

Şūfī Language and the Opening of Signification: Al-Ḥallāj as an Example

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To cite this article:

Maḥmūd Na'āmneh. Şūfī Language and the Opening of Signification: Al-Ḥallāj as an Example. *International Journal of Literature and Arts*. Special Issue: *The Woman as a Sufi Motif in Modern Arabic Poetry*. Vol. 10, No. 1, 2022, pp. 59-67. doi: 10.11648/j.ijla.20221001.18

Received: December 12, 2021; **Accepted:** January 26, 2022; **Published:** February 16, 2022

Abstract: The present paper studies the use of the Şūfī al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj as a mask in modern Arabic poetry, specifically the influence this figure exerted on Adūnīs ('Alī Aḥmad Sa'īd; b. 1930), 'Abd al-Wahāb al-Bayyātī (1926-1999) and Şalāḥ 'Abd al-Şabūr (1931-1981). It examines how these poets used al-Ḥallāj's mask in order to express contemporary national, social and meta-poetical issues. The paper will also demonstrate the intentional use which these poets made of al-Ḥallāj's sufferings and the story of his crucifixion. They turned him into a saint who died because he refused to give up his values and philosophies in order to express their own sufferings. Contemporary poets, thus, made al-Ḥallāj acquire a new spiritual dimension, quite different from his reputation in Muslim theology, where he had become a symbol of heresy, non-conformism and dissidence. The paper will show the various levels at which "Ḥallāj" thought can be used, whether as a mask and the tale of his execution or Şūfī expressions and ideas that have historically been associated with him

Keywords: Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj, 'Abd al-Wahāb al-Bayyātī, Şalāḥ 'Abd al-Şabūr, Adūnīs or 'Alī Aḥmad Sa'īd, and Mysticism

1. Al-Ḥallāj the Şūfī: From the Mystical Monk's Cell to Poetic Masks

Al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (858-922) [28, 20] is a figure who to some extent has been frequently used in modern Arabic poetry in the form of a mask. This can be seen especially in the poetry of 'Abd al-Wahāb al-Bayyātī, who employed this figure to express his views on commitment in poetry and on the artistic considerations involved in the poet's role in society. The historical al-Ḥallāj was a distinctive figure. As noted by one critic,

Al-Ḥallāj is an inspiring figure that opens doors to thought, a stage for the imagination and space for emotion, a multi-faceted personality with broad horizons in whom mental and emotional excitation were combined with spiritual and mental inspiration as well as intellectual and physical exercises. In the details of his life can be found all the elements which create heroism in history, heroism in all its glories of struggle, martyrdom and power" [2].

For centuries the name al-Ḥallāj represented the apex of Şūfī love. The story of his sacrifice-filled life turned him into a unique figure, a revolutionary symbol of opposition to

social norms, of championing the poor and the believers [22] and Aḥmad, 1996, 56.)

Al-Ḥallāj was, thus, considered fit to represent social redemption. Therefore, modern Arab poets who felt the need to write about the troubles of their times use him as a mask through which they expressed the issues that preoccupied them.

2. Al-Ḥallāj in the Poetry of Adūnīs

Adūnīs' writings show Şūfī influences. Like al-Bayyātī and 'Abd al-Sabūr, Adūnīs employed Şūfī ideas in his poetry. Yet, he differed from them, due to his surrealist tendencies. He gave his thoughts a more veiled and complex form [30]. He was particularly affected by the ideas of enlightenment as expounded in the writings of al-Shahrawardī (1154-1191), Ibn al-'Arabī (1164-1240) and al-Ghazālī (1058-1111). He borrowed Şūfī ideas as well as Şūfī terminology, as demonstrated by his book *al-Şūfiyya wal-sūryāliyya (Sufism and Surrealism)*.

According to Adūnīs, the language of Şūfī poetry and Şūfī writing in general is not a means for intelligible expression. It does not express "the thing itself," being sometimes

incapable of expressing a thought. The nouns and their denotations in Ṣūfī language, he maintains, become removed from their traditional semantic meanings [8]. However, despite the realization that Ṣūfī writing is opaque and complex, Adūnīs and other contemporary Arab poets have used Ṣūfī ideas in their poetic works.

Adūnīs used various devices for conveying Ṣūfī ideas like the mask and metaphors. He believed that a metaphor fits his conception of a language of realism since, so he maintains,

... through it, that is, metaphor, language no longer preserves its familiar, direct relationship with things. It shares in the ceremony of naming, which is based on constant renewal. As a result, poetry is drawn towards seeing, whence language overcomes its limitations. [25]

Adūnīs, thus, took an interest in Ṣūfī literature because it shakes the poem's structure and diverges from the standard language (Ibid., 95-101.) This explains Adūnīs' statement in *Sufism and Surrealism* that

My objective is to stress that reality has an unknown inner part, knowledge of which is only possible using logic and the intellect, and that without it, and without trying to reach it, man is a creature lacking in presence and knowledge. (Ibid., 15)

In other words, Adūnīs used Ṣūfī ideas in his poetic writings, opening himself to this obscure world which expresses itself in an unusual way, and in which language is not used in the standard way.

