached to the people. I believe it is precisely here that al-Niffari's writings and the Qur'an intersect, along with the argument about the genre of the *mawāqif*. As previously mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the genre of the *mawāqif* has not yet been established. Adonis calls it *shi'riyyat al-nathr* (poetic prose), whereas al-Ghanmi prefers not to specify any genre. However, I argue that al-Niffari was attempting to write his own Qur'an or in other words, attempting to create a genre similar to that of the Qur'an.

Abu Zayd concludes from al-Baqillani's opinion that the Qur'an is uniquely distinguished from any other text because of its structure and genre. He confirms that the Qur'an is obviously not poetry and cannot be classified under prose either, for it has its very own style, which cannot be compared to any other type of text. Therefore, Abu Zayd maintains that the Qur'anic *'i jāz*, comes from its dissimilarity with other texts (Abu Zayd 2017, 148–149).

The above leads me to suggest that by attempting to write his own scriptures without designating the genre in which they were written, al-Niffari's texts are a clear challenge aimed at the legitimate tradition and the spiritual authorities. However, in this text particularly, because of his complete resignation, he is rewarded with meeting with the truth, as Foucault calls it, and rewarded with enlightenment through acquiring the truth of the Divine's essence, which can be called a powerful situation.

## Conclusion

What is left to explain here is how al-Niffari's first and second texts could be crystallised as examined through Foucault's thought. I believe this to be possible through the lens of power, which can be derived from Wild's analysis of the concept of *tanzīl*. As previously established, al-Niffari echoes the image of prophecy by having a dialogue with the Divine, something which, according to the Qur'an, can only occur to prophets, and which happens through *wahy* contributed with the notion of sending down. Wild states that this term can only "make sense in a space in which there is an above and below." A verse or a sura were sent down to the prophet, for the prophet and the people are on earth and the Divine is in the heavens. Moreover, this image can be exemplified further through stances when the Divine addresses His prophets with speech and they attempt to get closer to Him by climbing a mountain.<sup>190</sup> In the case of Prophet Muḥammad, his first revelation was received in a cave in the region of Hira' (Wild 1996, 141). I believe that the division of above and below does not only apply to the relationship between the Divine and the inspired person but that it can also apply between al-Niffari, as a person who speaks to the Divine, and other persons who could not obtain such beatitude.

This chapter explored the work and theology of the Sufi master al-Niffari, as presented in his book *The Mawaqif and Mukhatabat*, with the intention of attempting to examine the aspect of direct dialogue between the mystic and the Divine. I began by introducing a literature review of the works that also attempted to study al-Niffari. I later presented the hierarchy of his theology, along with my suggested interpretations and reflections on his ideas. Two of al-Niffari's texts were studied in detail in this chapter, these were *al-Maḥḍar wa-l-Ḥarf* and *al-'Islām*. At first I explored the issue of voice in the texts, defending the belief that the Divine's voice in them is merely a mask that al-Niffari

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<sup>190</sup> Another example can be fire, as Moses once said to his people:

”إذ رأى نارا فقال لأهله امكثوا إني آنست نارا لعلي آتاكم منها بقبس أو أجد على النار هدى“ (Qur'an 20:10)

(He saw a fire and said to his people, 'Stay here, I can see a fire. Maybe I can bring you a flaming brand from it or find some guidance there' [ Abdel Haleem 2005, 196]).

hides behind to legitimise his philosophy. I supported my argument by engaging speech act theory and grammatical shifts. Having proven that, I suggested that borrowing the Divine's voice led al-Niffari to gain a certain stance of power, intentionally or otherwise. Authority adheres, from my point of view, by analysing the first text that explores the echo of prophecy, and which reflects several prophets in the Islamic heritage. Moreover, I suggested that reflecting prophecy was achieved in the first text through the echo of the Islamic *mi'rāj* by investigating the concept of inspiration and revelation that al-Niffari based the composition of his book on and which religiously, was exclusive to prophets selected by the Divine. Just like al-Suhrawardi, in the second text, al-Niffari uses the tone of blind obedience and surrender to achieve the understanding of the self, which can only be achieved by understanding the Divine. I argued that despite the fact this type of language might provide the impression of weakness, my belief is that it aims to achieve the opposite. Through the perspective of Foucault regarding self-mastery and its relation to power, I attempted to explain how this text, with its insistence on complete surrender, can be extremely powerful. The power that al-Niffari obtained might not be politically effective or threatening, as in the case of al-Suhrawardi. It might be limited to challenging the Sufi knowledge of systemisation of that time, in order to break the preoccupation of spiritual knowledge and draw a new mystical path for he who refuses the dogmas of spiritual schools, as I mentioned in the literature review. However, the potential of this power might be threatening on account of the many allusions I explained in detail throughout the analysis.

## Chapter Three

Salah 'Abd al-Sabur

### Section One

Ma'sat al-Hallaj (The Tragedy of al-Hallaj) by Salah 'Abd al-Sabur

لي حبيبٌ أزورُ في الخلواتِ  
حاضرٌ غائبٌ عن اللحظاتِ  
ما تراني أصغي إليه بسرِّي  
كي أعي ما يقولُ من كلماتٍ؟  
كلماتٍ من غيرِ شكلي ولا نقِ  
طِ ولا مثلِ نغمةِ الأصواتِ  
فكأني مخاطبٌ كنتُ إيَّا  
هُ على خاطري بذاتي لذاتي  
حاضرٌ غائبٌ قريبٌ بعيدٌ  
وهو لم تحوهِ رسومُ الصفاتِ  
هو أدنى من الضميرِ إلى الوه  
م وأخفى من لائحِ الخطراتِ.

(al-Hallaj 2007, 215)

I have a friend who visits when no one's around

He's present, but he's gone when I am looking.

You won't see me listening to him closely,

So I can be aware of words he is saying,

Words without letters or punctuation,

unlike the pronunciation of sounds.

It's as though I'm speaking to him  
of my thoughts, by myself, to myself.

Present, absent, near, or far, he's  
someone customary qualities don't contain.

He is nearer than my conscience to my thoughts,  
and more hidden than the glimpse of inspiration.

(al-Hallaj 2018, 74)

This is the last chapter of the thesis, where I explore the concept of dialogue with the Divine in a play written by the Egyptian poet Salah 'Abd al-Sabur about a well-known Sufi poet and theologian of Islamic mystical history: al-Hallaj. I opted to study this play because it offers a different form of dialogue with the Divine. As we have seen, the first chapter examined the case of a one-directional dialogue between al-Suhrawardi and the Absolute. The second explored a two-directional dialogue through the case of al-Niffari, who spoke to the Divine and obtained a response from Him. In this chapter, the poet does not speak to the Divine, what he does is write about a figure who had a dialogue with the Divine. Moreover, I believe that on the comparative scale, 'Abd al-Sabur was thoroughly explored by being evaluated against other modern Arabic poets as well as other Western poets by whom he is believed to have been influenced, such as T.S Eliot. However, my in-depth research failed to uncover any studies that compared him with any of the other writers I explored in my thesis, or any that examined the aspect of dialogue with the Divine in his play. Therefore, in this chapter I attempt to introduce a new dimension in reading 'Abd al-Sabur's play and to initiate a comparison that relates al-Suhrawardi, al-Niffari and the al-Hallaj of 'Abd al-Sabur.

The chapter will be divided into subsections: a literature review of the works that examined the play, a brief biography of the author, another of the play's protagonist, the methodology used to

analyse the play and an analysis of several poetic verses from this dramatic oeuvre. Furthermore, the analysis will pose several questions and endeavour to answer them as best as possible in order to reach a plausible conclusion. The questions will be presented in detail in the analysis section.

### **Literature review**

My research focused on a range of literature, including books and journals, that examined the tragedy of al-Hallaj particularly and the exploration of the concept of dialogue, be it between the characters in the play or between al-Hallaj and the Divine. The first aspect was discussed in only one of the resources I found and surprisingly, I could not find a single resource that touched upon the second one. In any case, I will provide a brief a summary for each reference used and will mention the relevant points, which I believe to be of relative significance to the study.

The journals listed in this section were presented in a conference entitled *Salah 'Abd al-Sabur: Mashru' 'Ibda'iy Mutajaddid* (Salah 'Abd al-Sabur: a renewable creative projective), which was held in Cairo in 2001 and the papers were published in a two-volume book a couple of years later. The first paper was authored by 'Abd al-Rahman Abu 'Uf under the title of *Salah 'Abd al-Sabur Katiban Siyasiyyan wa 'Ijtima'iyyan* (Salah 'Abd al-Sabur: a social and political writer). The author maintains that in all his dramatic works, 'Abd al-Sabur represents the state of maturity regarding dramatic structure, which was a result of the poet's wide exposure to Western and Eastern resources and his progress from being a reader to becoming a reformer of Arabic Drama, excluding the loss of his identity in the face of cultural overflowing. Abu 'Uf suggests that the dramatic works of 'Abd al-Sabur were an expression of the poet's idealistic yearning to improve the world. His writings were a space to unify the lyrical and the mask of modern heritage in order to exert the marginalised in drama via philosophy (Abu 'Uf 2003, 278). He states that his drama was not a form of escapism but a sort of imaginative entertainment that introduces methods of examining the fragility of social relations through 'Abd al-Sabur's symbolic system. The author highlights the issue of Western

influence on his study, maintaining that the poet did not kneel completely to international affect, since his purpose was to present a theatre that intersects with Western philosophy, drama and poetry, but without eradicating the Arabic peculiarity. On the other hand, Abu 'Uf does not deny the impact of certain Western poets on the movement of modern Arabic poetry, such as T.S Eliot, Lorca, Ezra Pound, Baudelaire and others. He in fact asserts that, particularly with regards to *The Tragedy of al-Hallaj*, 'Abd al-Sabur was clearly affected by T.S. Eliot's play *A Murder in the Cathedral*. 'Abd al-Sabur's dramatic works were not an imitation of the West, for the poet was deeply preoccupied with his daily Egyptian reality, which was fraught with suffering and changes. He therefore dedicated himself to creating a form of drama with an Arab vision that genuinely belonged to and reflected the reality of the Arab home. This somehow transformed his works into a sort of documentary about the events neglected by history. Abu 'Uf concludes by complimenting 'Abd al-Sabur's drama for being a true reflection of the Arab dramatic visionary age and for his ability to poeticise it (ibid, 279).

The second research paper was written by Dr. Hasan 'Atiyya and is entitled *Salah 'Abd al-Sabur Katiban Masrahiyyan: Tafkik al-Naş Tarkib al-Waqi'* (Salah 'Abd al-Sabur as a Playwright: Deconstructing the Text, Assembling the Reality). 'Atiyya suggests that the tragedy of al-Hallaj was written as the fruit of 'Abd al-Sabur's inspiration by several Western works, which were based on the idea of the martyr hero. It would originally have been based on Greek poetic tragedies that relied on intense characters and one specific individual whose life would be turned upside down by his own hands, going from an extreme of happiness to one of absolute misery on account of his pride and ego, which would eventually lead him to commit a tragic mistake and end his own life ('Atiyya 2003, 325–326). The author focuses on the political allusions layered in the pages of the play. He confirms that despite the ancient historical era during which the play is set, it is clearly highly related to the age lived by 'Abd al-Sabur and his peers. He stresses that the use of a controversial figure like al-Hallaj was only a mask to hide behind in order to avoid political

hunting. Indeed the generation of the playwright experienced severe police oppression and harassment due to their revolutionary speech that opposed the authorities, some facing a destiny of life imprisonment. Using the famous mystic was a means of shedding some light on the poet's deconstructed reality, shattered history and failed vision. In 'Abd al-Sabur's drama, al-Hallaj was a representative for the rebellion-aware word that resisted its present situation, conscious that it could destroy he who utters it, whether he be captured or executed by the courts.

'Atiyya touches upon the elephant in the room from 'Abd al-Sabur's perspective, at a time fraught with a blatant absence of social justice and tackles the questions of fairness, law and privileged segments of society (ibid., 326). The scholar supports the proposal of al-Hallaj as a symbol of the modern intellect who combats the oppressing authority but fails to convince people and thereby faces death (ibid., 328). The paper does not expand more on character analysis and the author contents with the foreign political dimension of the Sufi figure in the play.

Dr. Muhammad Badawi agrees with 'Atiyya; in his research *Salah 'Abd al-Sabur wa-l-Masrah al-Shi'ri* (Salah 'Abd al-Sabur and the poetic theatre), he confirms that the tragedy of al-Hallaj was not written for the sake of mysticism, for it does not explore the nature of Sufism and its relation with religion. Rather the play aims to urge to take up action and engage in social political activity. In times of crisis, would the mystic or the intellectual facing a struggle against social and political injustice choose to arm himself with words or with a sword (Badawi 2003, 348)?

The scholar maintains that 'Abd al-Sabur does not attribute al-Hallaj's execution to heresy but mainly to his involvement in politics, despite the authorities' accusations of blasphemy to justify his crucifixion. It would therefore appear that this play correlates with the renaissance of the Egyptian dramatic movement of the sixties, one of the common characteristics of which was social and political commitment. In the appendix, 'Abd al-Sabur mentions that he was interested in Louis Massignon's study of al-Hallaj, in which he emphasises the social role of the poet in an attempt to

improve the reality of his age. Since ‘Abd al-Sabur desired to primarily point out this aspect of al-Hallaj's life, he rejected the miracles that were associated with him, which does not mean however, that the protagonist of the play is only a political rebel because he refused to escape and did not allow his followers to save him from death. As a matter of fact, he welcomed and rejoiced in the thought of martyrdom, which demonstrates his yearning for a death that will achieve his mystical destiny and accomplish the Divine's will (ibid., 349).

As previously mentioned, ‘Abd al-Sabur was one of several Arab poets who were influenced by Western literature. In his paper *Tajallyyat al-Mawruth fi ‘Ibda‘ Salah ‘Abd al-Sabur* (The Manifestations of Heritage in Salah ‘Abd al-Şabur's Creativity), ‘Abdullah al-Tatawi focuses on the impact of Eliot on the poet in terms of poetic traditions and methods of reforming them. The author maintains that the artist is born within art, lives in it and breathes through it and that any artist who does not belong to the international heritage nor fights passionately to stand on its hills is a strayed one. He further upholds that any creative who is not familiar with his artistic ancestors could not be part of the human heritage and could not achieve his role as a responsible human being in this universe either.

Al-Tatawi understands this based on what ‘Abd al-Sabur wrote in his book *Hayati fi al-Shi‘r* (My Life within Poetry), where he documented most of his reflections on poetry, which was his method of glorifying the values he believed in: honesty and justice against falsehood, oppression and injustice. ‘Abd al-Sabur believed that there was no particular dictionary for poetry, hence he was brave enough to risk challenging the stereo-poetic structures by writing in the common daily language of people, a feat that bears resemblance to Eliot's principle. His wording was equally rich, practical, flexible, modern and in line with the language, notions and knowledge of his age. Al-Tatawi states that ‘Abd al-Sabur respected the multiple resources of culture and the reformation of the language, which was persistent with recognition, epistemic accumulation and obtaining the tools

to comprehend and deliver. According to ‘Abd al-Sabur, rich intellectuality requires a rich language to be recognised and in order to accomplish this, one needs to master the language by re-exploring the whole of the Arabic literary heritage, not by copying it but by appreciating the profound richness of our language and subsequently inventing new words to domesticate them and help them emerge in their poetic contexts (al-Tatawi 2003, 359).

I believe this is an important point to mention, since it will become apparent in the examples selected for the analysis section later, where the verses are clear cases of the modern Arabic poetic style, taking into account the fact that the poet used the free verse style to write the dialogue in the play, despite the fact it is set in ancient times and the audience might assume that the poet would follow the traditional *qaṣīda* (poem) structure, which is constituted of *ṣadr* and *‘ajz* (first and second hemistiches).

