

**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY  
ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS INSTITUTE  
DEPARTMENT OF CIVILIZATION STUDIES**

**PH.D. THESIS**

**YUNUS EMRE AND THE VOICE OF THE INEFFABLE  
ABSOLUTE (*HAKK*)**

**FRANCESCO CONTE**

**THESIS SUPERVISOR  
PROF. DR. BRUCE BENNETT LAWRENCE**

**İSTANBUL, 2023**

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## **ACADEMIC HONESTY ATTESTATION**

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ÖZ

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Bu çalışmada, Yunus Emre'nin eserinin birçok çevrede nasıl karşılandığını, daha doğrusu karşılanmadığını ve sessiz kaldığını anlamak için onu analiz etmeye çalışıyorum. Yunus Emre'nin şiirlerinin, ne yazık ki İslam'ın bätini boyutuna, özellikle de Arapça ve Farsça dışındaki dillere olan ilginin hala çok sınırlı olduğu İngilizce konuşulan akademik bağlamda daha iyi tanınması gerekmektedir. Aksine, sıklıkla vurgulanan şey, genellikle hukuki boyutla bağlantılı ve Arap diliyle daha yakından ilişkili olan daha bätini yönlerdir. Şu soruya bir yanıt bulmaya çalıştım: Yunus Emre'de dil anlayışı nasıldır? Bu soru, Divan'ın tamamına aynı şairin sözlerinin kökeni ve doğasına ilişkin sürekli bir kaygının nüfuz ettiği gözleminden kaynaklanmaktadır. Şiirsel jestle ilgili inatçı bir öz-sorgulamadan söz edebiliriz. Yunus Emre'nin şiirsel üretiminde dil neden bu kadar merkezdedir? Onun şiirindeki bu öz-sorgulamanın temel amacı nedir? Yunus Emre'nin dil anlayışının etik sonuçları nelerdir? Genel olarak ezoterizmin akademik araştırmanın sınırlarında kalan bir boyut olduğunu keşfettim. Bu durum İslami, Hristiyan veya Yahudi ezoterizminde olduğu gibi akademide daha az çalışılan diğer gelenekler için de geçerlidir. Ne yazık ki, bilginin inşasına yönelik aydınlanma sonrası rasyonalist yaklaşım bu tür bilgileri genellikle marjinalleştirmiştir. Bu nedenle, Kur'an vahyiyle ilişki kurmanın diğer yollarına ışık tutmaya hâlâ ihtiyaç vardır. Yunus Emre, yerel Türkçe şiirleri ve bätini

bakış açısıyla, dünya tarihinde İslam gibi önemli bir tarihsel olguyu karmaşıktırabilecek karmaşık kılabilir karşı bir kanonun kanonun yaratılmasında kilit bir rol oynayabilir ve oynamalıdır diye düşünüyorum.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yunus Emre – İslam - Bâtını Şiir – Felsefe – Dil - Hakk.



## ABSTRACT

### YUNUS EMRE AND THE VOICE OF THE INEFFABLE ABSOLUTE (*HAKK*)

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In this work I seek to analyze the work of Yunus Emre in order to understand its reception, or rather lack of reception, and muted acclaim, in many circles. His poetry needs to be better known in an English-speaking academic context where, unfortunately, interest in the esoteric dimension of Islam, especially in languages which are not Arabic or Persian, is still very limited. On the contrary, what is too often highlighted is the more exoteric aspects that are usually linked to the legal dimension and more closely related to the Arabic language. I tried to find an answer to the following: what is the understanding of language in Yunus Emre? This question arises from the observation that the whole Divan is pervaded by a constant concern regarding the origin and nature of the same poet's words. We can speak of an obstinate self-enquiry with respect to the poetic gesture. Why is there this centrality of the language in Yunus Emre's poetic production? What is the main aim of this self-enquiry in his poetry? What are the ethical consequences of Yunus Emre's understanding of language? I have discovered that in general esotericism is a dimension that remains on the fringes of academic inquiry. This is true whether it is Islamic, Christian or Jewish esotericism, or even other traditions less studied in

academia. Unfortunately, the post-enlightenment rationalist approach to the construction of knowledge has generally marginalized these types of knowledge. For this reason, there is still a need to shed light on other ways of engaging with the koranic revelation. Yunus Emre, with his poetry in vernacular Turkish and his esoteric perspective, in my opinion can and should play a key role in the creation of a counter canon that can complexify such an important historical phenomenon as Islam within world history.

**Keywords:** Yunus Emre – Islam – Bâtuni Poetry – Philosophy – Language - Ineffable Absolute (*Hakk*).



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**Francesco CONTE**  
**ISTANBUL, 2023**

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. My Research's Contribution

One of the main motives that prompted me to do this research is corrective: it exists not only a social misconception but also an academic trend that highlights some aspects of Islam and overshadows others. Despite the fact that so much time has passed since Edward Said with his book *Orientalism*<sup>1</sup> helped to unmask the power mechanisms that underpinned academic studies in the various departments of the world's leading universities, there are still knots to untie in order to get a more complex picture of such a complex historical phenomenon as Islam.

There continues to be a tendency to view Islam as a historical phenomenon in which the central core lies in its normative aspects. Regarding this field of interest, the central language of its reference texts remains the Arabic language, starting with koranic Arabic and the *hadith* corpus. I do not deny the importance of this normative dimension throughout the history of Islam and the centrality of the Arabic language in its development, but the academic effort devoted to this type of literature in comparison to other fields of investigation seems still disproportionate.

That is why my research has as its centre of interest a text that does not strictly concern the normative dimension of Islam, since it is a poetic text, and which certainly has a relationship with the Arabic language, but only in a secondary way. The focus of my research is the collection of poems by the Turkish poet Yunus Emre, a collection known today as Yunus Emre's Divan. Specifically, I refer to the version edited by Mustafa Tatçı published in 1991<sup>2</sup>. Since I have no expertise in philology and manuscript reading, which is beyond the scope of this research, I have

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<sup>1</sup> Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Book,.

<sup>2</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı.

referred to the poems in this edition as Yunus Emre's poems, accepting this collection as the most reliable among those currently in circulation.

My contribution is an attempt to make the figure of Yunus Emre better known to the international academic world, specifically as an Islamic mystical poet from Anatolia in 13th and early 14th century. However, I also aim to find a place for his poetry as a critical force within the complexity of Islamic civilization. In fact, I am convinced that his wisdom, full of contradictions, can teach us something profound that transcends the historical context in which he lived. These are thoughts that can be useful to the contemporary reader regardless of his/her historical-cultural and religious affiliations.

Regarding my research question, I will try to find an answer to the following: what is the understanding of language in Yunus Emre? This question arises from the observation that the whole Divan is pervaded by a constant concern regarding the origin and nature of the same poet's words. We can speak of an obstinate self-enquiry with respect to the poetic gesture. Why is there this centrality of the language in Yunus Emre's poetic production? What is the main aim of this self-enquiry in his poetry? What are the ethical consequences of Yunus Emre's understanding of language?

My hypothesis is that Yunus Emre attributes a performative dimension to his poetic words. What do I mean by this performative dimension? I mean a use of language that sets in motion a dynamism that goes beyond the simple description of the external or internal reality of the poet's life. In fact, it is a use of language that tries to communicate the incommunicable and for this reason it must highlight, in a performative way, the very limits of language.

Language becomes an interstitial force (*barzakh*) that relates words to what cannot be communicated. It is a space of otherness that can only communicate what is incommunicable. But if seen from the opposite perspective, it communicates only mere words, leaving behind a void that cannot be filled. In this sense it is a performance. It is the staging of the void that the incommunicable demands in order to be communicated. A void full of words, or words full of emptiness yet neither one

of them at the same time.