Although many critics believe Adūnīs is one of the great Arab poets of modern times, others criticize him harshly. These critics have identified points of weakness in Adūnīs' poetry indicating that his poetry is "cryptic and a little obscure," that it is "based on an overblown ego" or on "duality or bilateral relations." They added that the poet "uses writing as a metaphor for the world," and composes poetry in which "surprise at things has become a poetic principle" [16]. Yet, he is considered the pioneer of the new wave of Arab poets who have used al-Ḥallāj in their poetic writings. In a poem to which he gave the title of "Marthiyāt al-Ḥallāj" ("Elegy for al-Ḥallāj") and published in his collection (*Songs of Miḥyār the Damascene*),¹ he says:

Your green poisoned writing brush,
Your brush whose swollen veins are like flames
Like the star shining from Bagdad,
Our history and close resurrection

5 In our land in our repeated death.

The time lay on your hands,
And the fire in your eyes
Is sweeping, extending to the sky.
Oh, Star shining from Bagdad

10 Loaded with poetry and birth!

Your green poisoned writing brush.

Nothing was left for those coming from distance

Along with the echo, death and ice

In this land of resurrection

15 Nothing was left but you and the presence

Oh language of reverend thunder!

In this land of strips

Oh poet of secrets and roots!

Adūnīs published this poem in his collection *Songs of Miḥyār the Damascene* in which the Ṣūfī tendency is very clear. In this collection Adūnīs gave expression to the ideas of the Enlightenment, especially the Cartesian philosophy which influenced him greatly (René Descartes, 1596-1650). One major Cartesian principle which attracted Adūnīs was "I think, therefore I am."

It should be pointed out that according to Adūnīs, the Ṣūfī idea imports the outside world into one's inner self, thus creating a dialectic relationship between the personal and the cosmic circles. More to the point, it abolishes

the terrible presence in the universe by conjuring an absence which would do away with the true dimensions of time and place, thus creating a more effective and positive presence; polarizing the temporal and spatial dimensions of events, whether these dimensions are real or legendary, is parallel to conjuring the cosmos with its multi-faceted aspects and possibilities. The conjuring of vision and exhausting suffering in order to attain revelation and the realization of the vision is parallel to conjuring the language and the poet's suffering. [10]

Indeed, the idea of importing the external world into one's interior, that is, of thinking about the entire cosmos, of which one is part, thinking about one's hidden self while making time and space disappear, thinking at the same time about the real and legendary events in human history, and thinking exhaustively and profoundly before putting one's thoughts into verse are rules that describe how Adūnīs perceived Ṣūfī writing. Consequently, they are factors that naturally have affected his own poetry.

It should be added Adūnīs' use of figures from the Arab past, including that of al-Ḥallāj lies in the fact that such figures are classical examples that represent the goals which modernism aspires to attain. These figures reflect the crisis of modern poet as an individual living in the twentieth century and suffering at another level as well, the human level, such as death, life and love [23].

The poem's title very explicitly directs the reader towards the story of the execution of al-Ḥallāj, whose name has become equated with total, painful love. In fact, Adūnīs presents al-Ḥallāj's death, which is followed by the resurrection of the simple people in a way whose origins are to be found in Arab history. By evoking this historical figure, Adūnīs wishes to point to the current situation of the Arabs, who currently undergo a severe drought of cultural potency in language and literature especially poetry [17].

The first lines of this poem may be understood as follows: 1) al-Ḥallāj the poet places his pen in the service of the fight against injustice; 2) al-Ḥallāj is compared to a bird, a symbol of freedom; 3) al-Ḥallāj the rebellious believer struggles to

¹All quotations from Arabic sources whether prose or verse, the poems picked and the titles of the cited works were translated to English by the writers.

disseminate his principles and his ideas. In the first stanza Adūnīs says that al-Ḥallāj's ideas (the green quill, green being the color of growth and permanence) are constantly revived. The phrase "repeated death" is clearly connected with the identical title of one of the groups of poems in his collection *Aghānī Mihyār al-Dimashqī*. In referring to death as something that is repeated, Adūnīs seeks to urge the Arabs to make new sacrifices in order to circulate their ideas anew, just as al-Ḥallāj made sacrifices in Baghdad in order to spread his ideas. It is very likely that Adūnīs hints at himself and his path of suffering to revive the Arab culture.

If we were to summarize this poem which uses the Ṣūfī mask, we could say that it focuses on four themes, as follows: Lines 1-5, al-Ḥallāj and his long "quill" (the Arabic word *rīsha* could mean a pen, a feather or an arrow), are presented in their entirety as a mission of poetry, Ṣūfism and rebellion for the purpose of reviving the Arab peoples. Lines 9-11, al-Ḥallāj is granted secret powers that enable him to perform miracles, to travel to the star, to "the long quill", to Ṣūfism's mission, poetry and rebirth. Lines 12-18, al-Ḥallāj and his words remain the only hope for the Arab nation's revival.