Speaking of T.S Eliot's influence on ‘Abd al-Sabur, Mohammed A. al-Khozai wrote a complete chapter in *A Miscellany of Middle Eastern Articles* discussing this phenomenon. Al-Khozai suggests that the first feature of this influence could be glanced in ‘Abd al-Sabur's selection of composition for *The Tragedy of al-Hallaj*, by choosing *al-shi‘r al-ḥurr* (free verse), purportedly due to Eliot being the reformer of the revival of the combination of drama and poetry in English, after it had mostly been written in prose (al-Khozai 1989, 72). The author then examines the relationship between the play's title and its content. He believes that the name of the drama was not selected randomly, since the poet himself was a diligent student of Greek drama. He maintains that he opted for the word *ma’sāt* (tragedy) precisely to simplify the play's content and form for the sake of the audience. The researcher confirms that the play was not only a depiction of a historical figure's life, but was presented because of ‘Abd al-Sabur's deep conviction that al-Hallaj's life journey and its suffering deserve to be meditated upon because his end was unjust and tragic.

Al-Khozai continues discussing the Western influence on ‘Abd al-Sabur, stating that Shakespeare was another major inspiration for him, based on a statement made by the poet that the author mentions in his paper (ibid., 73). However, according to Al-Khozai, despite ‘Abd al-Sabur's vehement attempt not to fall into the Shakespearean trap, he ended up falling into Eliot's. The author maintains that the poet could not resist the magic of Eliot, as his star shone at a critical time between the two world wars. By contrast, the intellectuals of the Middle East were damaged and profoundly affected by the events occurring in their region at that time, which resulted in a generation of defeat due to the post-1948 ramifications. Those intellectuals therefore sought out glimmers of hope and inspiration in different cultures.

Having said this, being influenced by Eliot was not a disadvantage but rather evidence of the poet's education, which confirms that he belonged to the elite who not only had access to English literature, but in ‘Abd al-Sabur's case, also translated several of Eliot's books: *The Elder Statesman*, *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Cocktail Party*. The affection was therefore clearly due to his admiration of Eliot's writings.

Al-Khozai defends his opinion about Eliot's influence on ‘Abd al-Sabur by comparing *The Tragedy of al-Hallaj* and *Murder in the Cathedral*. The scholar maintains that both dramas end with the martyrdom of their central character and that both protagonists represent religious personas who selected the route of God instead of enjoying mortal life. Furthermore, both plays contain the same number of chapters and scenes. Nevertheless, the author also brings to the fore the differences between the two masterpieces. Becket, Eliot's character, faced an issue with different partners: Henry Miles and the Archbishop of Canterbury, whereas al-Hallaj's conflict derived from his pride and questions about the concept of freedom. The dispute of the mystic also involved other aspects, namely his trial, which resulted in his end by execution.

It is worth mentioning that al-Khozai highlights two factors that were not mentioned in the previous resources. Firstly, the significance of the debate style, which was clearly manifested in the

trial scene, the dialectic with al-Shibli and the conversation in the prison. Secondly, the comedy between the two prisoners in the cell. From a researcher's perspective, the comedy scene creates a respite from the other scenes, a sort of breathing space, since the play is fraught with serious and profound dialogues.

Another point al-Khozai remarks on regards the questions introduced in the trial. Indeed the questions revolved around vital issues such as the right to religious belief, the independence of the court and the role of rebellious speech (ibid., 80). At the end of the article, the author expresses his thoughts about 'Abd al-Sabur's poetic language. He states that the poet was successful in using free verse as his medium in the drama because using a traditional structure would have tainted the dialogue with a mechanical, unnatural feel. Instead, 'Abd al-Sabur's language flows effortlessly in the play, precisely due to its simplicity and its use of everyday language, which was appropriate for a modern drama (ibid., 82).

In terms of exploring the mystical backgrounds and references in 'Abd al-Sabur's work, the following studies are, in my opinion, highly valid. The first one is *'Anasir al-Thaqafa al-Hiliniyya fi Shi'r Salah 'Abd al-Sabur* (The Hellenistic elements in Salah 'Abd al-Sabur's Poetry) by 'Abd al-'Aziz Muwafi. In it, he states that 'Abd al-Sabur's poetry is imbued with several cultural aspects such as heritage, folklore and Hellenism, and that it is based on two vital factors: Sufism that tends to illumination and Hellenism that tends to logic. This tendency involves in turn two crucial factors: *ma'rifa* in *taṣawwūrāt*, knowledge in imagination and "legendising" reality. According to Hegel, philosophy is knowledge via imagination, whereas art is knowledge through images and the difference between the two is imagination, which is an intellectual attribution that tends to abstract words and their relations to turn them into ideas, while images are the opposite in that they are sensible and embody thoughts by visualising with the senses and returning their vision to the world to create words and relations (Hegel, as cited in Muwafi 2003, 276). One of this tendency's

characteristics is an abstraction that concentrates on causative relations that are not poetic and on accurate results, according to ‘Abd al-Sabur:

أنا مريض بالسؤال عن العلة في كل شيء وهو مرض أورتنتني إياه قراءات فلسفية عابرة وإصابة عارضة بالتأمل، لم أستطع أن أعالجها في صباي وشبابي. (‘Abd al-Sabur 1980, 174)

I am afflicted with an illness that causes me to question the reason behind everything, which I inherited from ephemeral readings and an affliction for meditation that occurred by chance and which I could not heal in my youth.

A lust to improve the world as Shelley calls it, which is precisely the power that motivates the philosopher, prophet and poet, for each of them sees a flaw and yet, our poet does not deceive himself but instead confesses his passion for those relations to the point of illness. He further declares:

”الكون لا يعجبني“

(I do not like the Universe) (‘Abd al-Sabur, as cited in Muwafi 2003, 277). Therefore, he strives to improve it. The author asserts that expression through images is deeply effective when composing with abstract language. This was recognised by poets, prophets and philosophers alike and they consequently created the path of the poets, since behind every prophet and philosopher shines a flame of poetry. ‘Abd al-Sabur unifies the three in a bid to improve the world, he then finds the unity between their different approaches in terms of metaphor but also agreement of intentions and methods. Any difference between them will only be coincidental. Thereby, just as we can find a philosopher or a poet in each prophet, so can we also glimpse a prophet or a philosopher in each poet. Muwafi goes on expanding on the type of knowledge that belongs to each profession (ibid., 277) and comes to point out a crucial fact in his analysis regarding the Sufi figure in ‘Abd al-

Sabur's play. He suggests that in the work of the poet, mystics occupy the position of prophets, and so 'Abd al-Sabur's poems become an interwoven textile of emotional and intellectual logic synonymous with *wahdat al-wujūd* (esoteric monism) on the theological level and *ḥulūl* (incarnation) on the *khirqā* (cloak) level, in addition to illumination. All these aspects of his poetry are an echo of the Hellenistic culture, which creates a common ground between philosophy and any other sector. For this reason 'Abd al-Sabur attempted to demonstrate that al-Hallaj strove to reconcile the idea with the ability, and wisdom with action to achieve a successful marriage between words and actions. If the tragedy of al-Hallaj lies on a middle ground between poetry and Sufism, it is also a space where mysticism and philosophy go hand in hand (ibid, 278). I believe this study to be credible to the purpose of this thesis, not least because the author highlights the relation between the poet, prophet and philosopher based on Hellenistic philosophy, which has several similarities with Sufism. Moreover, the relation between the three was discussed in detail to conclude that mystic writers and poets, by means of their dialogue with the Divine, reflect an echo of prophecy.

The second study that explores the mystical background is *al-Rumuz al-Sufiyya fi Masrahiyyat Ma'sat al-Hallaj* (Mystical symbols in the Tragedy of al-Hallaj's Drama), by Dr. Mahmud Subh. His paper focuses on the symbol of the *shajara*, the tree with which 'Abd al-Sabur begins his play and which is mentioned repeatedly throughout the oeuvre. The author presents a calculation for the number of times the poet mentions the word in different forms. He explores the allusion of the tree in detail, but I would rather include his explanation in the analysis section in order to avoid repetition. On the other hand, Subh disagrees with Muwafi in as far as the dialectic of life and death introduced in the drama is concerned, as he neither believes it to be Hellenistic nor Marxist. Instead, he suggests that it is purely Islamic; since there is no material before the image nor the opposite, this means that there is a dialectic relationship that has continuance, which requires the existence of both at the same time. For the created is an image of the Creator and the Creator is the reflection of

the created and the lover and the beloved are melted into a single self in a dynamic motion that runs from eternity to infinity, just like the human who lives and dies, but endures forever in the love of the Divine (Subh 2003, 45–46).

At one point in his paper, the scholar touches upon the crucial point of the similarity between al-Hallaj and the Christ. The tree of existence and immortality is in a dialectic relation that ‘Abd al-Sabur follows by using mystical political symbols in his play, which depict al-Hallaj as a fusion of the Christ and Muhammad – peace be upon him – as opposed to an integration. This was also Jubran’s method in *The Prophet*, when he made his lead character, al-Mustafa, the Chosen or *al-mahhdī al-montazar*. Subh continues by conducting an analysis about the usage of the word as the title of one of the play’s chapters and the role it plays within the Drama. He provides a precise calculation of the number of times the word “word” was mentioned in the play, its forms, synonyms and origins in the bible (ibid, 46). Moreover, the author compares the crucifixion of the Christ with that of the mystic, making reference to several historical resources that prove al-Hallaj was hoping for martyrdom. One of them is the following statement made by al-Hallaj to Ibrahim ibn Fatik:

“كيف أنت يا إبراهيم، حين تراني وقد صلبت وقتلت وأحرقت ، وذلك أسعد يوم من أيام عمري جميعه؟”

(How do you feel Ibrahim, when you see me crucified, murdered and burnt and this day is the happiest day of my entire life?) According to Subh, this was comprehended by ‘Abd al-Sabur, which was why he made the crucifixion on the tree his end (ibid., 47). Nonetheless, the poet negates the facts of the crucifixion of al-Hallaj based on historical references that state he was wiped six-hundred times prior to his hands being amputated, followed by his legs before he was finally hanged. Crucifixion was not known in Islam and the idea of crucifixion is quoted from Christianity.

Subh goes on to discuss the factual reasons behind the execution of al-Hallaj, maintaining that they were due to his actions and not his words, for he was involved in scandalizing several corrupt

issues and officials in the regime, which caused the trial of his that lasted for seven months and ended with his death (ibid., 50).

The third paper that explores the mystical origins in the play is *Tajalliyat al-Hallaj, Ma'sat Salah 'Abd al-Sabur* (The Manifestations of al-Hallaj, The Tragedy of Salah 'Abd al-Sabur) by Dr. Yusuf Zaydan. The scholar sets off his research by listing several historical references that confirm al-Hallaj's premonition of his execution. He mentions quotations narrated by the mystic's coevals, including al-Junayd and 'Ali ibn 'Isa. The author then asks what type of knowledge could have led to all this, in other words, what was the absurdity of the knowledge that made al-Hallaj decide to suffer and yearn for salvation? Zaydan decides that his desperate longing to reach the truth was the reason he did not stand with his people on the true *'irfān* (gnosis) ground (Zaydan 2003, 59). Consequently, he resolved that communication was impossible and that the emanation of Divine gnosis in the mirrors of the self was alarming with discrepancy in recognition.

Al-Hallaj traveled throughout all the vicissitudes of Sufism, however, he showed perplexity in various of his sayings and *ahwāl* (spiritual states) until he became exhausted and desired death. When awareness of his end dawned upon him, he recited the following prayer:

هؤلاء عبادك قد اجتمعوا لقتلي تعصبا لدينك وتقربا إليك ، فاغفر لهم ، فإنك لو كشفت لهم ما كشفت لي ، لما فعلوا ما فعلوا ؛ ولو سترت عني ما سترت عنهم. (ibid., 60)

Those are Your slaves gathered to murder me out of extremism to Your religion and to Your closeness, so forgive them, for had you revealed to them what you revealed to me, they would not do what they did, and if Thou veiled thyself from me, Thou did not veil thyself from them.

Zaydan carries on by examining the poetic image of al-Hallaj in the work of ‘Abd al-Sabur and his inclination is that the poet revived al-Hallaj in modern literature. The Sufi in the play is introduced through a private image that does not refer to him more than it does to ‘Abd al-Sabur himself, for he lived during a significant Egyptian age that was wrought with glory and oppression simultaneously and though it was rich in colours, the clearest was that of suppression. At that time, writers sought to hide behind symbolism, metaphors and speaking through others, which is exactly what ‘Abd al-Sabur did when he wrote his tragedy. Zaydan believes that the drama was in fact an expression of ‘Abd al-Sabur’s own tragedy more than that of al-Hallaj (ibid., 63). ‘Abd al-Sabur was not on the same page with the authorities, which would have driven him to illustrate al-Hallaj as a social reformer aiming to improve the reality of his age. Zaydan further upholds that ‘Abd al-Sabur made al-Hallaj wear a Socratic mask, which implied social correctness and expressed philosophical views (ibid., 64–65).

The final source I present in this section is the one I consider as the most detailed study of the tragedy of al-Hallaj and is entitled *al-Masrah al-Shi’ri ‘Inda Salah ‘Abd al-Sabur* (The Poetic Theatre of Salah Abd al-Sabur) by Dr. Thurayya al-‘Asili. Her book is a comprehensive study of the poet’s dramatic works and is divided into several chapters that cover his life, his vision and his background and resources, while other parts of the book discuss each of his dramatic works in detail and provide an analysis for their allusions.

Al-‘Asili designates an entire chapter to the exploration of the hidden meanings in the tragedy of al-Hallaj, which she titled *Ma’sat al-Hallaj: al-Qahr wa-l-Muqawama* (The Tragedy of al-Hallaj: The Oppression and The Resistance). In the beginning of her chapter, the author clarifies that the play is based on a crucial foundation: the concept of oppression, for human beings can either be oppressors or oppressed and in this play, the poet belongs to the second category. The scholar shares the belief of the aforementioned researchers that in his play, ‘Abd al-Sabur expresses himself

through al-Hallaj in order to voice his own feelings of bewilderment, loneliness and fear suppressed under the oppression. This justifies the repeated mention of the poor, the hungry and the subjugated in the play (al-‘Asili 1995, 59). She states, besides, that al-Hallaj is not the only character representing oppression, but that al-Shibli, the group of Sufis, commoners, the two prisoners and the judge Ibn Surayj are all embodiments of the authoritarian suppression as well.

Al-‘Asili examines the features of oppression in the play, which she believes to be death and crucifixion. On the other hand, she also sustains that the play alludes to resistance, which is expressed through words, since they are the weapon of the poor and the oppressed (ibid., 60). She goes on to tackle several other questions, such as the reason for which ‘Abd al-Sabur used the Sufi experience in his work, and what he did with al-Hallaj. She answers the first question by attributing it to the poet being influenced by the Sufis in his childhood, drawing her evidence from his personal experience as expressed in his biography, where he states that he read extensively about al-Hallaj and once attempted to reach the level of ecstasy that Sufis beautify.

Based on his statements as well, al-‘Asili confirms that the poet believed in the similarity between the poetic and the mystical experience, since they share a similar purpose, that of returning the universe back to its purity and harmony after diving at the heart of the experience. Moreover, he assumes there to be analogues between the poetic creation and the spiritual one, for he describes the stages of composing a poem with mystical notions such as *wārid* (inspiration), *lawā’ih* (Divine gleams), *talwīn*, (variations) and so on and so forth. However, according to Dr. Louis ‘Awad, the sole similarity between him and the mystics is his strive to find salvation (ibid., 60–61).

Regarding the second question, al-‘Asili states that ‘Abd al-Sabur focuses on the political role of al-Hallaj, as demonstrated in the trial scene. The act illustrates the type of accusations he faced, corresponding with Madharra’i and others and advising them to apply justice should they be appointed to leadership. He teaches them the vital characteristics of rulers. ‘Abd al-Sabur put emphasis on the integration of al-Hallaj with people, his involvement in their life, his adoption of

the case of justice, his longing for death, his arrest, trial and verdict. He also carefully selected some events from the the mystic's life in order to demonstrate that he was an advocate against the authorities' oppression. The poet also touches with tenderness upon the subject of Divine love, by portraying al-Hallaj as a loving worshipper of the Divine who detests injustice and plays a significant social role in his society (ibid., 63).