This conception of language has ethical consequences of enormous importance. Through his poetry, Yunus Emre wants to unmask the precariousness of our existence which is based on mere linguistic facts. Words enclose our existences in fictitious identities created by our own linguistic categories. Through the paradoxical use of poetic language, Yunus Emre tries to recognize the fictional side of words and at the same time to indicate something that escapes from language. We can say that throughout his poetry, he creates a universe of meanings different from the standard language.

Poetry becomes a network of words and meanings that may destroy the precarious identities of everyday life. Not surprisingly, the first identity that Yunus Emre has to sacrifice is his own identity as a poet. Could we say that Yunus Emre's poetry is nothing more than the result of the abandonment of his own poetic persona? Maybe, for this reason, his words no longer belong to him. The constant reminder that the words he uses to build his poetic art are not his own words can be considered as a demonstration of how the poetic performance serves to destroy his superficial identity. This gesture brings him closer to what cannot be named, that is to say: *hakk* which I will translate as the ineffable Absolute.

*Hakk* and *hakikat* are two fundamental terms in both the esoteric and exoteric literature of Islam. They are usually translated into English as Truth or Reality. In this work, however, I propose the term the ineffable Absolute, although I will later try to clarify how the two terms, *hakk and hakikat*, have a slightly different meaning in Yunus Emre's poem.. This choice derives from reading the works of Federico Campagna, in particular the book *Technic and Magic the reconstruction of reality*<sup>3</sup>. In this work, Campagna highlights the possibility of using some of the tools of Neoplatonism, especially its emanationist component, to understand how the main systems of metaphysics function in the construction of reality. He also brings a substantial critique to the metaphysics of Westernised Modernity and attempting to

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<sup>3</sup> Campagna, F. (2018). *Technic and Magic: The Reconstruction of Reality*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

propose possible alternatives.

In seeking alternatives, however, Campagna draws on various metaphysical systems including that of Ibn Arabi, which certainly shares many aspects with that of Yunus Emre. Campagna uses the works of Toshiko Izutsu to approach Akbarian metaphysics and especially his explanation of the centrality of the concept of *hakk*, a central concept in the metaphysics of Ibn Arabi. Izutsu explains how to Ibn Arabi, *Hakk* is the fundamental reality underlying the manifestations of the absolute Being (*vucud-u mutlak*)<sup>4</sup>.

Moreover, Izutsu notices how *hakk* is also the term to indicate the first of the five planes of Being or the absolute and primordial Reality, or the absolute Being itself. This refers to the Absolute in its original state before it begins to reveal itself or manifest in any way. The four remaining stages represent the essential forms in which the Absolute descends from its absoluteness and reveals itself on levels that are more tangible and concrete to us. Ibn Arabi refers to this self-manifestation of the Absolute as *tajalli*, which means revealing something that was previously hidden behind a veil.

However the first stage or primordial Reality cannot receive any linguistic designation, it cannot be called even Allah. To emphasise its aspect of ineffability, I decided to follow Campagna's solution and add the adjective ineffable to the name Absolute. In fact, this adjective indicates something that goes 'beyond expression, too great for words, inexpressible,' and it arrived to English from Old French ineffable (14c.) or directly from Latin ineffabilis 'unutterable,' from in- 'not, opposite of' (see in- (1)) + effabilis 'speaking,' from effari 'utter,' from assimilated form of ex 'out' (see ex-) + fari "to say, speak."<sup>5</sup>

My solution, however, is certainly inadequate in most of the cases. The context of this work drives us to seek clarity and linearity when using words, trying to eliminate ambiguities, paradoxes and contradictions. In contrast, Yunus Emre's poetry, like

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<sup>4</sup> Izutsu, T. (2016). *Sufism and Taoism: A comparative study of key philosophical concepts*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.etymonline.com/word/ineffable#etymonline\\_v\\_6410](https://www.etymonline.com/word/ineffable#etymonline_v_6410) last access 25/03/23

much of the literature of esoteric Islam, presents a polysemic language that is enriched by its complexity, ambiguity and paradox. Word like *hakk and hakikat* so central to Yunus Emre's ontology certainly takes on different nuances, depending on the different contexts in which they are used. I assume that my translation will always and certainly be a form of betrayal of the depth and complexity of Yunus Emre's language. But at least a conscious and unavoidable betrayal.

In this sense, the poetic performance has a double function. One concerns the poetic practice that depersonalizes the poet and brings him closer to his origin. The other concerns the receivers. Through the depersonalization of himself as a poet and his criticism of the authorities of his time, those cultural elites embedded in legalistic engagement with the Islamic revelation, Yunus Emre invites the listeners to turn their attention toward *hakk* or the ineffable Absolute. This double significance provokes a significant change in the ethical message of Yunus Emre's poetry and it is strictly linked to the apophatic form of language.

## **1.2. Turkish Language and Islamic Studies**

Compared to studies on esoteric poetry in Arabic and Persian, Turkish has been much neglected. Arabic and Persian have surely played a fundamental role in the development of Islamic civilization. Turkish language, despite the important political and military role of the Ottoman Empire, has probably been less cosmopolitan in the literary milieu. This may be why there are fewer academic works on Turkish-language authors.

One of the factors influencing this phenomenon is the fact that the Turkish language is even further removed from European languages than Persian or Arabic. The peculiarity and uniqueness of Turkish, with its syntactic structures, grammar constructions and the easy assimilation of lexicon from other languages, has made the study and understanding of poetic texts more difficult for international scholarship, especially for those whose native languages are Indo-European. I wonder if this element also contributes to the more minor presence of Turkish studies in Western academia compared to Arabic or Persian.

Regarding Turkish academia, during these years of research I have noticed a huge polarization in relation to the study of Turkish mystical poetry. Ahmet Karamustafa observed how an attentive analysis on the vernacular Turkish Sufism is still in its infancy<sup>6</sup>. To him, there is still a predominant paradigm that focuses on the continuity between Turkish vernacular sufism and the pre-Islamic beliefs of the Turkish population.

As Zeynep Oktay Uslu<sup>7</sup> also has noticed, the important studies of Fuat Koprülü<sup>8</sup> with their nationalistic bias at the beginning of republican times in Turkey, have created a false dichotomy in the approach to those literary texts. Shamanism versus Islam, or rural poetry versus urban poetry have become categories that do not enable readers to perceive the literary and spiritual complexities of the vernacular esoteric poetry of Anatolia in the 13th and 14th centuries.

The 'Koprülü paradigm' certainly had merit in giving importance to the early Turkish poetry of Anatolia, with a modern approach to the texts<sup>9</sup>. Unfortunately, however, due to republican ideology and its difficult relationship with Islam, these poets have sometimes become decontextualized from their intimate connection with Islam. More than Islamic mysticism, humanism has been the main concept applied to understand this form of spiritual art. Yunus Emre became the national poetic hero, reproducing the European model of looking for literary fathers to the nation. If the English have Shakespeare, the Spaniards Cervantes, the Italians Dante, the French Hugo and the Germans Goethe, we Turks have our Yunus (*bizim Yunus*).

This ideology is absolutely understandable when placed in its historical context. It was a time in which the new hegemonic cultural elite of Turkey tried to create a national identity that wanted to resist the colonizing pressures of Western powers. It

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<sup>6</sup> Karamustafa, A. T. (2014). Kaygusuz Abdal: A Medieval Turkish Saint and the Formation of Vernacular Islam in Anatolia. *In Unity in Diversity* Leiden: E.J.Brill.p. 329

<sup>7</sup> Uslu, Z. O. (2019). The Şaḫiyye of Yūnus Emre and Kaygusuz Abdāl: The Creation of a Vernacular Islamic Tradition in Turkish. *Turcica*, 50, Istanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Fen – Edebiyat Fakültesi 9-52. p. 9-52.

<sup>8</sup> Koprulu, M. F. (2006). *Early Mystics in Turkish Literature*. London & New York: Routledge.