Al-Ḥallāj's voice, which the poet adopts in this poem very strongly indicates that the poet considers al-Ḥallāj a *shu'ūbī* (cosmopolitan). *Al-Ṣu'ūbiyyah* refers to the negative reaction by non-Arab Muslims to the advantaged position the Arabs enjoyed within the Islamic nation [9]. For the poet al-Ḥallāj's, however, *shu'ūbiyya* has a cultural significance, involving his denial of his current situation and his search for a more complete civilized existence [23, 2]. A number of modernist poets who used Ṣūfī ideas in their works, including Adūnīs, claim that their attachment to Ṣūfī mysticism derives from the fact that they reject traditional forms and customs in thought and writing. It was the Ṣūfī lack of conformity which attracted them. Adūnīs did not adopt al-Ḥallāj's Ṣūfī ideas in their religious aspect. Rather, his purpose was to go beyond traditional ideas in the way that Ṣūfī philosophy promotes. In other words, Adūnīs rejects the current literary situation and strives for a more creative climate, in which one could break away from the familiar. He wants Arab poets to awaken from their mentality of expectation and to delve into the hidden aspects of being, just as al-Ḥallāj did. According to this study Adūnīs' fame derived from the fact that he broke away from tradition and called for ignoring its bounds. Adūnīs, like al-Ḥallāj, rebels against the laws of his society, which he strives to abolish through sacrifice.

In this Ṣūfī-inspired poem Adūnīs is calling for the revival of Arab nationalism. Mihyār the Damascene's voice, Adūnīs' mask throughout his collection *Aghānī Mihyār al-Dimashqī*, was therefore very clear, having as his objective the revival of Arab civilization [2]. The reader will now be aware that Mihyār the Damascene was the first mask in "Elegy for al-Ḥallāj," followed by the mask of al-Ḥallāj himself. In the poems of *Aghānī Mihyār al-Dimashqī* the mask is Mihyār, and al-Ḥallāj is the second mask. The act of exposing the mask and interpreting its symbolism is not an unmanageable task (although it may appear difficult in Adūnīs' poetry),

since Arab readers will realize that what causes modern Arab poets to lose sleep is first of all the Arabs' national and social issues, of which Arab readers are a part. Furthermore, the exposure of the masks is also made easier by the fact that what lies behind them is usually a political or social problem that preoccupies the poet [5].

In "Elegy for al-Ḥallāj," Adūnīs' views on the Ṣūfī experience appear very clearly. He sees a close connection between poetry and Ṣūfism, both of which "go beyond reality and become united in every aspect of being". He explains:

If among our forefathers creative writing went beyond the bounds of human reality, today it leads us to other worlds, to the place and what lies beyond it, outside our daily lives, in the abode of dreams and joys, feelings and a vision that drowns in the depths of the spirit. This explains my association with Ṣūfism. ... The breeze that is spread into the world of experience is a cosmic emanation, a flood that washes reality, accompanies life and dreams in substance so that things shriek and come together. This is how the poetic view is formed between the extremes, the plurality becomes reunited, the things of the world intermingle and everything becomes united with every other thing [2].

Adūnīs' predilection for Ṣūfism was thus the result of the latter's unconventional ideas, according to which one can go beyond reality through thought, and beyond language at the level of standard usage. This confirms the idea presented at the beginning of this chapter, that Ṣūfism is an approach that goes beyond reality, which is what attracted Adūnīs to it.

Regarding Adūnīs' association with Ṣūfism, it must be illustrated that there are two distinct types of Ṣūfī writing. There are the sectarian writings, which reject experience in favor of meditation, and experiential writings influenced by the former type, which express concern, longing and tension. The first type is not poetic while the second type is [10]. Despite its being influenced by Ṣūfism and not being a Ṣūfī composition *per se*, the poem "Elegy for al-Ḥallāj" should be considered as belonging to the second type, since it makes the reader aware of the revolutionary state in which al-Ḥallāj found himself. It points out how al-Ḥallāj had to face social and cultural paralysis and a difficult reality, including the state of poetry, which, according to Adūnīs underwent a very poor condition and required sacrifice. The reader is, thus, conscious that the poem in question belongs to the experiential type, which is cognizant of Ṣūfī thinking.

Adūnīs' poetry does not derive its material from Ṣūfī resources. Rather, it has its origin in other cultures. This explains the difficulties in interpreting and understanding Adūnīs' texts. Adūnīs in many of his poems has allusions to conceptions about creation and the emergence of life taken from the legend of Orpheus and the issue of artistic creation, especially the creation of poetry through interaction with language. This is a feature of his poems in his collections *Transformations and Emigration*, *Stage and Mirrors* and *Singular in Plural Form* [26]. It was Adūnīs' use of elements from multiple cultures that gave rise to the difficulties involved in interpreting his texts.