Al-'Asili points out that al-Hallaj was a popular figure among the poets and writers of 'Abd al-Sabur's age and she mentions several names who wrote poems about him or for him (ibid., 65). The author pursues her detailed dissection of the realistic and mystical dimensions of the character of al-Hallaj in the play. She maintains that the first is demonstrated through the factor of rebellion, where he is the voice of the people and the one who provokes the authorities. As for the second, she feels that it emanates from the scenes where he expresses his love for the Divine (ibid., 71). As her research progresses, al-'Asili expands on the conflict in the play by analysing other characters in the drama. A vital element she presents in her chapter and which was not touched upon in any of the other resources I found is the dialogue in the play. She affirms that the poet succeeded in making the dialogue reflect the character's ideas and their stance towards the authorities. As an example, she cites the fact that the second prisoner was in love with words in his youth, but that due to the oppression he and his mother faced, he turned into a rebel who only believes in force and weapons as a means to resist subjugation. She further asserts that the dialogue embodies the vision of al-Hallaj and 'Abd al-Sabur's regarding the benefit of words, whereas the second prisoner does not share their belief (ibid., 88). The dialogue's efficacy is due to its simple and direct linguistic style as well as to the Sufi symbolic language, which is expressed in the scenes where al-Hallaj speaks of his thoughts and discusses mystical issues with his Sufi fellows (ibid., 90). By contrast, she believes that the Sufi monologues were used to paint al-Hallaj as a man of God who sought equality and justice and despised oppression and unfairness (ibid., 91). Eventually, the author offers her point of view on 'Abd al-Sabur's stylistics, his use of the Qur'anic language effect, meters and technique,

such as *al-takwīnāt al-dā'irriyya* (ring composition) (ibid., 93). The author's comments on dialogue ceases at this point and does not expand any further.<sup>191</sup>

### **Salah 'Abd al-Sabur**

Born on the third of May 1931 in al-Zaqaziq, a city belonging to the al-Sharqiyya governorate, Salah 'Abd al-Sabur received his cognitive education in governmental schools before graduating in Arabic Language from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Fu'ad the First, known today as the University of Cairo (Sameh, Hassan & Frig 2020). During his college years, he joined the group "al-'Umanā'," which was established by his mentor Amin al-Khuli and which had a significant influence on the poetic and critical political movements of Egypt at the time (Lukhdur 2014, 20). Pursuing his career, the poet entered the path of education as a teacher (Husni 1999, 19), spending five years teaching at secondary level. However, according to his biography, he was not regarded as a successful tutor, for he was not on the same page with the inspectors of the Ministry of Education. One of them is said to have reported that he was not suitable for the job, on account of the different perspectives held by both parties. He therefore submitted his resignation without any regrets in 1957 ('Abd al-Sabur, as cited in al-'Asili 1995, 29) and became a journalist for the Ruz al-Yusuf magazine, before joining the al-Ahram newspaper as a literary editor (Goldschmidt 2000, 9). In 1961, the poet was hired by the management council of al-Dar al-Misriyya as a writer, translator and publisher. After this, he had many roles in different sectors, including one with the cultural department of the Embassy of Egypt in India and the head office of the Writers' Association in Egypt (Sameh, Hassan & Frig 2020).

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<sup>191</sup> It is vital to mention that, through the research I conducted, I have not found further Western sources that examine Salah 'Abd al-Sabur's play, *The Tragedy of al-Hallaj*. Nonetheless, for further Western resources about Salah 'Abd al-Sabur, the following sources may be referred to: *New Writing from the Middle East* by Hamalian and Yohannan, *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives* by Neuwirth and et al. and *Writer, Culture, Text: Studies in Modern Arabic Literature* by Elad.

‘Abd al-Sabur drew his poetics from an array of writers, of whom, to name but a few, Jubran, al-Manfaluti, Eliot and Lorca. Al-‘Asili believes that certain factors helped shape the poet’s vision, probably the most important of which were the political and social conditions that existed during his childhood, but also the political circumstances that reigned at the time when the poet produced his poetry. Other factors were ‘Abd al-Sabur’s own psychological preparation and intellectual tendencies (al-‘Asili 1995, 23). In addition, Cragg maintains that there are certain historical events that clearly impacted the poet's mental state, not least of which were the Algerian revolution and the defeat of Palestine in 1948 (Cragg 2009, 168). Where poetic drama is concerned, ‘Abd al-Sabur is considered as a pioneer, for his works were obscure, short and characterised by being experimental and concentrated. His first dramatic oeuvre was *The Tragedy of al-Hallaj*. The poet life’s ended in 1981, but he gifted the world with a rich legacy and in several genres, comprising of poetry, short stories, plays and non-fictional books such as his theory on poetry and his biography (Sameh, Hassan & Frig 2020). His works included but are not limited to *Aqulu Lakum* (I say to you), *Shajar al-Layl* (The Trees of the Night), *al-Nisa’ Hina Yatahattamn* (When Women Break), *al-Amira Tantazir* (The Princess Awaits) and *Ba’da An Yamut al-Malik* (After the King’s Death).

### **Al-Hallaj**

Al-Hallaj, Abu Mughith ibn Mansur is one of the most significant and controversial names in the history of Islam. The mystic’s doctrine, approaches and tragic end resulted in him classifying people into two categories: intense opponents and extreme admirers. Be that as it may, both parties might agree that the method of his execution was hideous. The Sufi was born in 244H (958 AD) in al-Tur (Massignon 2004, 61), his origins revert to Persia, yet he was brought up in Wasit in Iraq (al-Sullami 1998, 102). His education journey ceased at the age of sixteen, after which he dedicated himself to the service of his Sufi shaykh, Sahl, in the city of Tistir. Afterwards, al-Hallaj traveled to

Basra to build his path to Sufism and to obtain the *khirqa*<sup>192</sup> (cloak) (Massignon 2004, 62). His destination was fraught with political instability; the revolution of the Zanj, which was presided over by the Natrun mine's labourers. However, it was ended in 270H (883 AD) by al-Wasiyy Muwaffaq, who brought the cruel taxation system back (ibid., 63). Consequently, the Sufi decided to move to Mecca to perform *'umra*<sup>193</sup> and practice his rituals: praying and fasting next to the Ka'ba (Ansari 2000, 293). He later headed for Iraq, and there his problematic battle sprouted when 'Amr al-Makki filed his heresy accusation against him. This event led al-Hallaj to take off his cloak as a symbolic gesture of separation from the Sufi system (Massignon 2004, 64). In addition to the accusations of heresy, he was arrested in Jabal for an accusation of supporting the Qarmatians, although there were no further consequences to this incident. After performing his third hajj, he started spreading his missionary statement to the public, thereby attracting followers from all walks of life. With this, his ambition grew to the point of demanding government reformations (Ansari 2000, 295), which escalated and developed into the start of a revolt led by al-Mo'tazz against al-Muqtadir's regime. It was, however, a very short-lived rebellion, which was rapidly extinguished (Massignon 2004, 67–68). Al-Muqtadir was able to retake control of the throne speedily because of the lack of financial support from the Jews, who were acting in collusion with the minister of taxation, who happened to be a Shi'i and the Shi'i sector was against the revolution (Badawi 1964, 71). Al-Hallaj was able to escape for three years but Ibn al-Furat eventually succeeded in tracing him and bringing him back to Baghdad, where he was imprisoned for nine years. The followers of the mystic were able to convince al-Muqtadir to transfer his residency to the location of al-Qushuri, where he announced his approach for reformation again. This worked like a magnet that attracted a larger crowd of people and created more rumours and enemies against him (Ghaleb 1982, 46).

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<sup>192</sup> Wearing the *khirqa* is a mystical tradition that indicates the significant relationship between the mentor and his *murīd* (seeker), so this latter may drink from the fountain of his shaykh's illumination. Wearing the cloak implies surrendering to one's master and being included in his fellowship (al-Ajam 1999, 320).

<sup>193</sup> "Lesser pilgrimage to Makkah that may be performed at any time of the year" (Bakkour 2012, 399).

Obtaining the support of both audience and politicians only led to inflaming the tension for establishing another revolution. As a result, the only solution to put an end to his rebellious movement seemed to be constructing several accusations to sentence him with the death penalty (Badawi 1964, 76). In 309H (921AD), the trial of al-Hallaj was held and he was prosecuted on four counts: the practice of conjuring craft, fabricating a spiritual hajj, corresponding with the Qarmatians in secret and claiming to be a deity for declaring “*anā al-ḥaqq*” (I am the Real) (Sharaf 1970, 80–83). The court found al-Hallaj guilty of all charges, whence he was convicted and sentenced to death by execution. His death was, to say the least, very far from merciful; his hands were amputated, his feet crucified and his body burnt, before his head was amputated and hanged for two days on the bridge of Baghdad (al-Baghdadi, as cited in al-Sih 1998, 112).

### **The play’s summary**

*Ma’sāt al-Hallaj* was published in 1965 in Egypt (Badawi 1987, 220). It consists of two parts: the first is entitled *al-Kalima* (the word) and the second *al-Mawt* (death). In the first scene, the body of al-Hallaj is shown crucified on a tree and a dialogue is taking place between three different characters: the merchant, the farmer and the preacher, who are expressing their amazement at what they are witnessing. A group of people then enter and the preacher asks them about the identity of the murdered man and who is responsible for his death. The group confirm that they are the murderers. The members of that group consist of people suffering from certain disabilities such as blindness, as well as others from various professions including but not limited to blacksmiths and carpenters. The trader asks them if there is any executioner among them, to which they answer in the negative, so he goes on questioning them: “then how did you kill him, with you bare hands?” Their response is shocking, for they reply that they killed him with words. The merchant laughs at their explanation, for he cannot accept their reply logically, but they remain adamant about their claim and pursue with even stranger retorts, alleging that they murdered him because they were

more in love with his words than with him, so they let him die in order that his words might become immortal. The group persevere in describing their devotion and admiration for the murdered mystic whose knowledge they used to seek, until an old man enters the stage. The dialogue clarifies his name as al-Shibli and upon entering the scene, he addresses the hanged Sufi, blaming him for associating with the mass and proclaiming that he should have stayed away from the crowd and isolated himself to practice his Divine love in secret. He then throws a red rose next to his body. Al-Shibli feels guilty for his companion's death and ends his monologue by stating that he was the one who murdered him. The farmer, merchant and preacher, who were witnessing all of these events, find themselves engulfed in wonder at not knowing the truth behind the whole situation. The scene ends with them following al-Shibli in a desperate attempt to ask him about what really happened ('Abd al-Sabur 2000, 6–17).

The second scene is a flashback from when al-Hallaj was alive in his house and having an argumentative and philosophical debate with al-Shibli about the role of the man who was fortunate enough to meet the Divine and venerable enough to deserve the revelation of the veiled secret. The dialogue between the two mystics unburdens the different respective perspectives of each. Al-Shibli initiates the conversation by urging al-Hallaj not to involve himself in the affairs of the masses nor in life itself, affirming that a person who witnessed the light of the Divine's love should be above mortality, since it would veil him from *'irfān* (gnosis). Yet al-Hallaj disagrees with him entirely, for his belief is that he who had the merit of witnessing the Divine light should spread his radiance among people in order to cure the ill universe. Both mystics expand on their points of view and discuss further concepts such as the meaning and essence of evil, the questioning of the Divine's existence in the midst of the wave of injustice, hunger and poverty and the crucial role of words. The conversation is interrupted by the appearance of Ibrahim ibn Fatik, the loyal student of al-Hallaj, to warn him of the authorities' intention to arrest and punish him, whereby he advises his mentor to escape. Al-Hallaj vehemently refuses, proclaiming that injustice is in every place in the

universe and that he will stay because he believes in the certainty of the Divine's will and his support through the letters of the Qur'an. For his part, al-Shibli attempts in vain to convince him to heed Ibrahim's suggestion. Al-Hallaj later declares out loud his intention to back the people and to not give up on the importance of revolting against the injustice suffered by the people. Al-Shibli urges him to think wisely, reminding him that he is a Sufi with a cloak that comes with certain responsibilities. The scene ends with al-Hallaj tearing up his cloak to express his rejection to wear anything that might symbolise weakness and humiliation (ibid, 18–36).

The third scene starts with a conversation between the three characters from the opening of the first scene, who are discussing the issue of paying money to the authorities. Their conversation is interrupted by that of another group consisting of a cripple, a leper and a hunchback. The third instigates the dialogue by expressing his admiration for al-Hallaj but also his belief that the mystic's words are ineffective, for he cannot cure him. By contrast, the cripple disagrees, stating that his words can make him walk and run. The leper makes a further statement to explain al-Hallaj's influence on him, before an argument commences with a group of Sufis entering the stage, who express their indignation at al-Hallaj for ripping up his cloak. The tone of the conversation rises to debate the vitality of mystical symbols, the cloak and whether the Divine exists in it or in the heart of he who wears it. The three Sufis touch upon even more sensitive topics around mysticism, of which the selfishness of the mystic who enjoys his hermitage and neglects the sorrow of others and the fear of losing one's vision if the mystic gets involved in people's lives. Al-Hallaj calls for the group who decided to ask him their confusing questions. He calls for unfortunate people to preach. The first group appears and wonders about the mystic, whom they see as a mere man of ecstasy. Among the group following al-Hallaj are police officers who start arguing with him while he is speaking of the Divine's love and His signs in the universe, an emotion which, the mystic upholds, if abandoned, would spread hunger, poverty and injustice throughout the world. The two officers start provoking the mystic with questions about the attributes of the Divine in order to make his

tongue slip and arrest him for heresy. The police then take him into custody, causing the audience to protest against the false accusations made against him, on account of the officers tricking him into revealing the secret. The scene ends with the first group wondering about the nature of the revelation that got him arrested (*ibid.*, 37–53).

The first scene of the second part starts with al-Hallaj being shoved into the prison cell. Two nameless prisoners are already in the cell and are referred to as prisoner one and prisoner two. Upon hearing his prayer, the two inmates start their dialogue assuming that al-Hallaj has lost his mind. The two keep up their comical exchange and then ask the mystic about his identity and the crime that landed him here. Soon after, a prison guard angrily enters the cell to investigate the noise coming from there. Both prisoners deny any guilt so the guard concludes that it must be al-Hallaj's fault and starts to whip him, but soon wonders why he is not begging him to stop or screaming in pain for him to cease the beating. Al-Hallaj answers him with prayers requesting from the Divine to forgive his pain, which only makes the guard angrier and causes him to start shouting at al-Hallaj to beg God for mercy or look at him in fear or anything to make him stop. The guard eventually collapses and asks al-Hallaj his forgiveness. He then leaves the cell and the prisoners gather around al-Hallaj and begin to discuss several issues: al-Hallaj's abilities, the role of the mystic in society, the consequence of words, the difference between words and actions from the second prisoner's perspective and choosing between the word and the sword and the validity of each. The light dims and brightens up again, indicating the passing of days in the cell. Only the first prisoner and al-Hallaj appear in the scene, to illustrate the escape of the second one, for the first grew attached to al-Hallaj and his words, preferring to stay with him rather than to escape. We then see a police officer entering the cell to take the Sufi to his trial (*ibid.*, 56–82).