<sup>9</sup> Uslu, Z. O. (2019). The Şaḫiyye of Yūnus Emre and Kaygusuz Abdāl: The Creation of a Vernacular Islamic Tradition in Turkish. *Turcica*, 50, Istanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Fen – Edebiyat Fakültesi 9-52 p. 12

is surely interesting to read Yunus Emre from the perspective of a universal humanism common to all great poets regardless of their national, religious or political convictions. On the other hand, however, it is also limiting, especially for its disconnection from the spiritual and cultural achievements of Islamic civilization.

On the other side of the spectrum of Turkish academia, there are readings of Yunus Emre by scholars who see in him an epigone of Islam. The problem with these readings, is often about lack of depth with respect to the historical complexity of Islam. And they tend to make Yunus Emre a traditional figure who reproduces the most stereotyped elements of the 'good Muslim'. They tend to neglect the complexity of Yunus Emre's thought and his critical discourse with respect to the cultural elites of his time, as well as the internal contradictions within his own ideas.

### **1.3. Some Critical Approaches in the Field of Sufi Studies**

With a brief analysis of the field of Sufi studies, Shahab Ahmed in his *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*<sup>10</sup> denounces a tendency to disconnect the Sufi mode of being Islamic from the rest of the possibilities of meaning-making, truth claims and discourses in the history of the Islamicate civilization. Sufism has mostly been judged as something distinct from and not directly connected with 'True' Islam, that for mainstream scholarship, generally remains the normative and jurist approach to Islam. Ahmed succeeds in demonstrating that the Sufi mode of being Islamic is an important source which continuously contests, accepts or negotiates its own discourse with the legalistic and philosophical modes of being Islamic<sup>11</sup>.

The widespread and scholarly idea of a binary opposition between the Legalistic mode of being Islamic which focuses exclusively on normative claims, and the Sufi mode of being Islamic which contests and refuses those claims, does not express the real complexity of the picture. Both of these hermeneutical engagements with the

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<sup>10</sup> Ahmed, S. (2016). *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>11</sup> Ahmed, S. (2016). *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press., p.164

revelation have produced different normative discourses, together with the philosophical mode of being Islamic, which were part of an interconnected negotiation process.

The Islamic Self enacted those diverse discourses in its meaning-making in terms of Islam. To Ahmed, the Sufis were not exclusively special persons disconnected from the rest of Muslim, with antinomian or marginal stances; on the contrary, they were crucial actors in creating meaning and values in terms of Islam. These meanings and values were on some occasions even more absorbed and followed than those of the Legalistic mode of being Islamic, as a result of being expressed in the vernacular languages, as we will analyze later<sup>12</sup>.

As Liana Saif argues in her article devoted to the role of Islam in the study of western esotericism<sup>13</sup>, this type of binary inference is present in both Muslim and non-Muslim contexts. An example of this kind of simplistic reductionism is an ideologized description of a sunni-majority Islam that argues against esoteric, rational, or philosophical interpretations. In my thesis I will try to contribute to a type of approach toward Islam that takes into account the complexity of such a broad historical phenomenon from not only a chronological but also a geographical point of view.

For this reason, I will try to include in my reading of Yunus Emre's poetry a conceptual framework that takes into consideration the specific historical and geographical context in which he lived. I agree with Ahmed when he states that the events of the 13th and 14th centuries of Islamicate civilization produced a new paradigm in the worldview of Muslim societies, new values widely diffused in what he calls the Balkans-to-Bengal regions<sup>14</sup>.

The Balkans-to-Bengal (B-to-B) complex represents a new historical and geographical concept that Ahmed uses to rejuvenate, but also modify, Marshall

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<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p.129

<sup>13</sup> Saif, L. (2021). 'That I Did Love the Moor to Live with Him': Islam in/and the Study of 'Western Esotericism'. *New Approaches to the Study of Esotericism*. Leiden and Boston: E.J.Brill, 67-87.

<sup>14</sup> Ahmed, S. (2016). *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press., p. 75

Hodgson's Nile-to-Oxus concept. With the Nile-to-Oxus concept Hodgson wanted to avoid the euro-centric term 'Middle East' by using the names of the rivers Nile and Oxus to indicate the core area of Islamicate civilization in the Fertile Crescent and Iranian Highlands<sup>15</sup>.

These were the regions where Islamicate civilization started its venture, quickly becoming an important protagonist in the play of world history. For Hodgson, since the epoch of the Sumerians, these regions have been culturally dominated by the Irano-Semitic complex both at the level of folk and high cultures, making Islamicate civilization the last basin of convergence of the different elements of the Irano-Semitic complex.

Ahmed both assumes and broadens these ideas of the Nile-to-Oxus region and the Irano-Semitic complex, replacing them with the concept of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex. This temporal-geographical entity extends the concept of the area of Nile-to-Oxus rivers, including the lands of the Balkans, passing through Anatolia, Iran and Central Asia to Afghanistan and North India till it arrives at the Bay of Bengal, all regions where Muslim population was demographically the most significant. The B-to-B concept escapes from the polarization of the Irano and Semitic elements of Islamic civilization, aspects that for Ahmed are also important but, pace Hodgson, need to be considered in a permanent dialogue with other cultural traditions as Turkish or Indian<sup>16</sup>.

In its original historical framework, Ahmed does not take any specific group of languages or ethnicity as a starting point to conceptualize Islam, as the Irano-Semitic or Turkic-Persianate concepts do; on the contrary, the B-to-B represents a mosaic of diverse cultural forces that interact with each other and, in doing so, create a new paradigm. In this way, Ahmed succeeds in avoiding any nationalistic chauvinism, so common in scholarship on Islam of our times.

The B-to-B complex, as a concept, enables us to focus on the unique plural

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<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, p.83

<sup>16</sup> Ahmed, S. (2016). *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press., p. 84

dimension of the history of Islamicate civilization, particularly from the second part of 14<sup>th</sup> to the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century, a period in which different vernacular cultural elements, in poetical or fictional forms, started to circulate and create a network of discourses intertwined with each other.

Recently Bruce Lawrence reflecting on Hodgson's legacy and Ahmed's new perspective proposed a new key term that synthesizes previous conceptualizations: Islamicate Cosmopolitan Spirit<sup>17</sup>. Abbreviated in the acronym ICS, this term is intended to highlight the complexity needed in the study of historical and spiritual phenomena related to Islam.

With this new critical perspective, Lawrence wants to open a new horizon in the field of Islamic Studies that is not fossilized into the false binary oppositions so prevalent in contemporary academic research on Islam. Lawrence argues that this new term may be used by an audience of friends and enemies, but in his opinion it is not intended to become the focus of the academy or a priority for the general public. Moving beyond the categories of East or West, premodern or modern, it attempts to amalgamate opposites and invites us into a future still developing<sup>18</sup>.

Certainly as we will see later through a close reading of Yunus Emre's poetry, we are confronted with a cosmopolitan spirit that can transcend false binary oppositions. The language of Divan itself is steeped in terms from foreign languages, especially Arabic and Turkish, but also to a limited extent from Greek and Mongolian. If, however, there is a binary opposition that can be useful in placing Divan in a context not only of history and geography but also of literary genre, it is that between exoterism (*zâhir*) and esotericism (*bâtînî*).

#### **1.4. Islamic Esotericism**

The terms *zâhir* and *bâtîn* are two terms that have entered international academic

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<sup>17</sup> Lawrence, B.B. (2021). *Islamicate Cosmopolitan Spirit (Vol. 20)*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

<sup>18</sup> Lawrence, B.B. (2021). *Islamicate Cosmopolitan Spirit (Vol. 20)*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

discourse since the second half of the last century. Authors such as Henry Corbin<sup>19</sup> or Sayyed Hossein Nasr<sup>20</sup> used these terms to propose a critique of some of the values of modernity by taking as reference authors from the esoteric tradition of Islam. Their focus on the elements of the esoteric traditions of Islam (*bâtînî*) had a more metaphysical than historical interest. In the case of Corbin, his main interest was in the esoteric currents of Shiite Islam; in the case of Nasr and the whole current called Traditionalist<sup>21</sup> and influenced by the thought of René Guénon<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, sufism of sunni matrix had a centrality in the creation of a transhistorical conception of this phenomenon.