3. Al-Ḥallāj in the Poetry of 'Abd al-Wahāb al-Bayyātī

Al-Bayyātī is another poet whose works exhibit Ṣūfī influences. Here is what he has to say about the connection between Ṣūfism and poetry:

Ṣūfism for me does not mean wearing woolen clothing or becoming a dervish and participating in *dhikr* circles (where God's name is repeatedly invoked). Rather, it means completely abandoning selfishness, egoism, resentment and all forms of grievance; it is becoming one with the spirit of this world and the music of the cosmos, which is dissolved into the poem and transforms it into a being that extols truth, freedom, justice and the greatest love. [6]

For al-Bayyātī what Ṣūfism and poetry have in common is that both create a model world that stands on its own. The common denominator between al-Bayyātī and al-Ḥallāj is that both were poets who lived in the same social environment, one ruled by a Muslim Arab regime. The latter was prevented from publishing his ideas and his books and was eventually condemned to death by the ruler while the former's writings were censored and he eventually became an émigré [15].

Al-Bayyātī composed three poems dedicated to al-Ḥallāj: "al-Ḥallāj's Torture" (composed in 1964 and published in 1965 as part of the collection *Sifr al-faqr wal-thawra* [Book of Poverty and Revolution]), "al-Qurbān" ("The Sacrifice"; composed in 1973 and published in 1974 as part of the collection *Sīra dhātīyya li-sāriq an-nār* [Autobiography of the Fire Thief]); and "Qirā'a fī kitāb al-ṭawāsīn lil-Ḥallāj" ("A Reading of al-Ḥallāj's *Kitāb al-ṭawāsīn*], published in 1975 in the collection *Qamar Shīrāz* (Moon of Shiraz) (al-Bayyātī, 1979, 353-365, 423-436). In the poem "Adhāb al-Ḥallāj" ("al-Ḥallāj's Torture") we see the figure of al-Ḥallāj the Ṣūfī, which al-Bayyātī uses as a mask. In the first part of the poem, "al-Murīd" ("The Disciple") we read:

You fell in the darkness and void,
Your soul with dyes was stained,
You drank from their well,
The giddiness battered you,
Your hands were colored by ink and dust;
And here I see you engaged in faith on the ashes of this fire.
Your silence is the spider's house, the cacti your crown
Oh! Slaughterer of the she-camel for the neighbor!
You knocked my door after the singer had gone to bed
After the guitar had gone out of order
How can I (be matched up to you) while in the Great Presence engaged in revelation?
Where do I end when at the beginning of an end you are?
Our appointment is the morning; don't rot the seal of the wind's words over the water
And do not touch this scabby goat's udder
For the things' interior
Is their surface, so think whatever you desire!
The speaker in this poem is al-Ḥallāj, used as a mask

through which the poet can express meanings and concerns of his own time. Al-Ḥallāj attacks the norms of his society and its false traditions. In this case, of course, the reference is to al-Bayyātī's own times [3]. Al-Bayyātī, thus, uses the poem to present the harsh realities and the decline experienced in his own days, by speaking about al-Ḥallāj's tribulations. For al-Bayyātī it is the relationship between the revolutionary and the poet that paves the path for humankind's future. The intention of this relationship is not to rebel in order to fall into the trap of reality or to become a reflection of its form, but rather to go beyond reality [27].

"Al-Ḥallāj's Torture" consists of six stanzas, dominated by a Ṣūfī atmosphere. Because of this, many critics tended to view it as obscure, or even as lacking in specific meaning (Seeman, 1979, 524). The dialectic movement in the poem moves among four parallel levels: the historical level, viz. al-Ḥallāj's actual biography; the theoretical Ṣūfī level, viz. the foundations of the Ṣūfī experience; the poetic level or poetic experience; and the socio-political level, viz. the struggle for freedom and justice. The poem causes the reader to ponder on the details of the execution of the historical figure of al-Ḥallāj and to consider the Ṣūfī ideas used by al-Bayyātī, who, by evoking al-Ḥallāj, re-reads the past through the meanings of the present and expresses the meanings of the present through a reading of the past. By doing so, he in fact says that "the deaths or martyrdom of lovers and artists are the bridge which human civilization crosses towards a more perfect state" (al-Bayyātī, 1998, 41). The poet in this sense is like a Ṣūfī saint, who looks at history as a series of human trials that embody mankind's problems that repeat themselves every time.

Going back to the poem, the reader will notice that it consists of six stanzas, organized on an ascending dramatic scale and reaching its tragic apex in the fifth stanza, followed by one more stanza, in which the tragedy is revealed in all its details [11]. The title is "The Disciple." "Disciple" (*murīd*) is a Ṣūfī term denoting someone who "has devoted himself completely to God and renounced his own desires, because he knows that the only things that take place in reality are what Truth wants. A beginner *murīd* should not get married, because that would prevent him from focusing purely on God. A *murīd* must let himself be guided by a *shaykh*, otherwise he will not succeed. The Ṣūfī Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī (323-380 AH) composed the following verses about the Ṣūfī disciple:

From a *murīd* the heart's secret came out purely,
The secret toured with him at every valley.
He found in every valley he toured
No refuge but the creatures' Lord.
He in sincerity and purity purely did exult,
And the light of purity is the candle of the heart.
He wanted but it did not occur until it was wanted,
Praise be to him being a *murīd* like that.