The second scene unfolds in the setting of a court where the trial of al-Hallaj takes place. The judges present are three: Abu 'Umar al-Hammadi, Ibn Sulayman and Ibn Surayj. The dialogue commences with the first judge praying to the Divine, asking to be guided by his justice. He then

enquires about the delay of al-Hallaj's appearance in court. The court attendant replies that the delay is due to a protest led by another prisoner who shared the cell with the mystic and to the ensuing fight with police to disperse them. A conversation then starts between Ibn Surayj and Abu 'Umar, due to the objection of the first at calling al-Hallaj "*mufsid*" (corruptive) before examining the evidence and hearing the defence of the accused. The two keep on arguing with Ibn Surayj, claiming that al-Hallaj is a rebel who turned against the ruler and spread blasphemy among the people, until the conversation is interrupted by the entrance of al-Hallaj. His interrogation then begins and revolves around several aspects, including his doctrine, the spread of agitation and his intentions. Al-Hallaj replies with a long monologue about his origins, the journey of his search for knowledge, reaching the destination of Divine love and the conclusion of it. Abu 'Umar responds with anger and rejection for he considers al-Hallaj's answer to be a statement of pure heresy. Ibn Surayj disagrees with his colleague and refuses to convict him in view of the sacred relationship between a worshiper and his beloved Divine. Afterwards, Ibn Surayj investigates the truth behind al-Hallaj corrupting the masses and decides that the reason for the corruption is the Sultan himself. The trial continues by questioning al-Hallaj about his correspondence with other leaders from abroad and the content of his letters. The mystic replies that he was discontented by the suffering of people and by the injustice and poverty used to humiliate the less fortunate. The trial is interrupted by a messenger from the Sultan's palace, come to announce that the minister grants the Sufi amnesty. However, Abu 'Umar continues reading the letter and it turns out to be deceptive. Whilst it begins by showing mercy, it leaves the worse for last. The letter states that forgiving al-Hallaj on behalf of the Sultan does not infer laxity towards the Divine's rights. Thus, he should be punished for his crime against God. Ibn Surayj expresses his utmost disagreement and decides to leave the courtroom in protest against such injustice. Abu 'Umar continues the trial and recites the footnote of the letter that requires the court to let the people decide the penalty of al-Hallaj. Al-Shibli is one of the witnesses who was forced to speak at the stand and provide testimony. He tries very hard to

avoid answering the questions and begs to be allowed to leave. The judge then calls the group of paupers and asks them about their opinion of al-Hallaj, to which they all yell in unison that he is a *kāfir* (infidel) and should be executed. In the end, the judge orders the crowd to walk around the streets and markets, chanting that by order of the people, and not that of the authorities or the judges whose decision it was not, the court finds al-Hallaj guilty and sentences him to be hanged in the gallows. The group marches away to execute the order, and the play ends.

Summarising the play in detail was intentional, to not fall into the trap of mentioning each scene along with the analysis of verses in the following section.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Section Two**

#### **Methodology and Analysis**

Various were the scholars who felt inclined to explore the deeper meanings, symbols and allusions in *The Tragedy of al-Hallaj*. Many a research highlighted and confirmed the undeniable political significance of the play and its barely hidden rebellious voice, as was shown by the literature review in the last section. There were furthermore studies that brought up the influence of Greek drama on the poet, and which illustrated al-Hallaj as the sacrificing hero who dies for the sake of others. However, in this section, I intend to examine the play through a new perspective that, to the best of my knowledge, has never before been applied to it before. My analysis does not only aim to conclude the truth of the mystical challenge to the authorities, which has already been declared and established by several studies before, but I will also be exploring the method through which ‘Abd al-Sabur structured his play and built his main character in order to achieve that conclusion. In other words, instead of asking what the play aims to achieve, I will be attempting to explain how the poet developed his protagonist to allow him to express his political rebellion. In addition, to this, the above method will be applied to the study of the selected verses in the analysis, via the perspective and ideas mentioned earlier in this paper, with the purpose of emphasising the similarities between the points made in the different chapters of the thesis.

#### **The selected methodology**

As a general theoretical frame, I opted for the approach that Joseph Campbell introduced in his book *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. The reason for choosing this precise approach is because of the nature of the genre’s case study. In this work, ‘Abd al-Sabur does not write a direct dialogue with the Divine, instead, he writes about a mystic who had a conversation with the Divine.

Therefore, I believe that the chosen method has to focus on the character, in order to analyse his narrative. For the sake of clarity, I will present a broad outline of his method, as I will elaborate more throughout the analysis. The book provides a detailed anatomy map for the hero's journey from the beginning to the end, based on mythical stories and epic tales from different cultures and backgrounds. Campbell introduces his heroic guideline by designating two milestone parts in the protagonist's journey, which include several stages the main character will have to experience. It is not necessary that the hero delve into them all, however, he must plunge into at least several of them. At the very beginning, he provides us with a prologue about the monomyth and its allusions. He maintains that the hero is he or she who is capable of defeating historical and local limitations "to the generally valid, normally human forms" (Campbell 2012, 14). Moreover, the protagonist leaves the world of daily life and seeks the path of supernatural miracles. Afterwards, should he obtain victory, he would return from his mystery-laden journey having acquired the capability of providing his fellow men with blessings (ibid., 23).

The two parts Campbell divides the heroic journey into are "The Adventure of the Hero" and "The Cosmogonic Cycle." Each part is divided into four chapters and each has different steps or stages. In the first chapter entitled "Departure," the author classifies the stages of launching the adventure. Campbell calls the first step on the champion's path "The Call to Adventure" and suggests that it is instigated by a coincidence or a mistake that the hero or heroin commits, which leads to an unknown world or engages him or her with mysterious forces. This stage could be exemplified as awakening the self, the spiritual illumination, the great tree or the dark forest (ibid., 42–43). The next step is the "Refusal of the Call," when the hero refuses to leave the place where he believes his best interests to lie, his safe space (ibid., 49). However, when the conflict peeks, the heroin or hero will pray for a miracle to happen in order to change their negative reality (ibid., 56), which leads to the next stage: "Supernatural Aid." The ones who follow the call will be surrounded by a protective force such as, for instance, an old wiseman (ibid., 57). The preparation of the guide

will provide the hero with vital powers that will allow him or her to continue the journey, whereby he or she will face the ensuing step, which is “The Crossing of the First Threshold,” and is guarded by gatekeepers who stand between the hero and the unknown danger (ibid., 64). Managing to cross that magical threshold will instill the hero with the illusion of a rebirth into a new powerful identity. Instead, he will be defeated, drowned and swallowed into “The Belly of the Whale,” which announces the following stage, one that alludes to the image of the womb (ibid., 74) and hints to what Campbell calls "self-annihilation," where the hero dives into his own inner depths in order to be reborn (ibid., 77).

The second chapter is called “Initiation” and consists of six steps experienced by the main character of the monomyth. The first one is “The Road of Trials,” which follows the threshold and is considered to be the preferred route in the literature of miraculous adventures. In this stage, the hero explores a dreamland where he has to get through certain ordeals. He will be able to do so thanks to the advice and guidance bestowed upon him by the mentor he met earlier (ibid., 81). The author further believes that this level is analogous with the second step of the mystical path, “The Purification of the Self” (ibid., 84). In the step that follows, the main character transcends to the next level, that of “The Meeting with the Goddess” (ibid., 91). Campbell states that the symbol of the goddess represents the image of the mother. It is an image that colours the cosmos with femininity, protection and nourishment (ibid., 94) and only he who has brilliance will have the means to acquire the uppermost comprehension that would bring about the revelation of the high goddess (ibid., 97). In the next step, the hero has to endure yet another examination through a stage named “Woman as the Temptress,” which represents the mystical union between the hero, the goddess and the hero's victory, for the hero will have successfully mastered the deity's knowledge and she is seen as a symbol of life (ibid., 101). The fourth stage of the first part, or "Atonement with the Father," epitomises the father figure as a representation of adulthood, after having matured and separated from the figure of motherhood. Here, should he be worthy of it, the protagonist will

inherit the power of his father, a power which will prepare him for the real world (ibid., 115). This in turn leads the hero to the fifth stage: "Apotheosis." At this point, just like the Buddha, the main character emerges as a godlike figure, a state attained after transcending from the last stage of ignorance; the hero liberates himself from fear after his self-awareness is annihilated, in that space where "all beings become without a self" (ibid., 127). Finally, the last stage in this part is "The Ultimate Boon." It represents the eternal reward following the completion of the adventure (ibid., 148) and the attainment of the ultimate growth of the spirit.

The third chapter is baptised as "Return" and sets off with the stage of "The Refusal of the Return." Having completed his mission, the hero will be faced with the option of two choices: he could either stay in his new dominion or choose to return to his former society (ibid., 167). Should the protagonist be commissioned to spread the elixir of enlightenment around society, he will be supported by supernatural power. On the other hand, if the hero obtains the trophy against the wish of its guardian, or if the demons and the gods should resist his return to the world, his journey will be fraught with obstacles (ibid., 170). The stage that follows the "Return" is "Rescue from Without," and here is where the world might call for the hero in order to gain him back (ibid., 178). To be able to return, the hero will need to get through an obstacle, which is "The Crossing of the Return Threshold," a stage of confusion, where the champion experiences the divine world before clashing with the human one, which he has to return to. The problem with this level lies in the difficulty of transferring the language of darkness into the world of light (ibid., 181), and so the task that the hero is compelled to achieve is that of finding a method to bind his two worlds together. If he manages to do so, he will be elevated to the stage of "Master of the Two Worlds." To reach that level would indicate that the hero has mastered the art of passing across the two worlds, hence becoming the "cosmic dancer", as Nietzsche calls him (ibid., 196). In the end, Campbell states that the aim of the myth is to attain the point of dispelling the ignorance in life by reconciling the will of

the Universe with that of individual consciousness, which will help the hero achieve the last step: "Freedom to Live" (ibid., 206).

In the second part, Campbell represents another side of the hero's journey entitled "The Cosmogonic Cycle." In its first chapter, "Emanations," the author mentions six points. He begins with "From Psychology to Metaphysics," where he states that tales of imagination, which address the life of a hero, the hidden power of sacred nature, are in fact fears and desires that are layered in the human behaviour pattern. Therefore, myths are psychological texts that adhere to cosmology, history or biography (ibid., 219). Their messages are meant to be delivered in a form of communicative language of conventional wisdom (ibid., 220). The next point is "The universal round," which explains that in each mythology, there are illustrations of a cosmogonic cycle, which tends to start with an experience of awakening, followed by the experience of the dream and finally, the deep sleep (ibid., 227). I will omit the following steps and chapter, as they are irrelevant to my suggested analysis and will skip straight to the third chapter, called "Transformations of the hero," which I believe correlates particularly well with 'Abd al-Sabur's play. Its first point is "The primordial Hero and the Human," a stage in which the hero obtains enlightenment from the divine power in physical mortal shape (ibid., 271). It is followed by the "Childhood of the Human Hero," in which Campbell states that the cognitive years of the hero tend to illustrate the marvellous abilities he or she was gifted by the Divine (ibid., 274). When the hero obtains his power, he has to be tested by means of certain obstacles with the help of a companion or a mentor. Consequently, the hero steps into youth and the cycle of his childhood dies. The protagonist is then launched onto the unknown path (ibid., 280). When the stage of "The Hero as a Warrior" is reached, the hero will face obstacles and challenges from the unknown and because of that, he will become even more powerful to fight the enemy, which could materialise in any shape, such as a dragon or a monster. This enemy is in possession of the authority on account of his ego and oppression (ibid., 289). In the section that ensues, we have "The Hero as Lover," or the stage where the hero is rewarded with

love after accomplishing several courageous deeds. By "love," Campbell refers to a woman, who could be something akin to a princess rescued from a dragon or a maid kidnapped from a jealous parent and who represents the prize of his conquest (ibid., 293). The author then explores "The Hero as Emperor and as Tyrant." The writer believes that the hero is he who can make the presence of the One seen again by continuing the cosmogonic circle and reopening the eyes to see him regardless of delight or agony. Achieving this requires a deeper level of wisdom than the one before (ibid., 296). When the hero falls into the trap of worldly desires, he turns into a tyrant, as in the case of Nimrod (ibid., 299). A hero who experienced the One's illumination and returns with the belief of unification becomes "The Hero as World Redeemer," as the next stage is called (ibid., 299). However, in order not to turn into a tyrant, the author states that he ought to be crucified (ibid., 303). I believe that Jesus could be an illustration of this stage.

The final stage of examining the allusion is "The Hero as Saint." Here, a hero is he who is able to burn his ego and step away from the material world (ibid., 304). In the end, the hero manifestation reaches to the conclusion that there must be a "Departure of the Hero," which indicates his death in order to complete the purpose of his life. A hero is not a hero if he cannot reconcile with the doom (ibid., 306). However, that should not mean the end, for it is believed that he can be revived (ibid., 307).

### **The analysis of the play**

As has previously been mentioned, the play starts with the view of al-Hallaj crucified on the tree. It starts from the end; from death as the beginning of the story. According to Campbell's premise, death is the conditional departure for each hero in order to achieve the purpose of his life. Yet it does not represent the end, since the hero can be revived. Although this may appear like a contradictory image, it is actually compatible. The scene of his dead body is after all what motivated the people to start asking about him, his name, the crime that brought him to the gallows

and the identity of his killer. His death is what triggered his story to be brought back to life by inhabiting the memory of people and prompting questions that caused his remembrance to flourish:

المجموعة: أحببنا كلماته

أكثر مما أحببناه

فتركناه يموت لكي تبقى الكلمات.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 2000, 11)

We loved his words

More than we loved him

So we let him die so that his words might live.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 1972, 6)

The uttered words are the method of infusing the soul into his name. His memory will be revived through the words, which were at the same time the reason for his death. He therefore lives and dies because of them and makes the others live because of them:

كنا نلقاه بظهر السوق عطاشا فيروينا

من ماء الكلمات

جوعى، فيطاعمنا من أثمار الحكمة

وينادمنا بكؤوس الشوق إلى العرس النوراني.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 2000, 12)

We met him behind the market place:

Thirsty,

He quenched our thirst with the waters of his words;

Hungry,

He fed us with cups of longing for heavenly illumination.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 1972, 6)

The dialectic of life and death does not only show through the word in this scene, but through the tree that al-Hallaj is crucified on as well, since the tree is a symbol of life. The poet uses it in the play as if to say that man lives in death and dies in life and as long as he is alive, he dies. When this dialectic ends, he will find existence within the incarnation of the modern self, not only in the Creator who takes the image of the created, but also in the tree, which is nature taking on the image of the Creator, according to Ibn ‘Arabi’s theory of *wahdat al-wujūd* (the unicity of being)<sup>194</sup> (Subh 2003, 45). Subh believes that the concept of the Divine’s existence everywhere is illustrated by the tree: the creature that witnesses existence and immortality at the same time (ibid., 46).

Moreover, the first act in the play is entitled "*al-Kalima*," the word, and the second act is "*al-Mawt*," or death. I suggest that the titles of the acts are correlative with the dialectic between life and death, words being the representatives of life that causes death. However, it does not end but continues to circulate. When the preacher in the scene required to understand the situation, the head of the group replied:

لاتبغ الفهم.. اشعر و أحس

لا تبغ العلم.. تعرّف

لا تبغ النظر .. تبصّر.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 2000, 12)

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<sup>194</sup> Translation by al-‘Ajam 1999, 1155.

Do not seek to understand. Feel and sense.

Do not seek to know. Comprehend.

Do not seek to see. Perceive.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 1972, 6)

There is an intersection here between the idea of the group’s head and al-Niffari’s doctrine. Both agree on the fact that *fihm* (understanding), is the lowest level of comprehension, for the knowledge of the heart, or to feel, is more transcending. The agreement shines as well in the concept of *nazar* (seeing), which agrees with al-Niffari’s *ru’ya* (vision). Since vision is not the purpose, it is what you are seeing with that matters. Therefore, the preacher is depending on his eyes, an organ that is limited. Whereas the Sufi is asking him to look at what lies beyond in order to realise why what happened to al-Hallaj occurred. The head of the group then explains the tragedy and illustrates the significance of its occurrence, which elaborates more on the dialectic of life and death and confirms Campbell's suggestion regarding the death of the hero:

كان يقول:

إذا غسلت بالدماء هامتي وأغصني

فقط توضأت وضوء الأنبياء

كان يريد أن يموت، كي يعود للسماء

كأنه طفل سماوي شريد

قد ضل عن أبيه في متاهة المساء

كان يقول:

كأن من يقتلني محقق مشيئتي

ومنفذ إرادة الرحمن

لأنه يصوغ من تراب رجل فان

أسطورة وحكمة وفكرة

كان يقول:

إن من يقتلني سيدخل الجنان

لأنه بسيفه أتم الدورة

لأنه أعات بالدما إذ نخس الوريد

شجيرة جديية زرعها بلفظي العقيم.