Recently Liana Saif has critiqued, convincingly, the positions of these authors from a postcolonial angle<sup>23</sup>. According to her, the language of Corbin and the Traditionalists in the style of Nasr is a way of reordering the history of Islam in an ideological sense. Through this transhistorical perspective what is ultimately achieved is a search for what essentially characterizes all religions and which does not change with respect to the accidental dimension, the historical and geographical context, in which it is found. This ideological construction is based on the creation of a canon of texts that highlights only a certain type of elements of the *bâtînî* tradition, often those related to the production of high culture. In this way, however, many *bâtînî* aspects that are related more to the oral and popular tradition are excluded.

This is the same mistake that Ahmed's proposal runs into, which assumes as the main infrastructure of the sufi tradition a certain literary canon in which Hâfiz-ı Şîrâzî and his love poetry is situated at the center. Certainly his proposal has a more rigorous

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<sup>19</sup> Some of the most important works are Corbin, H. (2013). *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn'Arabi* (Vol. 91). London & New York: Routledge, Corbin, H. (2014). *History of Islamic Philosophy*. London & New York: Routledge., Corbin, H. (1989). *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: from Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran* (Vol. 2). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>20</sup> Some of the most important works are Nasr, S. H. (2007). *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*. Bloomington: World Wisdom, Inc., Nasr, S. H. (1987). *Islamic Art and Spirituality*. Albany: SUNY Press., Nasr, S. H. (2006). *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy*. Albany: SUNY Press.

<sup>21</sup> Sedgwick, M. (2009). *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>22</sup> See Guénon, R. (2001). *The Crisis of the Modern World*. New York: Sophia Perennis., Guénon, R. (2001). *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*. New York: Sophia Perennis., Guénon, R. (2004). *East and West*. New York: Sophia Perennis.

<sup>23</sup> Saif, L. (2019). What Is Islamic Esotericism?. Online: *Correspondences*, 7(1).p. 4

historical component than that of the traditionalists mainly due to Hodgson's legacy. Ahmed, however, still remains tied to a Hodgsonian legacy that associates the currents of esotericism with a non-*ṣeriat* spirit starting especially from the textual sources of love poetry as we shall see later).

In contrast, Liane Saif attempts to create a synthesis of previous conceptualizations of Islamic esotericism by not excluding the efforts of the Traditionalists, which she criticizes, yes, but to whom she also acknowledges the value of having opened an academic discourse regarding these themes<sup>24</sup>. She also, like Ahmed, draws on the Hodgsonian proposal, but not accepting the conceptualization of esotericism as strictly anti-*ṣeriat* current and seeking to disentangle esotericism from the textual and literary dimensions of high culture. Saif tries to find a heuristic tool that can help us understand the phenomenon of Islamic esotericism in both its historical-geographical and conceptual complexity.

In the first instance, Saif reasserts the term *bâtinîyya*<sup>25</sup> as a term endogenous with respect to the Islamicate civilization and not an external concept applied to the tradition as for example 'mysticism' might be instead. Saif notes how the term *bâtin* in opposition to the term *zâhir* has taken during the course of history different semantic contents but that ultimately it functions as the term that many authors in the course of Islamic history adopt to allude to a certain view of Islam. In our case we will see how Yunus Emre also makes use of this term and how in his poetry there is a certain correspondence between the pair of *bâtin/zâhir* and *hakikat/ṣeriat*.

Saif is not interested in cataloging a series of texts that have a *bâtinî* dimension as opposed to others that have a *zâhir* one. But on the contrary, her proposal is about understanding the characteristics of a mode of cognition that can be described as esoteric, resting on a historical and geographical context that goes beyond mere engagement with the Qur'an. In a sense, she does not stray far from Ahmed's perspective even though she proposes a type of conceptualization that emerges more

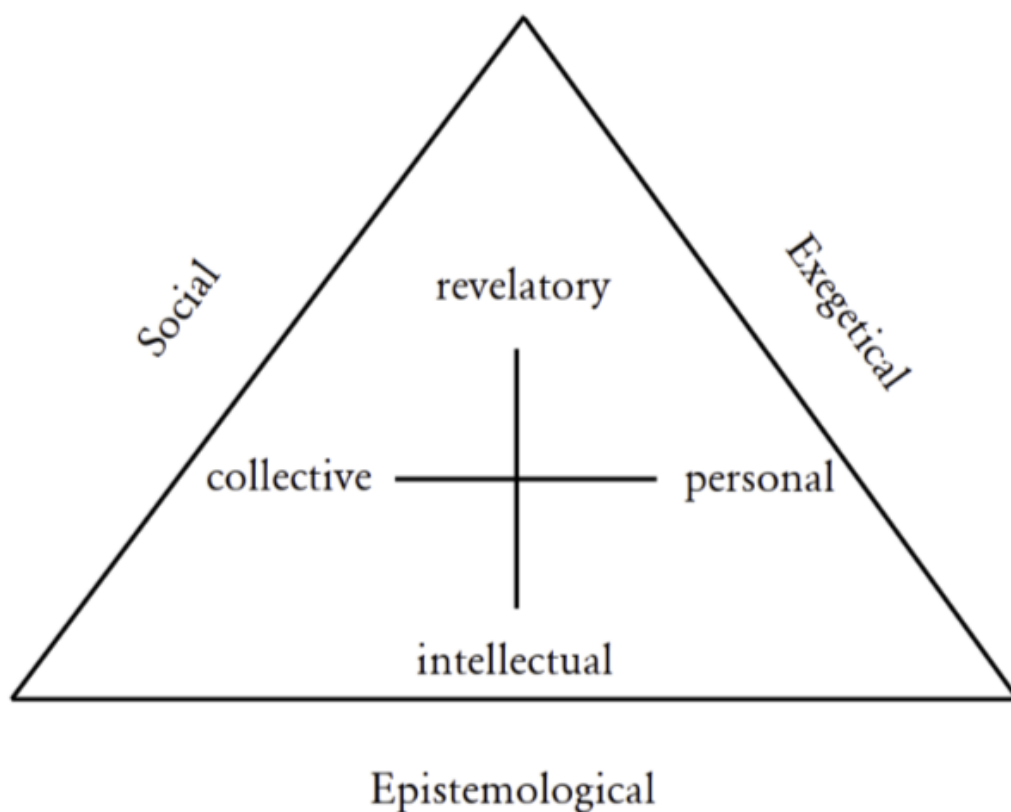
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<sup>24</sup> Saif, L. (2019). What Is Islamic Esotericism?. Online: *Correspondences*, 7(1).p.29

<sup>25</sup> Saif uses the Latin transliteration of the Arabic word باطنية . From now on I will refer to this concept by the Turkish word *bâtin* in the substantive case and *bâtinî* as adjective.

directly from esoteric currents in relation to theoretical aspects of the academy and includes more variety of phenomena not strictly related to the high culture textual milieu.

Saif contributes to improving the study of phenomena related to the esoteric sphere. How? Providing a set of features that can make these heterogeneous practices more intelligible to us, she also offers a criticism of the mainstream cognitive style characterized by the post-Enlightenment values of rationality. The features contemplated are represented in the following diagram where we see the complementary forces that influence the cognitive mode of Islamic esotericism<sup>26</sup>.



**Figure 1.1. Islamic Esotericism**

On the one hand we find the polarity between the personal and the collective indicating how in some cases the personal dimension of the esoteric experience of Islam has a preponderance over the collective and vice versa. Also visible in the

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<sup>26</sup> Saif, L. (2019). What Is Islamic Esotericism?. Online: *Correspondences*, 7(1),p. 47

diagram is the contrast between the intellectual and revelatory elements of esoteric currents, contrasting a type of epistemology related more to the intellectual or revelatory sphere. The last pair of terms makes reference to exegetical or social practice, where the first refers to a more textual approach with respect to revelation while the other alludes to a more social dimension in terms of practices that verge on having concrete consequences on the world<sup>27</sup>.