The title constitutes the beginning of the Ṣūfī journey of devotion to God and the renunciation of one's earthly desires.

The poem contains a dialogue between a *shaykh* and his disciple. The disciple is al-Ḥallāj, who describes to his

shaykh his situation before he repents and becomes a Ṣūfī. In the past the disciple lived in a state of emptiness, ashes and darkness. The *shaykh* in turn describes to the disciple his state before he attains the stage of repentance and mystical understanding. He was immersed in worldly pleasure (“the ashes of this fire”) and “drank from the well” of the corrupt regime.

Al-Ḥallāj himself is the disciple, and is also al-Bayyātī. Al-Bayyātī lets al-Ḥallāj speak. In his narrative style he expresses meanings in terms of al-Ḥallāj’s times, but the reader transfers these meaning to the times of al-Bayyātī [7]. Now while the speaker in the poem is al-Ḥallāj, it should be noted that the lines “How can I (be matched up to you) while in the Great Presence engaged in revelation? / Where do I end when at the beginning of an end you are?” are said by a disembodied Ṣūfī preacher [29].

Using the present form, the *shaykh* speaks about his disciple’s transformation from a state of worldliness to one in which he perceives the Ṣūfī truth, wearing a crown of prickly pears, which symbolizes mortification of the flesh and an abject life. Then, he slaughters a she-camel for the neighbor’s sake, an act symbolizing a sacrifice made for others: “And now you run to me, my disciple, while the people sleep” (Ibid). The disciple speaks in the first person singular: “My *shaykh*, how can I reach you in a Ṣūfī *ḥaḍrah* gathering when you are already ending it?” The *shaykh* replies: “The Ṣūfī way is a way that is perceived with the mind; it connects the outer aspect of things with their inner nature, after you have rejected all the earthly things symbolized by the “mangy goat” [3] (= the material world). Perhaps the poet refers here to the idea of God’s combining the exterior with inner aspect. Many Ṣūfī ideas have to do with this duality, and perhaps the poet here wants to tell us that the poem itself combines the exterior with the interior, an exaggeration which implies that the poem is at the level of the deity, because the exterior and interior are God. As Ibn al-ʿArabī says,

...this is the case of the attributes of opposites, which describes the True One, as He has been described as the First and the Last, the Exterior and the Interior. For He is the First and the Interior with respect to His being, and the Last and Exterior with respect to His names and attributes; He is the First and the Interior with respect to His oneness, and the Last and Exterior with respect to his multifariousness. [13]

The *shaykh*’s attitude shows al-Ḥallāj’s profound Ṣūfism also represented by the many Ṣūfī concepts used in the poem: the disciple (*murīd*), the mystic gathering (*ḥaḍrah*), the seal (*khatm*), the (holy) water (*māʿ*) and the wind (of the mind; *rīḥ*). The seal in Ṣūfī thinking is a “sign of truth of the knowing hearts. The ‘seal’ is one who is not of this world, with whom God sealed the power of Muḥammad; he is the greatest of the Mohammedan saints. There is also another ‘seal’ with which God seals his general rule, from Adam to the last saint (*walī*), namely Jesus, peace be upon him” [1]. And, the wind in Ṣūfī thought is ‘the wind of the divine mind (*al-khāṭir al-rahmānī*). This mind is connected to the ancient will and associated with (telling) the universe to stop. Its time

is unknown and baffles the worshipper. It is divided into an alarming storm until the worshipper finds it, or it speaks in his soul uncontrollably. It only moves for good and only through Him. The other kind is a simple storm, preceded by an emptiness, a separation, an absence or falling into an utterance of the truth” [1].

These ideas and terms demonstrate quiet clearly al-Bayyātī’s familiarity and sympathy with Ṣūfī thinking. The poem reflects a meta-poetical issue, in the same way as Adūnīs’ poem discussed here did. Al-Ḥallāj’s relationship with his Creator, or rather that of his Ṣūfī *alter ego* after he left behind him the remains of the “mangy goat” is identical to the poet’s relationship with his poem. The poet, like al-Ḥallāj, seems to have lived through a period preceding his poetic “obliteration of the self,” a stage in which he composed poetry for purposes that he perceived as transitory. One can feel the presence of an absent Ṣūfī saint, perhaps al-Ḥallāj’s mentor, who led him into the true kingdom of poetry, so that he and his poems became one, just as happened to al-Ḥallāj, who became one with God [22, 19]. On this al-Ḥallāj says:

It is I who I love and who I love is I;
We are two souls who have merged into one;
If you see me, you have seen him
And if you have seen him, you see me.
Oh, you questioner about our account!
If you saw us, you could never tell us apart:
His soul is mine and my soul is His.
Who has ever seen two souls in one fuse?