( Abd al-Sabur 2000, 13)

He used to say:

‘If my head and limbs were washed with blood,

Then I would be cleansed as were the prophets’

He wished for death, he longed to return to heaven,

As though he were a heavenly child who was lost,

A child who had strayed from his father in the dark of night.

He used to say:

‘He who kills me fulfills my wish

And that of God.

For he who kills me would fashion from the dust of a dead man

A story with a moral, and an ideal’

He used to say:

‘He who kills me shall enter Paradise,

For with his blade he would complete the cycle;

With the blood he draws from the veins

He would succour

The wilting tree I planted with my empty words.

(‘ Abd al-Sabur 1972, 7)

Campbell insists that the hero must die to achieve his life’s message and purpose. The head of the mystics here understands that by reciting the words of al-Hallaj about the necessity of his death, he is reviving his memory through the wisdom of martyrdom. He furthermore literally confirms Campbell's idea by saying that the killer completed the circle. This verse also happens to confirm another idea of Campbell’s, which is that death is not the end and might signify a rebirth. The real al-Hallaj, putting aside the protagonist of the play for a moment, was a person who suffered from internal diaspora. His language, poetry and political interests were methods of exiling him instead of bringing him closer to people. He therefore felt an urgent need for salvation, which was only exacerbated by his profound mysticism. Consequently, death was the vessel through which to reach his home and fulfil his yearning to belong. As he himself says:

اقتلونني يا ثقاتي

إن في قتلي حياتي

ومماتي في حياتي

وحياتي في مماتي.

(al-Hallaj 2007, 204)

Kill me, O my faithful friends

For to kill me is to make me live

My Life is in my death

And my death is in my life.

(al-Hallaj, as cited in Massignon 1982, 600)

Whether he referred to death in a metaphorical or literal sense, the mystic had a deep faith that death would be the salvation through which he would meet his beloved and be reborn. In the play, 'Abd al-Sabur portrays al-Hallaj as an intellectual hero come to liberate the minds and souls from humiliation and instil the belief that each individual has the right to challenge the authorities if they did not guarantee him or her a life of dignity. However, I suggest that the representation of al-Hallaj in the play transcends to echo the persona of the prophets, something that can be seen in several scenes. In the previous example for instance, the mystic narrates the words of al-Hallaj, indicating that he who sacrifices his life for others is truly a prophet, since his poured blood reflects the sacrifices of the prophets for their people. I will elaborate more on this point in a designated section later on in the analysis, where I suggest that, in the play, al-Hallaj echoes the image of the prophets Jesus and Joseph.

The following scene is that of al-Shibli's grief for his companion's death, which I believe represents the voices that believe in the uselessness of sacrifices, given that the people will only reward this with abandonment:

يا صاحبي وحببي  
(أو لم ننهك عن العالمين؟)  
فما انتهيت!  
قد كنت عطرا نائما في وردته  
لم انسكيت؟  
وردة مكنونة في بحرها  
لم انكشفت؟  
وهل يساوي العالم الذي وهبته دمك  
هذا الذي وهبت؟  
سرنا معا على الطريق صاحبين  
أنت سبقت

أحببت حتى جدت بالعطاء

لكنني ضننت

حين رأيتَ النورَ تفتتَ للرجوع

ها أنتَ قد رجعت

أعطيك بعض ما وهبتَ للحياة

بعض ما أعطيت

(يلقي عليه وردة).

( Abd al-Sabur 2000, 16)

My companion, my beloved:

Have we not forbidden you the world?

You did not heed;

You were a fragrance latent in a rose;

Why were you poured forth?

You were a pearl hidden deep in the sea;

Why did you reveal yourself?

Is the world worthy of your sacrifice?

Your blood that you shed for it?

We followed the way together, two companions;

But you left me behind.

You loved to give magnanimously;

But I withheld my gift;

When you saw the light, you longed to return to it.

Now you have returned.

I give you some of that which you gave the world,

Some of what you gave.

He lays the red rose on the corpse.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 1972, 8–9)

Throughout the play, al-Shibli tends to denominate himself as a "negative" character, as al-‘Asili puts it. She states that historically, al-Shibli used to compose poems expressing his love for the Divine, but that he was in support of concealment (al-‘Asili 1995, 76). I tend to disagree with al-‘Asili’s description of al-Shibli as being negative, for I believe that he happens to represent another point of view of Sufism. As I previously mentioned in the last chapter, al-Niffari selected his complicated language to avoid falling into al-Hallaj’s trap. Al-Shibli furthermore believed in saving the secret of mystical stations and not revealing it in front of the masses, since not every individual has the capacity of cherishing the Divine’s light, given that it takes a certain spiritual preparation and the Divine's selection for a person to be worthy of it. I do however agree with al-‘Asili’s opinion that maintains that al-Shibli’s dialogue with his companion in the play was to shed light on al-Hallaj’s heroic role and to highlight each mystical ideology (ibid.).

Al-Shibli blames al-Hallaj by quoting a verse from *Sūrat al-Hujur* in the Qur’an, when the Divine says:

أَلَمْ نَنْهَكَ عَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ.

(Qur’an 15:70)

Have we not forbidden thee all beings.

(Qur’an 1996, 285)

The verse was quoted from a dialogue that occurred between the Prophet Lot and his people when the Divine sent him angels in human form to recite His message to him, ordering him to leave

his town. When his people curiously enquired about his guests, Loṭ asked them kindly not to embarrass him in front of them, then they replied with the quoted verse meaning to say: "aren't you supposed not to host anyone?" (Ibn Kathir 2020). In the scene, al-Shibli quotes the verse in a form different from the Qur'anic one. He uses it lexically as if meaning to say: "didn't I warn you to stay away from people?" For he believed that al-Hallaj's involvement in the matters of the mass is what led to his tragic death. I believe that the use of the Qur'anic verse in this instance echoes the image of prophecy, especially since the original *'ayā* was addressed to a prophet. Although it might appear that the Qur'anic use is different than that of 'Abd al-Sabur's, I suggest that they meet at the idea of hospitality. Al-Hallaj hosted the Divine light in his heart and therefore could not fight against not sharing it with people. The love of the Divine light flooded his heart with generosity, and so he could not refrain from saving others. I believe that what could support my suggestion are the verses in which al-Shibli says to his friend that he loved to the extent of giving.

The dialectic of life and death emerges again in this verse by way of the symbol of the *warda*, the rose. Al-Shibli describes his friend as being a perfume in a hidden flower and later throws a rose in front of his body as a symbol of al-Hallaj's life dedication. Prima facie, the confrontation between life and death appears to be indicated by the hanging body representing death and the flower alluding to life. However, there is a deeper mystical meaning layered in this scene, where the rose happens to be a Sufi symbol denoting prophecy as well.

According to Schimmel, poets considered flowers to represent prophets – as in the case of Jesus – for their delightful fragrance could revive the dead, as indeed was the case with the miracle performed by Jesus. Moreover, flowers are also the book of the Divine's wisdom, that can only be comprehended by the passionate nightingale (Schimmel 2008, 50). Having said this, flowers could also imply mortality, on account of their short lives and their rapid withering. In addition, Schimmel mentions that the Persian mystical perspective considers the love story between the flower and the nightingale to be a sad one, since the bird fell in love with the rose but could not be with her. The

sadness in this story, as they state, lies in the tale's symbolism of the human soul's love and yearning for absolute divine beauty, since flowers indicate the Divine's presence, according to old Sufi precepts. Moreover, it is believed that every flower has a perfume from paradise, which indicates the link between the earth and the heavens (ibid., 51–52). Thus, the dialectic of life and death is limited to the body and the flower, but could be dual in the flower itself.

Al-Shibli's monologue continues:

رباه لا أستطيع أن أمد ناظري  
يجول في روعي وفي خواطري  
لو كان لي بعض يقينك  
لكنت مصلوبا إلى يمينك  
لكنتي استبقيت حينما امتحنت عمري  
وقلت لفظا غامضا معناه  
حين رموك في أيدي القضاة  
أنا الذي قتلتك!  
أنا الذي قتلتك!

(‘Abd al-Sabur 2000, 17)

God, I cannot look!

His memory fills my soul and my thoughts.

If I had only had such faith as you,

I would now be crucified next to you.

But when I faced the inquisition, I wanted to stay

Alive,

And I uttered vague words

When they brought you before the judges.

I am the one who killed you,

I am the one who killed you.

( 'Abd al-Sabur 1972, 9)

The flower dialectic that bespeaks the Divine presence and the impossibility of reaching it which, as mentioned earlier, in this case embodies al-Shibli's eye and soul. He witnesses the presence of his friend's body and the absence of his soul, while simultaneously feeling al-Hallaj's presence in his heart, which is the opposite of what is physically in front of him. He states that a little of al-Hallaj's faith would be the reason for his crucifixion as well, however he seeks refuge in the mysterious words to save his life, that same weapon that killed his friend. He therefore claims that he metaphorically murdered his friend because of his fear.

In the second scene, the poet takes us to the moment when al-Hallaj is arguing with his friend al-Shibli about the role of the mystic and the ramifications of the dialogue between al-Hallaj and the Divine, that appears in several parts of the play. Replying to his friend's advice not to speak of his dialogues with the Divine, al-Hallaj states:

لكن يا أصدق أصحابي نبئني

كيف أميت النور بعيني

هذي الشمس المحبوسة في ثنيات الأيام؟

تتأقل كل صباح، ثم تنفض عن عينيها النوم

ومع النوم، الشفقة

وتواصل رحلتها الوحشية فوق الطرقات

،فوق الساحات، الخانات، المارستانات

الحمامات

وتجمع دنيا محترقة  
بأصابعها الحمراء النارية  
،صوراً، أشباحاً، تنسج منها قمصانا  
يجري في لحمتها وسداها الدم  
في كل مساء تمسح عيني بها  
توقظني من سباحات الوجد  
وتعود إلى الحبس المظلم  
قل لي يا شبلي  
أ أنا أرمد؟

(‘Abd al-Sabur 2000, 19)

But, tell me, O best of friends,  
How do I extinguish the light my eyes see?  
The sun, wrapped in the folds of time,  
Rises slowly every morning, and rubs the sleep  
Out of her eyes  
And with that, mercy.  
Then she continues her cruel journey along the  
roads,  
Across the squares, over the caravanserais, the  
hospitals, the bathhouses.  
And, with the red fiery fingers, from the burned  
earth she gathers  
Images in shadows, weaving from them robes  
where blood flows

Through the wrap and woof.  
With these, every evening, she rubs my eyes,  
Wakes me from the splendour of ecstasy,  
Then returns to her dark prison.

Tell me, O Shibli,  
is my sight afflicted?  
(‘Abd al-Sabur 1972, 10–11)

The difference between the two mystics is pointed out through this conversation, where the light that al-Hallaj sees is the Divine light that expands in his body to encompass whatever his eyes rest upon. The brightness of this light is so blinding that it only allows him to see the Divine. By contrast, al-Shibli believes in keeping the light within the heart to be able to focus on beauty. However, al-Hallaj is unable to ignore the evil in the world or the sorrow of others that spreads on the streets. While al-Shibli carries on emphasising his point, al-Hallaj continues:

لا إني أشرح لك  
لم يختار الرحمن شخوصا من خلقه؟  
ليفرق فيهم أقباسا من نوره  
هذا، ليكونوا ميزان الكون المعتل  
ويفيضوا من نور الله على فقراء القلب  
وكما لا ينقص نور الله إذا فاض على  
أهل النعمة  
لا ينقص نور الموهوبين إذا ما فاض  
على الفقراء.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 2000, 21)

Certainly not. I am explaining to you  
why the Merciful Lord chooses particular people,  
Singles them and distributes among them glimmers of His light  
They are chosen so that they can give balance to  
This sick world,  
Shedding God's light on the poor in heart.  
And, just as God's light does not diminish when  
It shines upon the rich,  
Just so the radiance of the enlightened few is not  
reduced by  
Shining upon the poor.

( 'Abd al-Sabur 1972, 11–12)

I sustain that this verse expresses Campbell's ideas regarding the return of the hero in possession of the elixir after meeting with the goddess. To explain further, al-Hallaj is attempting to convince al-Shibli about the importance of the mystic's role, for he strongly believes that it is incumbent upon he who has met the Divine, and was hence selected by him, to take the responsibility of saving his people from darkness and following the light of divinity. This is what Campbell referred to about the hero's duty towards his people, as mentioned earlier in the methodology section. In addition, al-Hallaj confirms that there are few among the people to have been chosen particularly by the Divine to achieve His will. The verses are clearly reflecting the image of prophecy and the role of prophets towards their society. Being selected by the source of all power clearly proffers a certain powerful stance that could challenge the authorities. Al-Hallaj does not believe in mystics' isolation. He urges those chosen by the Divine to get involved in people's

matters in order to fight evil, while his friend could hardly disagree more. Al-Hallaj continues expanding on his point in response to his friend's question about the nature of evil:

فقر الفقراء

جوع الجوعى، في أعينهم تتوهج ألفاظ

لا أوقن معناها

...

قد تدمع عيني عندئذ، قد أتألم

أما ما يملأ قلبي خوفاً، يضني روحي فزعا

ونداماً

فهي العين المرخاة الهدب

فوق استفهام جارح

(أين الله؟)

(‘Abd al-Sabur 2000, 22)

The poverty of the poor

The hunger of the hungry

In such eyes as theirs, I see a glow

which means something, something but I don't

know what.

...

Then, tears may come to my eyes; or I may suffer.

But what fills my heart with fear,

What rends my soul with fear and sorrow,

Is the sight of eyes lowered in agony,

Asking in silence, inquiring:

'Where is God?'

(‘Abd al-Sabur 1972, 12–13)

My suggestion is that here, al-Hallaj is representing the perspective of socialism. He stresses that human crisis and injustice is at the very heart of what creates doubts about Divine existence, since the spread of evil will cause people to question the Divine's interference to end injustice. Therefore, from his point of view, having a dialogue with the Divine infuses the mystic with a certain responsibility towards his society, as he needs to keep their faith alive by achieving justice and ending poverty. Evil is neither the devil nor lust, it is the absence of fairness. The conversation escalates between the two mystics until al-Hallaj recites the following verse, which clearly confirms that he has power:

أصحابي أكثر من أن تحصيهم يا ابراهيم

أصحابي آيات القرآن وأحرفه

كلمات المحزون المهجور على جبل الزيتون

أحياء الأموات، الشهداء الموعودون

فرسان الخيل البلق ذوو الأثواب الخضراء

آلاف المظلومين المنكسرين.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 2000, 32)

My friends are countless, Ibrahim.

My friends are the verses of the Koran and its

letters,

The words of him who was sad and forsaken on

The Mount of olives,  
Those who are alive of the dead, the martyrs who  
Are promised  
Life everlasting;  
the green-robed knight, riding dappled horses;  
The thousands of men, wronged, broken.  
(‘Abd al-Sabur 1972, 19)

It is striking how al-Niffari and al-Hallaj are different in their concept and understanding of words and letters. The first considered them as a veil that separated the worshiper from his Beloved, while the second feels imbued with power thanks to the support of words and letters. We might argue that what is meant by letters and words from the perspective of al-Hallaj is different from that of al-Niffari's. Al-Hallaj is clear in his designation of the type of letters he refers to: the words of the Holy Qur'an; the author of those words and letters is none other than Allah, hence they are not a method of veiling, they are a method of support. Besides, he does not refer to them as objects but humanises them by calling them "my friends" due to his conviction that they are alive and present. I propose that the echo of prophecy also permeates this verse, but this time I believe that it reflects the image of the Prophet Muhammad, for he was the one upon whom the miracle of the Qur'an was bestowed. What I believe supports my argument are the following lines, where he describes the martyrs riding horses, which hints at images of the Prophet's companions who fought alongside him in his *ghazawāt* (battles).