I find this way of conceptualizing Islamic esotericism highly relevant because it manages to overcome the easy binary oppositions between *şeriat* and anti-*şeriat*, high culture and popular culture, etc. It also includes not only the textual dimension of the most influential languages in Islamic civilization, such as the texts of İbnü'l-Arabî, Rûmî so central to the traditionalist approach to sufism, but also textual sources in other languages. The social dimension of esoteric currents implies a pluralism of practices that must necessarily include a broad spectrum of textual and non-textual resources from multiple historical and geographical contexts of the Islamic civilization.

Rightly in this context, Yunus Emre's poetry also finds a space. A space not only within the Turkish-language poetic tradition but also in the very practices related to the ritual forms of Turkish esotericism. For example, the centrality of Yunus Emre's poetry in the musical repertoire used by the Turkish confraternities (*tarikât*) is an example of how the poet's personal esoteric experience has acquired a social dimension, being passed on in the form of music in different cultural contexts under Ottoman Turkish influence for centuries now. This could be one of the other aspects to be pursued in future research that could focus on the reception of Yunus Emre's poetry in esoteric musical contexts.

To conclude this brief analysis with respect to Islamic esotericism and the contribution of Saif's articles in this field I would also like to point out how her conceptualization opens the door to not only a broader conception of esotericism within Islamic civilization. In fact, it also allows for bringing together esoteric currents from other contexts of practices and textuality such as the Christian context,

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<sup>27</sup> Saif, L. (2019). What Is Islamic Esotericism?. Online: *Correspondences*, 7(1).p. 49

for example. This aspect gave me a way to confirm the interest of relating Yunus Emre's poetry to that of Dante Alighieri. Both poets not only shared a historical period central to the formation of vernacular language poetry, but also an esoteric perspective based on the metaphor of love within their own spiritual traditions. I will try to create a bridge between these two figures in the concluding part of my thesis.

### **1.5. 'You Lovers, Oh You Lovers, the School of Love Is Religion to Me' Yunus Emre and *Aşk Mezhebi***

However, Saif forgets something in her methodological proposal of the study of Islamic esotericism: the school of love or *aşk mezhebi*. In contrast to Ahmed, who instead devotes much space to this undercurrent of Islamic esotericism, Saif who tries to find terms coined in the tradition strangely forgets about it. In our case it is Yunus Emre himself who in the incipit of one of the most important poems in his Divan states:

You lovers, oh you lovers, the school of love is religion to me.

[Since] my eyes saw the face of the friend, all mourning is a wedding to me.

No other causes us to mourn, no other corrodes our heart.

The beautiful song of the true is the call that it addresses to me.

I will no longer call myself 'I,' I will no longer call anyone 'you'.

I will no longer call myself king or slave, so whoever hears me will be amazed.

*İy 'âşıkân iy 'âşıkân 'ışk mezhebi dîndür bana  
Gördi gözüm dost yüzünü yas kamu düğündür bana*

*Ayruk bize yas eylemez gönlümüzi pâs eylemez  
Hak'dan gelen görklü âvâz andan gelen ündür bana*

*Ayruk bana ben dimeyem kimesneye sen dimeyem*

First, we read in Yunus Emre's words a kind of confession of faith that starts from a *bâtîni* perspective. His confession of faith is not addressed to everyone, but to those who are on the path of love (*iy 'âşîkan*). If there is a specific trait of the esoteric dimension in any context-for example, we find the same dynamic in the esoteric Christian context-it is surely the realization that the inner path is not for everyone. This is why the poetic voice addresses only the lovers and not the *'umma*, in the sense of the entire community of the faithful.

Moreover, the *aşk mezhebi* is claimed as his own *din*. Here again Yunus Emre plays with words by loading them in a playful way with esoteric meaning that in one exoteric context (*zâhir*) have another. *Mezheb* is the key word that is used to refer to the main legal schools and know with their Turkish names: the *hânefî mezhebi*, the *şafî mezhebi*, the *mâlikî mezhebi* and the *hânbelî mezhebi*. *Din*, on the other hand, is a polysemic term that is used with multiple meanings in the Qur'an. In the more exoteric context, the word *din* is definitely associated with the word Islam. Attesting that one's religion is related to the school of love is a way of indicating a different perspective than the one linked to traditional legal schools.

In the second verse of the *beyt*, the poetic voice explains how she came to attest her belonging to the path of love. What transformed or transforms the way of seeing the world depends on an experience of encountering the face of the friend (*dost yüzünü*). The metonymy of the face, as well as the trope of the friend, are rhetorical figures of koranic origin and are used in that context to refer to Allah.

Here, however, we are immersed in a web of ambivalent meanings, a central aspect of *aşk mezhebi* in general and Yunus Emre's poetry in particular. The poetic voice refers to the encounter between lover and beloved in terms of disciple and master (*mürîd* and *mürşîd*). This encounter is considered a marriage that anticipates the mourning of the *dervish*, who is aware that this marriage will bring death. In fact, this final encounter will annihilate the *dervish's* lower soul (the *nefs*), connecting the

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<sup>28</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı. poem n. 7

contradictory experience of life and death in the same place.

For Ahmed, who translates the Arabic word *مذهب* as a ‘way of going’ putting the focus on ‘the articulation, narration, celebration’ and ‘recitation’ of the discourse of esoterism founded on love<sup>29</sup>. To him, these unique works display a distinct set of values, both in the positive and negative senses, thus giving rise to a horizon of normality. The noteworthy point is that this horizon of normality, parallel and alternative to the normative claims based on a legalistic hermeneutical engagement with revelation, does not merely refer to the literary space. In contrast, this widespread canon of the B-to-B region became a major source for Muslim to give meaning to their lives, in terms of social, imaginative and intellectual realms<sup>30</sup>.

The *ghazal*, the love poem, is a significant aesthetic feature of the *aşk mezhebi*. Ahmed makes a sort of genealogy of the central ideas of this school and recognizes Ibn Sina as one of the main influences in this love-centered conception of Islam. In his Epistle of Love, he indicated Love as the manifestation of God in its essence and existence, influencing several poets with this idea that would translate this view in form of poetry<sup>31</sup>. Ahmed considers Hâfiz-ı Şîrâzî as the most emblematic example of this sort of poetical production, considering him not only the example of the paradigm of the B-to-B complex but also as the epigone of the *aşk mezhebi*.

Hâfiz-ı Şîrâzî wrote his Divan across the 14th and 15th centuries, a few years after Yunus Emre’s Divan. Hâfiz-ı Şîrâzî also succeeded in spreading the aesthetical and existential values of the *aşk mezhebi* all over the lands of the B-to-B complex. However, these values were already in the pipeline before Hafiz’s Divan, as Yunus Emre’s poetry demonstrates. Interestingly enough, those values consider the experience of love as a trope for also speaking about death.

That is why, in the second *beyt*, mourning is spoken of as something that cannot corrode the heart of the beloved but on the contrary puts it in touch with the song

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<sup>29</sup> Ahmed, S. (2016). *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. p.44

<sup>30</sup> Ahmed, S. (2016). *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. p. 45

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, p. 40

(*âvâz*) that comes from the ineffable Absolute. Later we will see how there is a close relationship between the loss of the poet's identity, a kind of initiatory death, which turns into a rebirth in the space of poetry. The process of poetic creation is ambivalent; on the one hand it is a loss and on the other a source of life in the linguistic plane of poetry.