So, al-Ḥallāj is the poet, who studied the principles of poetics and after having written about ephemeral terrestrial matters began to write on intellectual topics and reached the level of committed writing, just as al-Ḥallāj, “the disciple”, reached the Ṣūfī level of mystical obliteration of the self (*al-fanāʿ*).

Clearly, in this poem al-Bayyātī summarizes the concept of poetry. He stresses that the revolution is a transition through death. Man dies just as he is born, and he is born exactly as he dies. The poetic enterprise constitutes revolution in and of itself, an appropriation of life, and is connected with the creative acts of history [27]. The choice of al-Ḥallāj to represent social distress in this poem was not arrived at by chance; it was a planned, fitting choice, for al-Ḥallāj is a revolutionary symbol of social redemption. Al-Ḥallāj moved the masses, called for reform and proclaimed the idea of a perfect government that would uphold the *sharīʿa* based on the melodies of pure love for and worship of God [20]. The same can be said about the poet, who also calls for reform, although he is aware that he will become a victim. Al-Bayyātī alludes to al-Ḥallāj not just for his ideas, although it is true that he was inspired more by al-Ḥallāj’s Ṣūfī ideas than by the historical figure itself. The one historical aspect of al-Ḥallāj’s biography that clearly made a great impression on al-Bayyātī was Ibn al-Zanjī’s account of the burning of his books. Apparently the poet also experienced censorship and lived a period during which his works were not permitted to be published, just as in al-

Ḥallāj's case. Both poets, thus, were persecuted by the authorities. Al-Bayyātī had many confrontations with the authorities, as noted above, while Ibn Zanjī reports that "afterwards al-Qurbī appeared to Naşr al-'Āş and told him that he was wronged although he was a pious person. He summoned a group of copyists and they took an oath not to buy or sell any books by al-Ḥallāj" [14]. So, al-Bayyātī is committed to his path just as al-Ḥallāj realized that he would die. Both knew that their ideas were correct and would become popular following their sacrifice.

Through the use of al-Ḥallāj as mask, al-Bayyātī depicts the false nature of the society in which he lives, a society that refuses to allow speech and literature to live in freedom. In a previous period one drank speech and poetry from the well of the ruler, whom they applauded, but now, after all this has been removed, poetry has become widespread, just as in the case of al-Ḥallāj's ideas. Al-Bayyātī's first poem thus applauded the regime, but when it transformed itself into a description of the true state of affairs the authorities repudiated it and al-Bayyātī was forced into exile.

4. Al-Ḥallāj in the Poetry of Şalāḥ 'Abd al-Şabūr

'Abd al-Şabūr's association with Şūfism goes back to his collection *al-Nās fī bilādī* (*People in My Country*). As one critic noted, it demonstrates "the poet's hidden inspiration by love or poetry, by his sanctification and veneration of poetic or emotional experiences, in a way that is reminiscent of the Şūfī experience" [2]. 'Abd al-Şabūr sees the world in which he lives as contaminated and imperfect, and considers it his duty to reform it so as to make it fit for a life of happiness. Like many philosophers, prophets and poets, 'Abd al-Şabūr is consumed by a desire to amend the world [12].

'Abd al-Şabūr sees the key to solving the world's destructive tendencies in the Şūfī experience. He is known to have admired the Şūfī heritage, especially the ideas of Muḥyī al-Dīn al-'Arabī. Thus, for example, in the poem "Qaşīdat' walā'" ("A Poem of Devotion") he evokes the mystical experience of ecstasy in his depiction of the poetic experience. He also uses a number of Şūdī terms in the poem and mentions some Şūfī values in an attempt to convey the spirituality of the poetic experience, and the poet's need to devote himself exclusively to his poetry and to lose himself in it [31]. According to 'Abd al-Şabūr, the solution also lies in the artistic experience because both spring from the same source and meet at the same destination. In al-Ḥallāj 'Abd al-Şabūr found the true object of his searches, because al-Ḥallāj combines mysticism with the principles of liberated poetry. In his evocation of al-Ḥallāj on his poetic stage, 'Abd al-Şabūr used this historical figure as the main axis around which he wanted his play to revolve, to present the issue of commitment or, in other words, the crisis of Arab intellectuals in the 1960s [18]. The secret of him being attracted by al-Ḥallāj lies in the latter's life of sacrifice and adoption of Şūfism. According to one critic,

If Sufism is cognizant of God when the world has retreated and if the sense of tragedy is cognizant of the world when God has retreated, the first has made Al-Ḥallāj a monk and dervish and has made out of the second a tragic hero. Undoubtedly, both formulas have a strong link from the aspect of goal as both can't accept but the Righteousness, the Only One and the Absolute in trespassing the complexities of the world and human existence. Both ignore the material time and go beyond it. Their consciousness of righteousness is not confined by time. Nor is it attainable except in one of two: annihilation or infinity. [12]