After al-Shibli's suggestion to his friend to go to hajj, his friend responds by speaking of his experience there, then al-Hallaj clarifies his purpose in preaching to the mass:

في أرض مدينته الخضراء  
ولدت كلمات الله هناك بقلبي المثقل  
فأتيت بها، طوّفت بأرض الناس  
عن فتنة طلعتها أنضو أطراف ثيابي شيئاً شيئاً  
سأخوض في طرق الله  
ربانيا  
حتى أفنى فيه  
فيمد يديه، يأخذني من نفسي  
هل تسألني ماذا أنوي  
أنوي أن أنزل للناس  
و أحدثهم رغبة ربي  
الله قوي، يا أبناء الله  
كونوا مثله  
الله فعول يا أبناء الله  
كونوا مثله  
الله عزيز يا أبناء الله.  
( Abd al-Sabur 2000, 35)

In the prophet's green city, itself,  
God's words laden with love were born in my  
heart;  
I carried them and I wandered in man's world,  
Unveiling them little by little,  
I shall walk in God's path  
In a godly manner, until I perish.

He will then extend his hand and take me away  
from myself.

You ask me, what do I intend to do?

I intend to go to the people

And tell them about God's will.

I shall tell them 'God is mighty, O children of God.

Be like Him.'

I shall tell them, 'God is creative O children of God.

Be like him.'

I shall tell them: 'God is Omnipotent, O children of God.'

( 'Abd al-Sabur 1972, 20–22)<sup>195</sup>

I believe this verse expresses what Campbell calls “the belly of the whale.” Being in Mecca, the city of the Ka‘ba, where the worshipper is under the hospitality of the Divine, experiencing the mystic's annihilation, which I suggest symbolises hitting rock bottom. Since this stage is considered to represent the rebirth of the hero by dint of his receiving “supernatural aid”, the help from the Divine arrives to rescue him and launches him again towards his destiny. His message defines the reason of his being a threat that annoys the authorities: to have the Divine as a higher example and imitate his attributes, which include strength, efficiency and glory. Had the people followed his advice, a revolution would have ensued to tackle the stability of the state. Al-Shibli therefore demands from his friend to honour the commitment of the cloak, for it is the symbol of asceticism. However this only enflames the rage of al-Hallaj into saying:

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<sup>195</sup> There is a difference from the original Arabic version in the translation's arrangement. It seems that the translation was based on an older version of the play that has similar arrangements.

إن كانت شارة ذل ومهانة  
رمزا يفضح أنا جمعنا فقر الروح إلى فقر المال  
فأنا أجفوها أخلعها يا شيخ  
إن كانت سترا منسوجا من أنيتنا  
كي يحجبنا عن عين الناس، فنحجب  
عين الله  
فأنا أجفوها أخلعها يا شيخ  
يا رب اشهد  
هذا ثوبك  
وشعار عبوديتنا لك  
وأنا أجفوه، أخلعه في مرضاتك  
يا رب اشهد  
يا رب اشهد.  
(يخلع الخرقة).

(‘Abd al-Sabur 2000, 36)

If it is a mark of degradation and disgrace,  
A sign indicating that to material poverty we have added  
Poverty of the spirit,  
I will abandon it! I will cast it off!  
Oh Shaykh! If it is a veil woven from our ‘we are  
this and we are that’  
In order to hide us from the people and thus be  
hidden from God,  
I will abandon it! I will cast it off!

Witness my oath O God:  
this is Your Vestment,  
the mark of our servitude to You,  
I abandon it! I cast it off, so that You may be  
pleased with me!  
Witness, God!  
Witness, God!  
He removes the cloak.  
(‘Abd al-Sabur 1972, 22)

This verse lays the question of symbolism in mysticism. It is my belief that in this instance, the cloak stands for what al-Niffari views as the veil: letters and words, since he maintains that all that veils you from the light of the Divine is a *ḥarf*. Al-Hallaj sees the symbol of worship as a veil that hides the light of the One, because it increases the distance between him and the people. This confirms al-Hallaj’s belief that a man cannot be a man of God if he cannot contribute in the assistance of others. For he who isolates himself in a hermitage is no less than an ignorant. Those who are isolated represent Campbell’s idea of the hero who refuses the call, on account of wanting to remain in his comfort zone and the lack of desire to discover his own inner world. By contrast, al-Hallaj represents the hero who answers the call to adventure and returns to spread awareness.

Afterwards, the Sufi roams the streets and markets to preach his message to the masses, which seems religious in appearance but is in fact purely political. His monologue in this scene is quite long, I will therefore omit quoting the verses that do not support my analysis.

Al-Hallaj's idea of human power is inspired by the Qur’anic belief that the human soul is partly divine, thereby, any human should treat his own self with dignity and never approve of any injustice:

وإذ قال ربك للملائكة إني خالق بشرا من صلصال من حمأ مسنون، فإذا سويته ونفخت فيه من روحي فقعوا له ساجدين.

(Qur'an 15: 28–29)

And when thy Lord said to the angels, ‘See, I am creating a mortal of a clay of mud moulded. When I have shaped him, breathed my spirit in him, fall you down, bowing before him! (Arberry 1996, 282).

Therefore in the play, al-Hallaj states:

أراد الله أن تجلى محاسنه ، وتستعلن أنواره  
فأبدع من أثير القدرة العليا مثالا ، صاعه طينا  
وألقى بين جنبيه ببعض الفيض من ذاته  
وجلاه ، وزينه ، فكان صنيعة الإنسان  
فحن له كمرآة ، يطالع فوق صفحتها  
جمال الذات مجلوا ، ويشهد حسنه فينا  
فإن تصف قلوب الناس ، تأنس نظرة الرحمن  
إلى مرآتنا، ويديم نظرته، فتحيينا  
وإن تكدر قلوب الناس يصرف وجهه عنا.  
( Abd al-Sabur 2000, 44)

God wished His goodness to be evident, and His  
light to shine.

So from the breath of omnipotence,  
He fashioned a form from clay,

And breathed into it some of His emanation;  
He clothed it, and He ornamented it. His creation  
was Man.

Thus, to Him we are a mirror in which he contemplates  
His beauty unveiled; He sees His radiance in us.  
So, if man's heart is pure, the Merciful is pleased,  
His eye remains upon us and we live.  
But if man's heart is corrupt, he turns his face  
from us.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 1972, 27)

In this case, al-Hallaj turns to the religious belief that states that the Divine is happy when the worshiper follows his doctrine. In fact, what al-Hallaj is saying here is that when man is contented, the Divine is satisfied. Later he states:

وماذا يفعل الانسان إن جافاه مولاه ؟  
يضيق الكون في عينيه ، يفقد ألفة الأشياء  
تصير الشمس في عينيه أذرعة من النيران  
يلقي ثقلها المشاء  
.....  
ويمشي القحط في الأسواق ، يجبي جزية  
الأنفاس  
من الأطفال والمرضى  
حقييته بلا قاع ، فلا تملا إذ تعطى  
ورغبته بلا ري ، فلا تسكت أن تسأل

وخلف القحط يمشي تحت ظل البيرق المرسل

جنود القحط ، جيش الشر والنقمة.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 2000, 45)

And what befalls a man whose master is angry with him?

The universe becomes too small for him,

Things become too confused for him,

The rays of the sun become tongues of fire

Moving like multicoloured claims upon the faces

....

Then poverty stalks of the world and collects its tributes

From infants and invalids.

The man whose Master is angry with him

Is like one who carries a bottomless sack which

can never be filled

No matter how much is put into it:

His desire is never satisfied, it nags him constantly.

Now, behind poverty, under its unfurled banner

March poverty’s soldiers, the legions of evil vengeance.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 1972, 28)

The mystic simply puts it that the lack of Divine presence in the human heart is the reason for its misery, as it is responsible for hunger, poverty and injustice. Al-Hallaj politicises the spiritual because he believes the two are related and should not be separated. If the authorities claim to be ruling according to religious directives, then why are the people suffering? Is not religion supposed

to treat every human soul with dignity, since every human soul contains the breath of the Divine? This discourse could not be approved by the authorities since it touches upon their dominance and control of the people, and so in the middle of al-Hallaj's speech, two police officers appear and start arguing with him, in order to let him fall into the slip of his own tongue and have an excuse to arrest him for supposedly spreading blasphemy. In his discussion with them, al-Hallaj declares:

رعاك الله يا ولدي ، لماذا تستثير شجاي  
وتجعلني أبوح بسر ما أعطى  
ألا تعلم أن العشق سر بين محبوبين  
هو النجوى التي إن أعلنت سقطت مروءتنا  
لأننا حينما جاد لنا المحبوب بالوصل تنعمنا  
دخلنا الستر ، أطعمنا وأشربنا  
وراقصنا وأرقصنا ، وغنينا وغُنينا  
وكوشفنا، وكاشفنا، وعاهدنا وعاهدنا  
فلما أقبل الصبح تفرقتنا  
تعاهدنا ، بأن أكتم حتى أنطوي في القبر.  
( Abd al-Sabur 2000, 48)

May God protect you, my son! Why do you stir me up

And make me reveal my secret?

Do you not know that love is a secret between two lovers?

Is it a relationship which, if made public, defiles

Our honor,

For when the Beloved gratified us with union, we had delight:

We entered the secret place,

We were given food and drink,  
We danced and we were danced with,  
We sang and we were sung to,  
We revealed our inner thoughts and inner thoughts were revealed to us,  
we promised and were promised,  
And when morning came, we separated.  
But we had made a covenant that I should keep the secret.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 1972, 30–31)

This is the moment where I believe al-Hallaj and al-Suhrawardi intersect. This verse explains the indirect dialogue that took place between al-Hallaj and his Beloved. The communication with the Divine being the analogue for receiving the hospitality of the One, drinking from his rivers of wisdom, entering the hidden zone. It echoes the image of al-Suhrawardi’s spiritual journey, when he had the privilege of drinking from the same cup. I also believe this scene to converge with the stage Campbell calls “Answering the Call to Adventure.” Entering the zone behind the veil could represent entering the dark forest or the cave that hides the treasure and thereby leads to meeting the goddess.

Campbell’s stages can be found in different arrangements along the play; the first stages might be found in the middle and some of the last ones will be at the start. Nonetheless, they are clearly presented in the exact same arrangement they appear in Campbell's book during the monologue al-Hallaj gives in the trial scene, despite the fact that the scene of al-Hallaj in prison precedes that of his trial. However, I am in support of presenting it as a full example of Campbell’s hero map, and I will be exploring the jail scene individually, as I believe it represents the prophetic reflection.

In his own defence in the trial accusing him of heresy, instigating the mass against the king and corresponding with foreign leaders, al-Hallaj responds with a long monologue that I will be dividing according to each stage it matches in the hero cycle.

أنا رجل من غمار الموالي، فقير الأرومة والمنبت

فلا حسبي ينتمي للسماء، ولا رفعتني لها

ثروتي

ولدت كآلاف من يولدون، بآلاف أيام هذا

الوجود

لأن فقيرا -بذات مساء- سعى نحو

حضن فقيرة..

وأطفأ فيه مرارة أيامه القاسية

نموت كآلاف من يكبرون، حين يقاتون

خبز الشموس

ويسقون ماء المطر

وتلقاهم صبية يافعين حزانى على الطرقات

الحزينة

فتعجب كيف نموا واستطالوا، وشبت

خطاهم

وهذي الحياة ضنينة.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 2000, 102–103)

I am a man of the people;

Poor by birth and descent.

My genealogy does not reach the sky,  
And my fortune has not elevated me up high.  
I was born like the thousands who are born in the thousands of days,  
Because a poor man, one night, went into the embrace of a poor woman  
Where he sweetened the bitterness of his cruel existence  
I grew up like the thousands who grow up feeding on the bread of the Sun  
And drinking the waters of the rain,  
Like the thousands whom you meet on sorrowful roads,  
Sad young people;  
And you wonder how they survived and how they became strong  
Despite the deprivation of their lives.  
( Abd al-Sabur 1972, 63–64)

This is the stage that that corresponds to “The Call to Adventure,” when the hero is just a regular person among the crowd with an urge to break out of the shell of his oppressed conditions of poverty, hunger and injustice, which create the motive to find the call to adventure. The first stage to reach the call was tracking knowledge:

تسكعت في طرقات الحياة ، دخلت سراديبها

الموحشات

حجبت بكفي لهيب الظهيرة في الفلوات

وأشعلت عيني، دليلي، أنيسي في الظلمات

وذوبت عقلي، وزيت المصابيح، شمس

النهار على صفحات الكتب

لهتت وراء العلوم سنين، ككلب يشم

روائح صيد  
فيتبعها ، ثم يحتال حتى ينال سبيلا إليها ،  
فيركض ،  
ينقض  
فلم يسعد العلم قلبي، بل زادني حيرة راجفة  
بكيت لها وارتجفت  
وأحسست أني ضئيل كقطرة ظل  
كحبة رمل  
ومنكسر تعس، خائف مرتعد  
فعلمي ما قادني قط للمعرفة  
وهبني عرفت تضاريس هذا الوجود  
مدائنه وقراه  
وودياته وذراه  
وتاريخ أملاكه الأقدمين  
وأثار أملاكه المحدثين  
فكيف بعرفان سر الوجود، ومقصدي  
مبتدا أمره، منتهاه  
لكي يرفع الخوف عني، خوف المنون  
وخوف الحياة ، وخوف القدر.  
( Abd al-Sabur 2000, 103–104)

I wandered the roads of life and entered its dark alleys.

With the palm of my hand, I shaded myself from the noon-day heat of the desert;

And a night I lit my eyes, a torch for my way in the darkness.

The rays of the sun, lamp oil, and my mind, I burned in libraries

Four years, I searched for knowledge, the way a dog hunts on his prey,

And follows it, schemes to seize it, then runs and leaps upon it.

Yet learning did not content me;

It's only increased my fearful perplexity;

I cried and I trembled,

I felt alone and insignificant, like the dewdrop,

like a grain of sand.

I felt broken, miserable, frightened, and shaken.

My learning did not lead me to knowledge.

Suppose I knew the topography of this word –

its cities, towns, and villages,

Its valleys, and its heights,

Knew even the history of its ancient kings,

The achievements of its present Emperors–

How would that help me know the secret of being,

Its purpose, its beginning, and its end.

So that fear would leave me, fear of death, fear of life, fear of the unknown.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 1972, 64)

In order to escape his miserable reality, the mystic searches for knowledge, as it might satisfy his most urgent needs, but once he starts to do so, he falls into the trap of dissatisfaction. I suggest that the disappointment stems from the call to adventure itself, which the hero answers and follows. It is followed by the next stage:

لكي أطمئن

سألت الشيوخ، فقيل

تقرب إلى الله، صل ليرفع عنك الضلال

صل لتسعد

وكننت نسييت الصلاة، فصليت لله رب المنون

ورب الحياة ورب القدر

وكان هواء المخافة يصفر في أعظمي ويئز

كريح الفلا وأنا ساجد راعع أتعبد

فأدركت أني أعبد خوفي، لا الله

كنت به مشركا لا موحدًا

وكان إلهي خوفي

وصليت أطمع في جنته

ليختال في مقلتيّ خيال القصور ذوات القباب

وأسمع وسوسة الحلي، همس حرير الثياب

أنني أبيع صلاتي إلى الله

فلو أتقنت صنعة الصلوات لزداد الثمن

وكننت به مشركًا، لا موحدًا

وكان إلهي الطمع

وحير قلبي سؤال:

ترى قُدْرَ الشرك للكائنات

وإلا، فكيف أصلي له وحده

وأخلي فؤادي مما عداه

لكي أنزع الخوف عن خاطري

لكي أطمئن.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 2000, 105–106)

So that I might feel safe.

I asked the learned. They told me,

‘Cling to God, pray that He may enlighten you, pray for peace of mind

I had forgotten prayer. So I prayed to God,

Lord of death, Lord of life, and Lord of fate,

But the wind of fear whistled through my bones

Like the desert wind

Even while I prostrated myself, while I knelt in prayer.

Then I realised that what I was worshipping was my fear, not God-

I was worshipping more than one God:

My God was also my fear

I prayed greedily, I prayed to earn His paradise,

To see in my mind’s eye the images of domed palaces in heaven

To hear the tinkling of jewels, the whispering of the houri's silken garments.