The third *beyt* aptly speaks of this process with the depersonalization of the personal pronouns I '*ben*' and you '*sen*.' The poetic voice expresses in the poetic space of the *ghazal* that it can no longer refer to itself in terms of I '*ben*' and to no one else in terms of you '*sen*.' The world of duality has lost all meaning in the opening of another space, the poetic space, and the two figures of sultan and slave disappear causing a state of confusion in the reader. Neither I nor you, neither sultan nor slave, what remains is only the presence of an absence, which is evoked in a form that as we shall see later Michael Sells calls apophatic<sup>32</sup>.

From you to you goes my way. Through you my tongue speaks of you.  
Oh God, my hand does not reach you, I am amazed at this wisdom.

I do not depart from your love. I do not exile myself from your hermitage.  
And if I go from here, I will go with you to you.

That friend sent us. He said: 'Go and take a look at the world'.  
I came and I saw an ornament, he who loves you does not care for it.

He promised his servants, he said: 'Tomorrow I will appear to you'.  
The tomorrow in which these friends rejoice is today for me.

*Senden sana varur yolum senden seni söyler dilüm  
Allah sana irmez elüm bu hikmete kaldum tana*

*Ben 'ışkundan ırılmayam dergâhundan sürülmeyem  
Bundan dahı giderisem senün ile varam sana*

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<sup>32</sup> We will analyze this issue later by referring to Sells, M. A. (1994). *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

*Ol dost bizi viribidi var dünyayı bir gör didi  
Geldüm gördüm bir ârâyiş seni seven kalmaz ana*

*Kullarına va'deyledi yarınki gün görnem didi  
Ol dostların sevindüğü yarınım bugündür bana<sup>33</sup>*

If earlier the poetic voice claimed the impossibility of the use of the pronouns I (*ben*) and you (*sen*), in an extremely playful way in the first verse of the fourth *beyt* we are confronted with a complex sonic game composed by four times the pronoun you (*sen*), this time referring to Allah. If in the first part of the poem the love experience dilutes any kind of identity, in this second part another I (*ben*) you (*sen*) relationship is established: the poetic voice with Allah.

We can read these verses with the help of *barzakh* logic, terms used by Bruce Lawrence and which I will consider later. If the word tongue has a suffix indicating the possessive, my tongue (*dilum*), this same tongue is absolutely surmounted by an ineffability from which it comes and to which it refers. For without this inspiration of the ineffable, the poet's words would be impossible. Language comes to express what hands cannot grasp. The tongue and the ineffable you (*sen*) become one and at the same time remain inexorably separate.

In the fifth *beyt* we have another image of the omnipresence of the beloved in the love experience. It seems that the poetic voice is caged in a state that does not allow it to go anywhere but the beloved. The journey and the arrival seem to coincide. In the sixth and seventh *beyt*, on the other hand, we find ourselves with an inner dialogue between the beloved and the poetic voice in an almost dramatized form.

In this dialogue, the poetic voice attests to a lack of interest in what the experience of the world proposes and also a skepticism toward the exoteric discourse with respect to time and reward. In this discourse the person who submits to Allah's commands (*kul*) will be repaid for his/ her obedience in a tomorrow (*yarınki gün*). The poetic voice does not seem interested in such future reward, for the one who loves

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<sup>33</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı. poem n. 7

tomorrow is today and vice versa (*yarınım bugündür bana*).

In the last two *beyt* the esoteric perspective of Yunus Emre's poetry takes an even more pronounced form. Every kind of duality so necessary in exoterism is denied and challenged. The categories of earthly world and world of the hereafter (*dünyâ âhiret*) or beginning or end (*ezel-ebed*) become the now of poetic time. The here and now of the poetic moment are for Yunus Emre the *din* and *iman*, descended through the words of poetry. For love today and tomorrow have no value; it is the poetic experience that is the only thing that matters.

As we will see later, thanks to Fatema Keshavarz's analysis referring to Mevlânâ Celâleddîn-i Rûmî's poem, in Yunus Emre too we find ourselves with a type of poetry that demands from the recipient a kind of participation, even a sense of play and involvement with the poetic voice<sup>34</sup>. The last lines of this poem seem to transport the person to the receiver into another temporal dimension where conventional temporal categories are transcended. The poetic voice invites us into a liminal space that is on the borderline between the verbal and the ineffable because it encompasses and excludes both at the same time.

#### **1.6. 'I Climbed on the Plum Branch and Ate the Grapes There': Reading Esoteric Poetry**

Looking through Fatemeh Keshavarz's book *Reading Mystical Lyrics, the Case of Jalal al-Din Rumi* was extremely useful in acquiring new tools for the interpretation of Yunus Emre's esoteric poetry.<sup>35</sup> Although the book is a monograph dealing with the poetry of Rûmî and its relationship with the same genre of Persian language poetry, I am convinced that Keshavarz's innovative approach can easily transcend the boundaries of Persian literature. In fact, Keshavarz's outlook can be fruitful even if applied to esoteric poetry in the Turkish language, and in particular to a close reading of Yunus Emre's Divan. I will try to highlight the main characteristics of the reading that Keshavarz proposes regarding Rûmî's Divan and I will explain why

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<sup>34</sup> Keshavarz, F. (1998). *Reading Mystical Lyric: The Case of Jalal al-Din Rumi*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press. p. 47

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem.

these elements can contribute to a new reading of Yunus Emre's poetry.

Already starting from the title, Keshavarz makes the reader understand that her intent is to take Rûmî as a case study but that her contribution can be extended to other authors. The general approach of her work is influenced by Bakhtin's theory because she gives importance not exclusively to the literary text as such but also to its historical context and the literary genre of mystical poetry.

However, what is compelling in Keshavarz's reading proposal is her ability not to unnecessarily divert attention to the theoretical aspects of her study of the Divan. Instead she finds a delicate balance between literary theory and her personal close reading of the text. In other words, theory becomes a tool that brings out new elements from Rûmî's poetry, instead of locking it in stagnant and deterministic categories.

I suppose we can say that the main objective of the book is to go beyond the traditional interpretations of the metaphors and allegories of Rûmî's poetry and show its greatness through a new complex conceptual apparatus. The conceptual apparatus that Keshavarz constructs is not limited to literary theories, but also includes elements of the philosophy of language including authors such as Heidegger or Kierkegaard. In any case, these paths that go beyond literature or mystical poetry on a disciplinary level in the strictest sense always constitute ideas in the service of Rûmî's Divan and not vice versa. Certainly, this is the originality and value of Keshavarz: putting Rûmî's poetry in a dialogue not only with authors who wrote in a synchronic milieu but also in diachronic environments.

Keshavarz argues that in order to read and appreciate Rûmî's Divan we must take into account his playful, fresh and surprising characteristics. To her, Rûmî intends to open a dialogue with his addressees, and to succeed he uses some strategies typical of children to take the attention away from other people. Why is it important to create a connection with the reader or listener? Keshavarz points out that the poet's goal is not to speak solipsistically about his mystical experiences, but on the contrary to use the poetic space to invite the addressee to seek a form of life that includes esoteric experience. This invitation, however, does not come from a distant voice that

offers recipes from the top of a pulpit, but on the contrary from a close and childlike poetic voice that creates a playful text to surprise those who receive his message<sup>36</sup>.

One of the most repeated ideas in Keshavarz's book is to transform a funeral of words into a whirling dance. Starting from this image, Keshavarz interprets Rûmî's conception of language in an extremely original way. Like any other mystical poet, Rûmî is aware of the limits of language to express the ineffable or its experience. However, instead of passively accepting these limits with a nihilistic attitude, Keshavarz demonstrates how Rûmî is capable of transforming these dead materials, words, into something else which gives life to what is unutterable. This transformation into living elements recalls the ceremony of *sema*, the whirling dance typical of the *Mevlevi* sufi order<sup>37</sup>.