'Abd al-Şabūr's play *Ma'sāt al-Ḥallāj* (*The Tragedy of al-Ḥallāj*) echoes many of the questions that the playwright asks himself: What is the function of the word? What is the connection between word and deed? What is the meaning of commitment, and what are its boundaries? These questions were posed in the play at a time when the social environment in which the playwright lived was undergoing fundamental historical, economic and intellectual changes. The poet was very disturbed by these changes. As he notes,

I am the son of a generation whose eyes opened at two things: Palestine's first defeat in 1948 and the enforcement of martial laws at the same time. This suggests that my eyes saw two major things: the loss of decency and the loss of freedom. Too much a tragedy! [12]

By his choice of al-Ḥallāj, 'Abd al-Şabūr gave expression to the element of absolute injustice experienced by humankind in every period and in every place, through his awareness of the fact that al-Ḥallāj had come to represent this in Middle Eastern and Arabic literature. He, therefore, identified with him and found in him an accurate expression of his own experiences of injustice and oppression, due to his ideas and his attempts to reform the corrupt aspects of his society [12]

In depicting the character of Al-Ḥallāj, 'Abd al-Şabūr gives a picture of the utter tyranny from which human beings undergo at all locations and through all times. He rests on the point that Al-Ḥallāj has become an icon of victimization in oriental and Arabic literature (Ash-Shuabei, 1976 34). He, therefore, fuses within Al-Ḥallāj in whom he perceives an accurate replication of his own experience of maltreatment and harassment in the wake of his convictions, concepts and efforts to mend the deficits of society [12]. Likewise, Al-Ḥallāj becomes an up-to-date star, chaperon and master who escorts the contemporary al-Şabūr's battle of societal, political and poetical amendment.

'Abd al-Şabūr divided the play into two parts. He uses flashback, beginning the play with the closing scene. The action then ends, and the story is retold from the beginning and ends at the starting point [21]. The play's first scene shows a crucified *shaykh*. The question of his identity arises among the various classes of people. Afterwards, it becomes clear that this is al-Ḥallāj, who was said to have been executed because some people testified against him falsely, despite the fact that they liked his words:

We love his words
More than we loved him,
So we let him die so that the words would remain.

His words made him live again, because they remained alive in the people's hearts, like seeds [2]. These words end the scene, which is quiet and touching, perhaps telling us that words are very effective. This apparently is one aspect of the poet's belief in words and in poetry.

In the second part, there is a conversation between Al-Ḥallāj and his Sufi friend, Ash-Shelbi, who is a wholehearted devotee and escort of Al-Ḥallāj and who is influenced by the events which lead to the killing of Al-Ḥallāj. In his description of the Al-Ḥallāj's execution, Massignon writes,

When Al-Ḥusain Ben Mansūr Al-Ḥallāj was brought for crucifixion, he saw wood and nails. So he laughed so hard that his eyes shed tears. Then he looked at the people around him and saw Ash-Shelbi among them. He said to him, 'Oh! Abu Bakr! Is your carpet with you?' He (Ash-Shelbi) answered, 'Certainly, my *sheikh*.' 'Roll it open on the ground!' [20]

In response, Ash-Shelbi, as Abu Ghālī writes, says, 'Lo, Ḥallāj! Listen to me very carefully! We are not people of this secular world so that it will engage us in pleasures!' To this Al-Ḥallāj replies, 'The Most Merciful has not looked down upon people of His creatures. Rather, He disperses sparks of His light on them. This will be the scale of the universe. These creatures will, in turn, flood the light of God on the poor hearts'. [2]

This emphasizes his belief in social justice. In this play 'Abd al-Ṣabūr tells us that men must act in order to achieve justice rather than to wait for a miracle [4]. He says,

My lord!
In the era which is polluted, rough and sparse
Our Lord won't create a wonder or a miracle to save a
generation of deceased ones
Who died before death.

The events of the play move on, Al-Ḥallāj is executed and the identity of the killers is exposed. The focus, however, is on the reaction of the people on the killing. Rather than question the assassination, complain against it, denounce it overtly or covertly, call for an investigation, or demand a legal prosecution against the assassins, the public choose to give up to submission which is the nadir of unresponsiveness and the supreme of sarcasm.

When dawn appeared, we dispersed
We vowed that I keep quiet till I am folded in the grave.

The play's events focus mainly on al-Ḥallāj's execution and on the executioner's identity. Was it the people who had been bought by the sultan's money?

Because when our beloved loved us excessively, we
rejoiced;
And we entered concealment. We were fed and
intoxicated;
We were told of things and we told of things; we were
promised and we promised;
They gave each of us a dinar of crimson gold;
It was glowing, untouched by a palm before.
They said: cry out: Atheist! Disbeliever!

Let him be killed and we shall take responsibility for his murder!