I felt that I was selling my prayers to God,

And that if the performing of prayers had been more elaborate,

The price would have been higher.

Thus, I was worshipping more than one God:

Greed was also my God

The question perplexed me:

Is associating other beings with God preordained?

Otherwise, how would I worship Him alone?

And concentrate my thoughts upon Him alone?

In order that I be free from fear, and feel secure.

This verse represents the stage where the hero meets the helper who will provide him with the necessary knowledge to cross the threshold. But just when the hero believes that he finally has all that it takes to indulge in his journey, he falls into the whale’s belly, which is depicted by the dissatisfaction of al-Hallaj with the result of his prayers. Indeed he is once more disappointed, since he thought that following the “helper,” the shaykh, was supposed to suffice to cross the threshold. This intersects with al-Niffari’s doctrine as well. As already mentioned in chapter two, al-Niffari considers that performing religious rituals such as *dhikr* does not necessarily mean that the worshipper is a monotheist, for the ritual could be a method of separating the seeker from his beloved because it creates dualism in his heart, meaning that he is worshipping the Divine for a purpose other than love, such as greed or some specific reward. This causes the path of unification to vanish, because it implies that the worshiper acknowledges himself as an individual identity separate from the One. I believe this to be “The Belly of the Whale” that al-Hallaj fell into. The solution, however, soon follows:

كما يلتقي الشوق شوق الصحاري العطاش

بشوق السحاب السخي

كذلك كان لقائي بشيخي

أبي العاص عمرو بن أحمد، قدس تربته ربه

وجمعنا الحب، كنت أحب السؤال، وكان

يحب النوال

ويعطي، فيبتل صخر الفؤاد

ويعطي، فتندي العروق ويلمع فيها اليقين

ويعطي، فيخضر غصني

ويعطي، فيزهر نطقي وطني  
ويخلع عني ثيابي ، ويلبسني خرقة العارفين.  
(‘Abd al-Sabur 2000, 106–107)

Just as the longing, thirsty desert meets abundant rain  
So did I meet my teacher  
Abūl‘āṣ, Omar, son of Ahmad, may his soul rest in peace  
And love United us; I loved to ask, and he loved to reply,  
And he gave, and my soul became tender,  
And he gave, and my veins swelled and faith shone through them;  
He gave, and my being became younger;  
He gave, and my speech, and my knowledge bloomed  
He took off my clothing and dressed me in the the garment of the learned.  
(‘Abd al-Sabur 1972, 65–66)

The verse above is the one I suggest as the embodiment of what Campbell calls “The Supernatural Aid.” It might come from a higher level or from a human being, which I believe to be Abi al-‘As ‘Amr ibn Ahmad, the mentor who provided al-Hallaj with the superpower and the instructions and guidance to win the elixir, which is none other than the Divine’s love. He continues:

يقول هو الحب، سر النجاة، تعشق تفز  
وتفنى بذات حبيبك، تصبح أنت المصلي،  
وأنت الصلاة  
وأنت الديانة والرب والمسجد

تعشقت حتى عشقت، تخيلت حتى رأيت

رأيت حبيبي، وأتحفني بكمال الجمال

جمال الكمال

فأتحفته بكمال المحبة

وأفانيت نفسي فيه.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 2000, 107)

He used to say that love is the secret of salvation

Love and you will be saved

You will be rich in your beloved;

You will become the praying and a prayer

You will become the faith, the Lord and the mosque

So I loved until I fell in love

I imagined until I saw

I saw my Beloved,

And He favoured me with the perfection of beauty and the beauty of perfection

And I favoured Him with the perfection of love

And I lost myself in Him.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 1972, 66)

The elixir of the Divine's love provided al-Hallaj with ultimate power, a strength poured onto him from the Absolute, that unleashes al-Hallaj as a prophet capable of performing miracles and spreading the light that he met, those words addressed to him by the Divine, among the people. Thus, he is able to follow the next step that Campbell calls “The Return,” in order to achieve the hero’s purpose, which in his case is saving the people who were less fortunate than him because

they were not selected by the One. Despite the fact that returning to society is, from al-Hallaj's point of view, executing the Divine's order, which appears to be a religious thing to do, the judge Abu 'Umar replies with:

صمتا: هذا كفر بين!

('Abd al-Sabur 2000, 107)

Silence! Clearly, this is heresy!

('Abd al-Sabur 1972, 66)

But the other judge, Ibn Suryj, who holds a fairer view, says:

بل هذا حال من أحوال الصوفية

لا يدخل في تقدير محاكمنا

أمر بين العبد وربه

لا يقضى فيه إلا الله.

('Abd al-Sabur 2000, 107).

Not heresy, but the description of a mystical vision

That's outside of the jurisdiction of our courts

this is a matter between a man and his Creator

only God can judge it.

('Abd al-Sabur 1972, 66)

The dialectic we see here is between the faith that the authorities wish to force on the worshipper and the private relationship between the Divine and his seeker. Al-Hallaj establishes his revolution based on religion, the very same one used by the authorities to subjugate the mass. Al-Hallaj believes himself to be a prophetic hero who came to liberate the people from worshipping the king in order to glorify the God of the king instead. This, from Abu 'Umar's perspective is total heresy. It is clear that both al-Hallaj and Abu 'Umar consider religion to be a political tool; the first to revolt and the second, to oppress. And the question that arises here is: why would religion create a threat to the authorities? Why would a few words jeopardise the throne of the ruler? It is due to the ramifications of it? Al-Hallaj believed that shedding the light of the Divine should be the approach to achieve justice, he therefore corresponded with rulers from other countries to invite them to join his movement for they might become the next rulers of his. If they did, they must follow the doctrine of the Divine, which is justice. Abu 'Umar describes al-Hallaj's messages as "poisoned" and asks him about the reason for sending them, to which he replies:

ماذا أصنع؟

لا أملك إلا أن أتحدث

ولتنتقل كلماتي الريح السواحة

وأثبتها في الأوراق شهادة إنسان من أهل

الرؤية

فلعل فؤادا ظمانا من أفئدة وجوه الأمة

يستعذب هذي الكلمات

فيخوض بها في الطرقات

يرعاها إن ولي الأمر

ويوفق بين القدرة والفكرة

ويزاوج بين الحكمة والفعل.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 2000, 111–112)

What should I do?

I possess nothing but words

So let the wandering wind carry my words

And let me impress them upon paper, a testimony of a visionary man

In the hope that the thirsty heart of a great man

Will find these words refreshing

And spread them among the people;

And when he comes to power,

Strike a balance between power and thought

And join wisdom with action.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 1972, 69)

Fully aware of his limitations, al-Hallaj knows that he cannot end poverty nor fight against the persons who caused it, he can only preach, advice and illuminate others to lift the oppression. Abu ‘Umar continues by interrogating him about his intentions towards poverty and if he wishes to eliminate it. His reply is:

الفقر هو القهر

الفقر هو استخدام الفقر لإذلال الروح

الفقر هو استخدام الفقر لقتل الحب وزرع

البغضاء

الفقر يقول لأهل الثروة

‘أكره جمع الفقراء

فهمو يتمنون زوال النعمة عنك'

ويقول لأهل الفقر

'إن جعت فكل لحم أخيك.'

( 'Abd al-Sabur 2000,112)

Poverty is the soul oppressed.

Poverty is the use of deprivation to humiliate men,  
to kill love and plant hatred.

Poverty speaks to the privileged and says:

'I hate the poor

Because they wish to take your wealth.'

And speaks to the poor, saying:

'If you are hungry, eat your brother's flesh.'

( 'Abd al-Sabur 1972, 69)

The mystic believes that poverty is a political instrument that the authorities use to humiliate the mass. He sees the current political situation as being against religious requirements. Whereas for their part, the authorities consider what he calls religious to be a complete heresy, simply because it does not achieve their own political agenda. Since the authorities have the exclusivity of defining what is rightly religious and what is not, they decide the validity of his faith. Abu 'Umar says to his colleague:

يا ابن سريج

إنني لا أبحث في إيمانه

بل في كيفية إيمانه.

( 'Abd al-Sabur 2000,116)

Ibn Surayj,

I am not investigating his belief in God,

But the manner of his belief.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 1972, 72)

However, Ibn Surayj objects to this approach by retorting:

هل تبغي أن تنبش في قلبه

هل هذا من حق الوالي

أم من حق الله؟

(‘Abd al-Sabur 2000,116–117)

Do you mean to probe his soul?

Is this one of the ruler’s rights?

Or is it God’s right?

(‘Abd al-Sabur 1972, 72)

He then leaves the courtroom to express his rejection of the trial's approaches. It is clear by this point that we have two versions of religion here: the religion of al-Hallaj and that of the authorities. The second clearly believes in upholding religion as a method of oppression. Later, when the death penalty verdict is pronounced against al-Hallaj, the judge claims that the verdict was pronounced by the masses, for they voiced their belief that the mystic was guilty of blasphemy. Through this action, the judge eludes his responsibility for the death of the mystic and washes his blood from the Sultan’s hands. The crucifixion of al-Hallaj represents the last stage in the hero’s journey, which is

the death of the protagonist, which must happen in order for the hero to achieve the purpose of his life. As already made clear however, this does not represent the end, since the cycle is repetitive.

While the echo of prophecy was clearly reflected along the play, I believe that there are two specific scenes that should be examined closely. The first one is when al-Hallaj is in his prison cell with two prisoners, which I suggest is a scene that reflects the prison scene from the story of the Prophet Joseph in the Qur'an. The Islamic version of it is narrated in *Sūrat Yusuf*, as follows:

ودخل معه السجن فتيان قال أحدهما إني أراني أعصر خمرا، وقال الآخر إني أراني أحمل فوق رأسي خبزا تأكل الطير منه، نبئنا بتأويله إنا نراك من المحسنين، قال لا يأتيكما طعام ترزقانه إلا نبأتكما بتأويله قبل أن يأتيكما ذلكما مما علمني ربي، إني تركت ملة قوم لا يؤمنون بالله وهم بالآخرة هم كافرون، واتبعت ملة آباي إبراهيم وإسحاق ويعقوب ما كان لنا أن نشرك بالله من شيء ذلك من فضل الله علينا وعلى الناس ولكن أكثر الناس لا يشكرون، يا صاحبي السجن أرباب متفرقون خير أم الله الواحد القهار، ما تعبدون من دونه إلا أسماء سميتموها أنتم وآباؤكم ما أنزل الله بها من سلطان، إن الحكم إلا لله أمر ألا تعبدوا إلا إياه ذلك الدين القيم ولكن أكثر الناس لا يعلمون، يا صاحبي السجن أما أحدكما فيسقي ربه خمرا وأما الآخر فيصلب فتأكل الطير من رأسه قضي الأمر الذي فيه تستفتيان. (Qur'an 12: 36–41)

And there entered the prison with him two youths. Said one of them 'I dreamt that I was pressing grapes.' Said to the other, 'I dream that I was carrying on my head bread, that birds were eating of. Tell us its interpretation, we see that thou art of the good-doers.' He said, 'No food shall come to you for your sustenance, but ere it comes to you I shall tell you its interpretation. That I shall tell you is of what God has taught me. I have forsaken the creed of a people who believe not in God and who moreover are unbelievers in the world to come And I have followed the creed of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Not ours is it to associate aught with God. That is of God's bounty to us, and to men; but most men are not thankful. Say, which is better, my fellow-prisoners -- many gods at variance, or God the One, the Omnipotent?

That which you serve, apart from Him, is nothing but names yourselves have named, you and your fathers; God has sent down no authority touching them. Judgment belongs only to God; He has commanded that you shall not serve any but Him. That is the right religion; but most men know not. Fellow-prisoners, as for one of you, he shall pour wine for his lord; as for the other, he shall be crucified, and birds will eat of his head. The matter is decided whereon you enquire. (Arberry 1996, 257–258).

Quoting the complete scene from the Qur'an was intentional in order to clarify the comparison duly. Just like the Prophet Joseph, al-Hallaj had two inmates in his cell. Although they did not take him seriously at first, the incident with the guard changed their opinion of him and made them appreciate him dearly, as if they were reciting the verse that follows, from the Qur'an:

إننا نراك من المحسنين.

(Qur'an 12: 36)

We see that thou art of the good-doers.

(Arberry 1996, 257)

The first prisoner says:

هذا رجل طيب

يلقي لفظا لا أفهم معناه

لكني أشعر به.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 2000, 63)

This is a good man  
He says things I don't understand,  
But I feel them.  
( 'Abd al-Sabur 1972,41)

In the Qur'an, the two prisoners felt the goodness in the Prophet by intuition, but in the play, the prisoners began by underestimating him, since he was praying and they assumed that he was imagining the cell to be a palace. They soon changed their minds thanks to the impact of his words, which indicates the effective influence of al-Hallaj despite the prisoners' inability to understand his meaning. This falls in line with what the Abbasid poet Abu Tammam<sup>196</sup> once said in front a foreign singer:

ولم أفهم معانيها ولكن  
ورت كبدي فلم أجهل شجاها  
فبتت كأنني أعمى معنى  
بحب الغانيات ولا يراها.

(Abu Tammam, as cited in al-Mubarrad 2003, 104)

I did not understand what she meant,  
but it set my heart on fire,  
for I understood her sorrow

All night long I was like a blind man, brokenhearted,

---

<sup>196</sup> Abu Tammam Habib ibn Aws, born in 805H (1402–1403AD) in Syria. One of the poets who lived in the Abbasid period. Famous for being self-educated. He painstakingly collected the oral poetry of the pre-Islamic era to include it in a book entitled *Hamasa* (enthusiasm). His collection is one of the most vital compilations after the *Mufaḍḍalyāt* and *Mu'allaqat*. He died in 845H (1441–1442AD) (Bushrui and Malarkey 2013, 423).

in love with beauties he cannot see.

(Abu Tammam 2015, 241)

In contrast to what the Prophet Joseph did, al-Hallaj did not preach to the prisoners about worshipping the Divine, however, the strength he demonstrated in front of the guards is what caused the prisoners to have this feeling towards him. Moreover, while in the Qur'an the Prophet's companions ask his opinion about dreams they saw in their sleep, al-Hallaj speaks of dreams in a different way when he says:

ودعوا أحلامكم تتسج دنيا أخرى.

(Abd al-Sabur 2000, 73)

And let your dreams weave the garment of the hereafter.

(Abd al-Sabur 1972, 46)

When one of the prisoners asks him how can a man build a world of dreams, the mystic replies:

الحلم جنين الواقع

أما التيجان

فأنا لا أعرف صاحب تاج إلا الله

والناس سواسية عندي

من بينهم يختارون رؤوسا ليسوسوا الأمر

فالوالي العادل

قبس من نور الله ينور بعضا من أرضه

أما الوالي الظالم

فستار يحجب نور الله عن الناس

کی یفرخ تحت عباءتہ الشر

یا ولدی.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 2000, 73)

Dreams are the embryos of reality.

But crowns! I recognise none except God’s.

To me, all men are equal.

They choose from among themselves those who are to rule.

The just ruler

Is a ray of God’s light which illuminates the Earth,

But the unjust ruler

Is a curtain which conceals God’s light from man

In order to create evil in the darkness.

This is what I say, my son.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 1972, 46)

From the Sufi point of view, a dream is not a mysterious vision that needs interpretation, a dream is born from a reality, which only obeys the Divine and refuses to be under the sword of the unjust ruler. This is despite the disagreement of the second prisoner, who believes these to be only words and words to be useless. The only solution to this dilemma seems to be armed rebellion to execute the oppressors. However, the Qur’anic narration and that of al-Hallaj do meet with regards to the death of one of the prisoners. Indeed Joseph predicted the death of the second inmate and in the case of the second prisoner who escaped from al-Hallaj’s cell and revolted to support him, he was executed on the same day as the Sufi.