Keshavarz is not the first to find a similarity between Rûmî's words and the dance ceremony so frequently associated with him. However, she proposes an original correspondence that does not stop at the external dimension of the correlation between poetry and dance, but instead points to an element of profound meaning. In fact, Keshavarz exemplifies a biographical event of Rûmî's life, the loss of his disciple Salah al-Din the Goldsmith, as an example of transgression of the boundaries of tradition. To her, this act of transgression also reflects the general attitude of Rûmî toward literary conventions. One of the implicit theses of the book is the idea that Rûmî's poetry has a profoundly reforming character and it could be considered even 'modernist', if we accept that this movement started before modernity. 'The panorama of continuity and change' makes Rûmî's Divan a text that repeats some topoi of its genre but never in a mechanical way<sup>38</sup>. In fact, Keshavarz notes how the literary tradition is often transgressed in order to directly involve the listener or reader of the poems.

Performance is another keyword in Keshavarz's book. To her, performance is built through the unique relationship between the content of Rûmî's poems, referring in

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<sup>36</sup> Keshavarz, F. (1998). *Reading Mystical Lyric: The Case of Jalal al-Din Rumi*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press. p.130

<sup>37</sup> Keshavarz, F. (1998). *Reading Mystical Lyric: The Case of Jalal al-Din Rumi*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press. p.138

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*. p.158

particular to the Divan, and its forms. Certainly, esoteric poetry must be included in literature. However it has some specific features which are different from other literary genres. The main aim of this genre is talking about experiences that go beyond the common sphere of linguistic capacity. For this reason, Rûmî creates a very particular bond between what is expressed and how it is expressed. This is a mechanism that enacts a fictive game. This means a kind of performance that is created through the dialogic opening of the poet's language with whoever s/he wants or is able to engage with. Rûmî does not speak about something far away and extraneous to the addressees. On the contrary he trusts in the power of words that can convey a transformative value for those who are able to listen to them<sup>39</sup>.

This confidence in the possibility of transformation through poetry starts from an intense struggle against the conception of language as a pre-existing system of rules<sup>40</sup>. Just as an esoteric approach tries to enable the opening of extraordinary moments within people's daily lives, the use of poetry becomes the perfect ally to create a form of life that can break the ordinary. With poetry, language acquires other forms and, through these new forms, mystics transform themselves or others. However, the magic of this transformation can only pass through paradoxes.

If language is intrinsically paradoxical, Keshavarz adds sonic games through her analysis and not merely of the meaning of poetic language. For Keshavarz, sonic games are important aspects of meanings. Furthermore, she notes that silence also plays a central role in creating paradoxical experiences for those who read or listen to Rûmî's poems. One of the most interesting examples is how Keshavarz highlights Rûmî's use of silence. According to her, Rûmî asks the readers or listeners to fill this silence with their own reflections. So not only do we find ourselves faced with a poet who uses language to state something as well as to deny it, a typical aspect of the apophatic language, but also uses silence that asks to be filled by someone who is not present in the moment of its creation.

I would like to take advantage of some of Keshavarz's ideas in order to analyze

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<sup>39</sup> Keshavarz, F. (1998). *Reading Mystical Lyric: The Case of Jalal al-Din Rumi*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press. p.70

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*. p. 9

Yunus Emre's conception of language, starting from the hypothesis that he too struggles against an idea of language as a granite system made up of fixed and immutable norms. Yunus Emre also uses different strategies based on the resonances and dissonances of the Turkish language to convey to readers or listeners a state of estrangement that can involve or educate them with the esoteric experience. Yunus Emre deals with a deconstruction of the ordinary structures of meaning of the language not only through a specific lexicon but also through specific sonic games.

Of course the roles of Yunus Emre and Rûmî are not comparable, because Yunus Emre is one of the first to use Turkish language in this way. While Rûmî has an established tradition of mystic poetic genre in the Persian language behind him, Yunus Emre is the true pioneer in venturing into giving words in Turkish to the ineffable. If sometimes Rûmî tries to distance himself from some rusty elements of Persian mystical poetry, Yunus Emre, instead, is the one who creates the canon. For example, there is an extremely obscure and playful poem with complex sound games as follows here:

I climbed on the plum branch and ate the grapes there.

The owner of the garden got angry and said: 'Why do you eat my nuts?'

*Çıkdum erik talına anda yidüm üzümü  
Bostân ıssı kakıyup dir ne yirsün kozum<sup>41</sup>*

This poem has been given interpretations from important subsequent authors such as Niyâzî-i Mısrî, İsmâik Hakkı Bursevî or Şeyhzâde, demonstrating that Yunus Emre has become one of the reference figures for mystical poetry in Turkish<sup>42</sup>.

Reading Keshavarz can help us to highlight new elements of Yunus Emre's poetry, paying particular attention to his playfulness, his dialogue with the addressees and the intertwining of game sounds and meaning. These could be new keys to

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<sup>41</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı. poem n.407

<sup>42</sup> See Ak, S. (2015). *Çıktım Erik Dalına: Yunus Emre'nin Bir Şiirinin Üç Şerhi*. İstanbul: Büyüyen Ay Yayınları

interpreting what for many poets of Islamic civilization is called the language of Solomon or the language of birds (الطَّيْرُ مَنْطِقٌ). This koranic term<sup>43</sup> refers precisely to a special poetic language that transforms both those who utter it and those who know how to listen to it. It is a magical language that elevates the participants towards the heights of mystical union.

We will see how Yunus Emre's poetry continually refers to this special type of language and how he tries to share its heights in a playful and inclusive way. In fact, elements of nature, musical instruments, and people of everyday life are included in Yunus Emre's poetic horizon to make this language accessible to those who know how to listen. One of the constant requests of the poetic voice is to listen (*işit*). So one of the objectives of this work will be to try to listen to Yunus Emre's poetry and try to interpret some of the secrets of his version of the language of birds.

### **1.7. Apophatic Language**

Before finishing this introduction, I would like to mention another key concept useful to understand Yunus Emre's poetry better: apophatic language. In his book *Mystical language of Unsayings*, Michael Sells identifies a cultural, philosophical and religious network of authors who conceive language in an apophatic way.<sup>44</sup> Before clarifying the concept of apophatic, it is important to say that Sells takes into consideration authors who come not only from a different cultural milieu but also from different moments in history, starting from Plotinus and arriving finally at Meister Eckhart. What do these authors have in common? According to Sells, in different historical epochs within different cultural and religious horizons some authors have tried to overcome the limits of language.

The metaphysical principle underlying this overcoming of language lies in the awareness that human beings create their worlds through language. But the creation of linguistic worlds always implies something that escapes from language, exceeding it and its capability to capture the real. For all of them, this 'something' that is

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<sup>43</sup> The Qur'an (*Sahih international*) 27,16

<sup>44</sup> Sells, M. A. (1994). *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

impossible to name is the foundational element of any other reality and we can only, imperfectly, call it ineffable. But how can we name something which escapes words? How can we overcome the limits of our world through words, when there is an awareness, as Wittgenstein expressed it, that 'the limit of my language means the limit of my world'?<sup>45</sup>

Sells suggests that there are three responses to this important aporia.<sup>46</sup> One of the possible answers is silence. I would connect this solution to the last and widely known quotation from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* : 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.'<sup>47</sup> The second response could be an ontological differentiation between the ineffable or God in itself and our linguistic idea of it. This is exactly what the 'apophatic discourse' tries to avoid. In fact, in this third way to find a solution to the previous aporia, the authors accept it as it is and they do not try to go beyond its logical contradiction. In this way, they create a new mode of discourse: the apophatic discourse.

In Sells words:

Apophasis is the common Greek designation for this language. Apophasis can mean 'negation,' but its etymology suggests a meaning that more precisely characterizes the discourse in question: apophasis (un-saying or speaking-away). The term apophasis is commonly paired with kataphasis (affirmation, saying, speaking-with). Every act of unsaying demands or presupposes a previous saying<sup>48</sup>. Apophasis can reach a point of intensity such that no single proposition concerning the transcendent can stand on its own. Any saying (even a negative saying) demands a correcting proposition, an unsaying. But that correcting proposition which unsays the previous proposition is in itself a 'saying' that must be 'unsaid' in turn. It is in the tension between the two propositions that the discourse becomes meaningful. That tension is momentary. It must be continually re-earned by ever new linguistic acts of

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<sup>45</sup> Wittgenstein, L. (2002). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London & New York: Routledge.