Or was it the Ṣūfīs, who preferred his words to his person and made no effort to save him?

We love his words
More than we loved him
So we let him die so that the words would remain.

Or was it the regime and its minions? The authorities secretly paid people to bear false witness against him. The ruler informed the judges that he waived his rights with respect to al-Ḥallāj. But what about God's right? It was as if the ruler prescribed al-Ḥallāj's death:

Suppose we ignored the Sultan's right,
What shall we do with God's right?
We were told that Al-Ḥallāj
Sees that Allah settles in him or what Satan wishes it.
Thus, I wish people had asked for him in his atheist call.
The master might forgive whoever commits a crime
against him
But he never forgives whoever makes a crime against
Allah.

But he will never give amnesty to whoever commits a
crime against God's right [21].

In this part we hear the voice of Ṣalāḥ 'Abd al-Ṣabūr calling on the working class, the foundation of society, to build their society, informing them of the need to establish justice, freedom and equality. He rejects the compulsion that puts limits on the writers' freedom of expression and movement. On the other hand, he condemns attempts of writers to convert their works into a means of despicable propaganda aimed at flattering the authority and deplores critics and audiences who commend such type of cheap writing [24]. In so doing, Ṣabūr coins the features of his meta-poetical play which also validates the need to modify writing and literature. In the play the poet's vision merges with Al-Ḥallāj's. Both affirm the potentials of positive mobility of society and the world and the role of the poet as a source of wide-ranging social rectification (literature included).

In this play about al-Ḥallāj's tragic end, the poet's view is seen to be completely in agreement with al-Ḥallāj's with respect to the need to act affirmatively in the world and in society. The poet has the duty to reform his society and its literature. Just as al-Ḥallāj acted to reform the society on whose behalf he sacrificed his life, so the poet today has the duty to reform his society and to sacrifice himself through his poetry. Just as al-Ḥallāj was determined to battle evil with words although he realized full well that he was fated to die because he took sides in the struggle between the Sunnī establishment and the Ṣūfī movement [21], so the poet must battle evil with words today.

In this poetic play we encounter conscious sacrifice in the figure of the Ṣūfī al-Ḥallāj [2]. The same kind of sacrifice which can also be applied to the poet 'Abd al-Ṣabūr. So this play which reflects the conscious self-sacrifice made by Al-Ḥallāj is consistent with God's choice for Al-Ḥallāj, the Sufi figure:

This is the best that my Lord gave to me!

Allah has chosen!

Allah has chosen!

It is most likely that Şabūr implicitly expresses his conscious willingness to go after his model.

Şabūr notion of life as the play counts on the existence of a close link between man and God and between man and society rather than a conflict between man and his fate. This is one feature of Şabūr's texture of national education which he aims at in this play.

5. Conclusion

The paper has studied the employment of the Şūfī Maṣnū' al-Ḥallāj as a mask in contemporary Arabic poetry, specifically the effect this character exercised on Adūnīs, 'Abd al-Wahāb al-Bayyātī and Şalāḥ 'Abd al-Şabūr. It checked how these poets used al-Ḥallāj's mask so as to state up-to-date social, national and meta-poetical questions. The paper has also confirmed the intentional reference to al-Ḥallāj's woes and the tale of his execution. These modern poets have turned al-Ḥallāj into a saint who perished because he refused to hand over his principles in order to voice their own griefs. Modern-day poets, thus, endowed al-Ḥallāj with a new spiritual dimension, quite different from his reputation in Muslim theology, where he was a symbol of profanation, non-conformism and resistance. To be more specific, Adūnīs claims that his fondness of Şūfī mysticism lies in the fact that it discards outmoded forms and practices in thought and writing. In adopting al-Ḥallāj's Şūfī ideas, Adūnīs aims at rising above traditional ideas in the way that Şūfī philosophy promotes. Put differently, Adūnīs denies the up-to-date literary condition and endeavors to establish a more inventive climate, where one could split from the accustomed norms. He wants Arab poets escape their mentality of expectation and to explore the concealed features of being. Like al-Ḥallāj, Adūnīs protests against the rules of his society and struggles to eliminate them through sacrifice.

Equally, through the use of al-Ḥallāj as mask, al-Bayyātī represents the deceitful nature of his community which restricts free speech and literature. Al-Bayyātī's earliest poems much-admired the regime, but when it gave the true state of affairs, the system disavowed it and al-Bayyātī was sent into exile.

Correspondingly, Şabūr's poetic play maintains that the cognizant self-sacrifice performed by Al-Ḥallāj is consistent with God's choice for Al-Ḥallāj. Furthermore, it seems the poet hints at his readiness to undergo the same kind of sacrifice as al-Ḥallāj. It is most likely that Şabūr subtly expresses his mindful inclination to imitate his model.

Şabūr notion of life as the play relies on the presence of a strong tie between man and God and between man and society rather than a battle between man and his fate. This is one crucial feature which Şabūr wishes to emphasize in texture of national education.

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