This same scene contains another prophetic reflection, through which shines the image of Jesus. When one of the prisoners asks the mystic about the accusation that led to his arrest, he replies that he wishes to revive the dead, to which the second prisoner replies sarcastically: Are you a second Jesus? So al-Hallaj explains thus:

لم تفهم عني يا ولدي  
فلكى تحيى جسدا ، حز رتبة عيسى  
أو معجزته  
أما كي تحيي الروح، فيكفي أن تملك  
كلماته  
نبئني ..كم أحيا عيسى أرواحا قبل  
المعجزة المشهودة.

(‘Abd al-Sabur 2000, 71)

You have not understood me, my son,

In order to revive a body, you must have Jesus’ status and his miraculous gift,

But to revive a soul, you need only Jesus’ words.

Tell me how many souls had Jesus revived

before he performed his greatest miracle?

(‘Abd al-Sabur 1972, 45)

Al-Hallaj negates being Jesus, for he believes that he holds a higher stance and could therefore not compare himself to him. When the prisoners ask him about his method of reviving souls, his answer is that he can do so by way of words, which is something that might trigger the question about the relationship between miracles and words. The Qur’an describes Jesus as follows:

إنما المسيح عيسى ابن مريم رسول الله وكلمته ألقاها إلى مريم وروح منه. (Qur'an 4: 171)

The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and His Word that He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him. (Arberry 1996, 125)

While I do not suggest that al-Hallaj impersonates Jesus, I do believe that the power of his words does. Just as Jesus was able to revive the dead, so was al-Hallaj, by means of words, able to revive the souls. The Jesus parallel is also reflected in the flower that al-Shibli throws on al-Hallaj, since the Sufis believed that the perfume of the rose of Jesus could bring people back to life. In his monologue, al-Shibli describes his friend as a hidden flower, the one that represents Jesus. There is a further representation of Jesus in the scene of the crucified mystic on the tree, which mirrors the crucifixion of the Christ, who sacrificed his life for others. However, as Campbell states: this is not the end, and the Qur'an confirms that the Prophet, the hero, did not actually die:

وما قتلوه وما صلبوه ولكن شبه لهم. (Qur'an 4: 157)

Yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them.

(Arberry 1996, 123)

## Conclusion

This chapter intended to examine the work of the Egyptian poet Salah 'Abd al-Sabur, *Ma'sāt al-Hallaj*, in a bid to explore the aspect of dialogue with the Divine in it as well as the allusion of the prophetic echo permeated in the play. I suggested the approach that Joseph Campbell presented, which traces the journey of the hero, as a method to examine the character of al-Hallaj in the

tragedy. I attempted to demonstrate the steps and stages that al-Hallaj voyages through in order to be crowned as hero in the oeuvre. Unlike al-Niffari, in the play, al-Hallaj obtains the weapon of words and letters in order to spread the light of the Divine. The light which, he confirms along the play, he gained thanks to his conversation with the Absolute.

Nonetheless, there still remain more questions to answer: why would a leftist poet such 'Abd al-Sabur, write about a religious mystical figure like al-Hallaj? Could secularism have any type of correlation with Sufism? I believe that Ziyad el-Marsafy's study on Sufism in the contemporary novel contains some valid answers to that last question. He states that adopting the mystical tone, particularly after the 1980s, is attributed to reallocating and producing a new definition of self-individualism due to the invasion of religious institutions with restrictions imposed on them by politics (el-Marsafy 2012, 5). He further maintains that this historical period witnessed significant political upheavals, which led the authorities to create policies based on injustice, exploitation and the abuse of human rights. In addition, the author mentions the study of Michel de Certeau, which concludes that there is vital relationship between the appearance of mysticism as a way of salvation from social agony. The author exemplifies this by mentioning Massignon's study of al-Hallaj. Therefore, it would appear that the role of the saint becomes crucially more significant during social distress, that he may adopt human suffering and attempt to end it (ibid., 6). The author quotes one of Wittgenstein's phrases, which states that Sufism is the solution when a man feels that he is behind the advance of technology and science (ibid., 7). On the other hand, I believe that what summarises the relationship between the two is the quotation the author includes by the novelist Najib Mahfuz, when he differentiates between Sufism and the love of Sufism, which from my point of view reflects the difference between al-Shilbi and al-Hallaj in the play. The novelist confirms that he is in support of adoring the type of mysticism that decreases the distance between him and the concerns of his society. He disagrees with the mystical idea of erasing the qualities of the individual and the

Sufi direction admired by him is the one that has the concerns of his society and fellow humans at heart (Mahfuz, as cited in el-Marsafy 2012, 27).

We can simply put it that ‘Abd al-Sabur found in the figure of al-Hallaj the spiritual revolutionism and heroism that the modern intellectual identifies himself with, in order to challenge the oppressing authorities of his age. The last question I would like to ask is: who was speaking in that play? Was it the Sufi or ‘Abd al-Sabur? I tend to agree with the references mentioned in the literature review that state that it was ‘Abd al-Sabur’s voice disguised as that of al-Hallaj. However, I suggest that the verses composed by the poet merged well with the poetry of al-Hallaj to a certain extent. I believe that ‘Abd al-Sabur succeeded in hiding behind al-Hallaj’s name to avoid political persecution and that he also succeeded in modernising the poems of al-Hallaj.

## Conclusion

There remains one question left to answer and that is, of course, what are the common aspects between the three selected writers?

The first element, which I believe unites those writers from totally different eras, is the concept of the journey. In the first chapter, al-Suhrawardi experiences an indirect dialogue with the Divine that was symbolised through the drinking of wine. Feeling drunk with the Divine's love was a bridge to cross to start the journey through the sky of His love. By contrast, as illustrated in the analysis, al-Niffari lived through a spiritual ascension that transcended him from the spot of mortality to the *ru'ya* that annihilates all types of *ḥarf*, so as to be under the hospitality of the Divine. As for al-Hallaj, as demonstrated in the third and last chapter, he was the hero of a dramatic work, in which he endured several stages that constituted the cycles he had to go through along his journey in order to achieve the purpose of his selection and then, to start over. These three journeys contain a number of steps. The first is that the writer or the mystic has to be called and chosen by the Divine. The writer then starts a conversation with the Absolute that occurs in union and that we, readers, can only know about through the production of the author. After that, the writer or mystic will be in deep sorrow on account of being separated from the Divine and will yearn to be called and chosen by Him again.

The second common factor between the three writers is the dialectic of the role of the word. Al-Suhrawardi and the al-Hallaj of 'Abd al-Sabur glorify the word, for it is the expression of the lover's suffering for his beloved and the method of spreading the Divine's illumination among people to save them from their own ignorance. In comparison, al-Niffari negates any value or virtue of letters and words, as he views them as otherness that occupies the heart and prevents it from communicating with the Absolute. However, one might argue that what he calls "veil" and "otherness" is his method of transferring his doctrine to the readers, so how could the veil be the

method to speak of the Absolute? Despite the fact this may appear to be contradictory, I believe it can be understood. From al-Niffari's perspective, words are veils and obstacles that deform our union with the Divine, since they are the reason for spreading ignorance about Him. Simultaneously, those same words are our method to communicate with him and tell people of Him. When Gabriel first met Prophet Muhammad, he commanded him to read, "'iqra'," he said to him and the Prophet replied that he could not. According to Abu Zayd, this word was misinterpreted, for "read" here means "recite." What supports this premise is Abu Zayd's argument that since the Divine is the All-knowing, surely He must have known that Muhammad was illiterate. Consequently, the Divine knew that his prophet could not read and it would therefore have been infelicitous to ask him to do so (Abu Zayd 2017, 66). However, the Divine commanded his prophet to recite His words and hence, words became a double-edged sword; a step to communicate with the Divine on one hand and a method to deepen ignorance of Him on the other. Nonetheless, the word maintained a leading position in the revolution against oppressive cultures. As the Qur'an was the Divine's word that challenged the pre-Islamic cultural context, words were the method the three writers adopted to challenge the authorities, be they religious, spiritual or political. This was clearly demonstrated in a scene from a play<sup>197</sup> written by Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi, when al-Walid, Ibn Marwan and Ibn al-Hakam were convincing al-Husayn to renounce his right to rule for the sake of peace, since it was a simple thing they were asking for: a word. He replies:

الحسين: كُتِرَت كلمة

وهل البيعة إلا كلمة؟

ما دين المرء سوى كلمة؟

ما شرف الرجل سوى كلمة؟

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<sup>197</sup> A versed drama written by Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi in 1969, inspired by the historical Battle of Karbala that ends with the death of its protagonist (al-Saadi 2017, 1–3).

ابن مروان: (بغلظة): فقل الكلمة واذهب عنّا!

الحسين: مفتاح الجنّة في كلمة

ودخول النّار على كلمة

وقضاء الله هو الكلمة

الكلمة لو تعرف حرمة

زادا مذخور

الكلمة نور

وبعض الكلمات قبور

بعض الكلمات قلاع شامخة يعتصم بها النبل البشري

الكلمة فرقان ما بين نبي وبغيّ

بالكلمة تتكشف الغمّة

الكلمة نور

ودليل تتبعه الأمة

عيسى ما كان سوى كلمة

أضاء الدنيا بالكلمات وعلّمها للصيادين

فساروا يهدون العالم

الكلمة زلزلت الظالم

الكلمة حصن الحرية

إن الكلمة مسؤولة

إن الرجل هو الكلمة

شرف الرّجل هو الكلمة

شرف الله هو الكلمة

ابن الحكم: وإذن؟

الحسين: لا ردّ لديّ لمن لا يعرف ما معنى

شرف الكلمة.

(al-Sharqawi 2019, 30–31)

al-Husayn: How grandiose is a word

What is a pledge, if not a word?

What is a man's religion, if not a word

What is a man's honour, if not a word?

Ibn Marwan (with gruffness): Then say the word and go away!

al-Husayn: The key to heaven is in a word

And stepping into hell is for a word

And Allah's fate is the word

If the word should know sanctity

Treasured livelihood

The word becomes light

And some words are graves

Some words are castles

Where human nobility seeks refuge

The word is the distinction between

A tyrant and a prophet

With one word, gloom could withdraw

Word is light

And a flag that a nation could follow

What is Jesus, if not a word?

He illuminated the world with words

And taught them to hunters

Then, they went to illuminate the globe

The word quivered the oppressor

The freedom's fortress is the word

Responsibility is a word

A man's honour is word

Allah's honour is word

Ibn al-Hakam: then?

al-Husayn: I don't have a word

For he who doesn't know the meaning of

The honour of the word.

I believe those verses summarise the relation between rebellion and words very well, aware of the fact that al-Husayn himself faced his tragic death on account of his rebellious rejection of the Umayyad leadership in the famous Battle of Karbala<sup>198</sup> that finds significant echo in the story of al-Suhrawardi and al-Hallaj, which leads us to the third linking factor between the three authors: the image of prophecy.

In the analysed poem in chapter one, al-Suhrawardi does not only mention his union with the Divine, but also tells us about the wine he tasted; the love response from the Divine. He then informs us that the wine he is drinking is not just any wine, for it is the same wine that Adam and Noah tasted. It's as if the perlocutionary act of his assertives were to convince us, readers, that he is on a similar level. Likewise, the conclusion that the book of *Mawāqif* was an attempt to record al-

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<sup>198</sup> A Battle that took place in the desert, miles from the city of Kufa in Iraq, on the tenth of Muharram 61 AH (10 October 680 AD). The battle took place after al-Husayn Ibn 'Ali, Prophet Muhammad's grandson, rejected Yazid's claim to become the next caliph after the death of his father, Mu'awiya and decided to rebel against him. Joined by seventy-three members of his family and supporters, al-Husayn was unexpectedly attacked by an army sent by the caliph of Kufa and murdered in a brutal massacre, along with his sons, a dramatic event considered to be a tragedy in Islamic history (Curta, 2016, 373).

Niffari's revelation or in other words, the writing of his own Qur'an is where I believe that he borrows the image of the prophet. In the case of the al-Hallaj of 'Abd al-Sabur, the image of prophecy lies in the exigency of delivering the message of the Divine to the people, as the only emancipator, in order to rescue them from ignorance.

The final common link between the three authors is the aspect of dialogue with the Divine and the rarity with which it has been explored in the works of the three writers. The three mystics had a special relationship with the Divine that was illustrated through their texts and the analysis of those. Two of them were historically known to have been killed while the third is said to have lived the life of a wanderer. Why would such sacred relationships lead to such chaos? It is my belief, based on what my research has uncovered, that the ramifications of their relationship with the Divine is what led to the tragic end of two of them. As I attempted to illustrate along the thesis, whether intentionally or not, the conversation between man and the Divine achieves salvation. When one finds his own salvation, he is liberated from several restraints, but most importantly, from fear. Being fearless, by default, creates rebellious characters who seek to improve the world by rejecting the unsatisfying reality and uniting people by spreading awareness and emancipation from ignorance. This does not draw the best scenario for oppressing authorities who use the relationship with the Divine as a weapon to eliminate those who oppose them.

This thesis attempted to tackle the reflections on dialogue with the Divine in the works of three different writers: al-Suhrawardi, al-Niffari and Salah 'Abd al-Sabur. In the first chapter, I introduced a literature review of different sources that explored the poetry of al-Suhrawardi. The literature review illustrated that the aspect of dialogue in his poetry had not been studied. It was furthermore crucial to include a section discussing the poet's biography and philosophy, in order to understand his doctrine of illumination, since it is heavily reflected in his poetry. I later presented an analysis of one of al-Suhrawardi's poems, by using several methodologies to examine the factor of dialogue in it. My argument suggested that analysing such allusions required the application of certain

structures in order to examine scenes, their relation to addressees, language and signs. I concluded that the link between the suggested analysis and the concept of power was valid through evidence from Islamic resources.

The second chapter examined two texts of *The Mawaqif and Mukhatabat* of al-Niffari. The first section also began with a literature review that investigated the academic studies that examined the work of the Sufi. This was followed by a section exploring al-Niffari's theology, including the concepts of *siwā*, *ḥarf*, *ʿilm*, *maʿrifa* and *ruʿya*. Al-Niffari's meanings were analysed through each of these aspects and my own reflections on each were also presented in this section, along with ideas on how they could be related to literary concepts. In the third section, I provided a dissection of two of the mystic's texts, at the beginning of which, I discussed the dialectic of voice in his texts. I argued that al-Niffari was behind the voice of the Divine in his text, due to the desire of colouring his doctrine with glory, which is an indication of power. To support my argument, I started by conducting a discussion around the concepts of inspiration and revelation before presenting proof that the claim of power was achieved in the texts through the echo of prophecy, speech act theory application and *Itifāt*. The second analysis also focused on the aspect of power, which is clearly manifest despite the initial appearance of submissiveness and obedience, as shown through Foucault's concepts of spirituality and power, to conclude that spirituality is a type of self-constitution that enables he who masters himself to be prepared for significant political roles.

In the third chapter, I studied the play of *Maʿsat al-Hallaj* by Salah ʿAbd al-Sabur which is based on one of the best-known figures in Islamic spiritual history. The literature review I began by presenting in this chapter explored a number of studies about the play. A biography of the author and another of the main character were then offered, followed by a summary of the play. The second section contained the methodology I suggested for the examination of the play, which was based on Josef Campbell's approach, and which traces the cycle of the hero in various tales and epics to designate the stages that every hero, regardless of the difference in culture, has to go

through in order to become one. This was followed by my analysis of the play, accomplished via the exploration of certain themes in it, including the dialectic of life and death and the reflection of prophecy. I concluded by suggesting that Sufism plays a significant role in terms of challenging the authorities, and that it is a valid approach to use despite the fact it appears to be historically ancient or that it might be different to one's ideology, for it contains the seeds of rebellion against oppression and injustice in any given time or age.

As the first to examine the aspect of dialogue and its ramifications in the works of the aforementioned writers, despite the fact that unearthing the information I was looking for was challenging, to say the least, I hope that what my research has succeeded in accomplishing by bringing such subjects to the fore and raising the questions that it did, will have achieved the feat of sowing the seeds of curiosity in its field and matter of concern in some of its readers, and that some of those seeds might bloom into actual opportunities of expanding on the present research, for such studies are indeed rare and in dire need of amplification.

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