<sup>46</sup> Sells, M. A. (1994). *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 89

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, p.3

unsaying<sup>49</sup>.

In describing the apophatic discourse, Sells points out the extreme dynamism of language. To him, the authors who use apophatic speech trust in the possibility of opening a way to the ineffable through specific linguistic endeavors. However, they also conceive any linguistic expression of the ineffable as temporary, vulnerable and provisional. Tensions and contradictions are the main features of the textualities of all these mystical poets who try to say the unsaying.

I believe that Yunus Emre is also part of this network of poets who conceive language and their language and poetic gestures within apophatic discourse. In the next few pages I will try to highlight the specific characteristics that Yunus Emre manifests within his poems, demonstrating how apophatic discourse takes shape in the Divan. To what extent can we say that he is one of the first authors, if not the very first, to use the Western Turkish language to express these values within apophatic discourse? This will be another important question that I will try to answer in the following pages.

Sells notes that apophatic discourse conceives the speech act in a performative way. In this sense, he indicates that those authors who are part of this tradition avoid merely speaking about the ineffable. They are aware that it is impossible. However, they use language to perform the ineffable. Here, etymology can help us to better understand this difference between a language which speaks about something and a language which performs something. Perform as a verb is a word that comes to English from old French and it is composed of the Latin and French preposition *per* and the word form. It is an impossible performance in the sense that it attempts to put into words events that occur on the temporal horizon from a position that is instead eternal and outside of time.

The preposition *per* as prefix of a word has many functions, but in this case I think it refers to the idea of leading towards something. Where is it leading to? It is leading to a form. Form is also an English word which has the meaning of shape.

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<sup>49</sup> Sells, M. A. (1994). *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.3

Performative language in this context can be interpreted as a language that leads to the ineffable or furnishes it with a certain form. It is a sort of vestige of the ineffable inside the linguistic dimension. However, it always refers to something that escapes from language itself. This is because in the act of dressing the ineffable with words, which is the only way to have a linguistic relationship with it, the ineffable disappears.

In this sense, performative intensity goes beyond the duality typical of any linguistic expression, with an implicit distinction between the signifier and the signified, and it leads to what Sells calls a meaning event. The meaning event is that dimension which overcomes any kind of distinction or ontological dualism. To explain it, Sells uses the example of jokes. Jokes are semantic dispositives which do not really refer to something outside language, as could their explanations, but they use language to create something that overcomes it: our laughter. On the contrary, the explanation of a joke is a dual way to use language to explain something that is outside it, the event of the joke. However, its explanation would not have any performative intensity and it will not make anyone laugh<sup>50</sup>.

The concept of meaning event is by no means easy to understand and I will try to make it more intelligible by trying to unpack its components. Starting from the first word, meaning, Sells specifies that in this context what he wants to avoid is a distinction between meaning and predicate. The duality between a form of predicate and its meaning is non-existent in apophatic discourse, as there does not exist in this domain a metaphysical distinction between essence and existence. Sells connects this intimate mingling between meaning and predicate to the mystical union. Here, Sells alludes to the dissolution of any limit of finitude in its encounter with the infinite. Finite and infinite become one.

The other key word in the concept of meaning event is event. Here, Sells distinguishes event from experience by showing how the latter is characterized by a grammatical object, in the sense of experiencing something. It is a mediation that passes through a subject and finally a form of construction of the experience. A

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<sup>50</sup> Sells, M. A. (1994). *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 4

modern example of this method could be the Kantian transcendental philosophy. Differently, Sells conceives event as a dimension prior to any distinction between subject and object, an immediate dimension in the sphere of a non-referential but trans-referential language. I believe that, here, the adjective trans-referential means a language that goes beyond its dimension of referring to something outside the system of signs of the language itself.

In other words, with meaning event, I believe Sells wants to indicate a literary dimension, one internal to the semantic space, where something happens that imitates the mystical union and where the dual categories of subject, object, essence, existence, meaning and predicate are canceled. It is therefore not a question of language that speaks about the mystical experience of a subject, but language which creates an event of performative intensity. Whoever reads this language could possibly participate in a sort of linguistic mystical union.

One of my hypotheses is the possibility of a new reading of Yunus Emre's poetry, making the literary space a performance with the possibility of opening a pre-linguistic dimension distinct from a linguistic conception or an experiential view of the text. The text becomes the setting of a performance that anyone can interpret according to their interests, skills and background. Maybe because of this, the reception of Yunus Emre's poems, as of all the authors who have used this particular articulation of language, is so infinitely broad.

Apophatic speech is therefore a specific way of enacting the ineffable by a linguistic apparatus. Its axiom assumes that there is a form of non-dual language that overcomes the binary distinction between words and the ineffable, creating an interstitial force (*barzakh*) that operates between them. However, it is neither words nor the ineffable, but at the same time is both words and the ineffable in its discursive continuity. It is a continuous flow of an indistinct form that participates in both the linguistic dimension and in its ineffability.

Apophatic language is a liminal space, or as Bruce Lawrence suggests, a *barzakh*<sup>51</sup>. It is a form of language that stands between what can be said and what cannot be said. The metaphysical principle underlying those authors who use apophatic language is the impossibility of naming through language something that goes beyond language. The moment we name something, this something escapes. However, it does not mean there is not something beyond language. The goal is to catch it with a particular form of language that must be performed to be grasped.

I would also like to observe that this performative element of apophatic language has something in common with post-modern nominalism<sup>52</sup>. Also in esoteric poetry or prose there is an awareness of the importance that language has in building our reality, however combined with the conviction that reality cannot be reduced only to linguistic elements. This is why it is so important for today's intellectual debates to include these authors that are in general overlooked because of their 'metaphysical' insight. Maybe here we can find answers to some of the aporias that postmodern thinking creates, without falling into a narrow naturalistic perspective on reality.

### **1.8. The Structure of my Thesis**

In the first chapter, I will look at how contemporary scholars have read Yunus Emre's poetical production. I refer to secondary literature created since the start of the 20th century as contemporary writings. Yunus Emre is unquestionably one of the classic writers of Turkish literature, and the current approach to classics involves a special method of text reading. The primary concern of contemporary scholarship has been characterized by the scholars' attention to the reliability of sources, context, and reception. Additionally, contemporary researchers have a propensity to read the classics from certain pre-textual positions, leading to a wide range of potential readings and interpretations. The same can be said of Yunus Emre's poetry.

I will separate Yunus Emre's secondary literature into three primary categories: non-

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<sup>51</sup> Lawrence, B.B. (2021). *Islamicate Cosmopolitan Spirit* (Vol. 20). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

<sup>52</sup> I refer here to all those authors, especially those influenced by the so-called French theory of Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari among others, who recognize the importance of language in shaping our identities.

Turkish international scholarship, Turkish international scholarship, and Turkish local scholarship in order to respond to the preceding issues in a methodical manner. I make this distinction because I firmly believe that the audience for which secondary literature is intended is related to the pre-textual encounters with Yunus Emre's works. In other words, I believe that there are some pre-commitments relating to the audience that scholars are writing about when they read and write about Yunus Emre. Scholars who aim to write for an international audience, for instance, will approach their writing differently from those who are primarily interested in Turkish academics.

In the second chapter, I would like to discuss some of the key components that shape Yunus Emre's way of conceiving his islamic engagement with the revelation and which are evident in his Divan. Despite the fact that we know very little about Yunus Emre's life, we are certain that he was a *dervish* who adhered to the *bâtinî* path of Islam. I'm going to look into how closely Yunus Emre's Divan relates to his spiritual journey. I will try to understand his conception of life by reading some of his poems and his ideas about poetry.

I believe there is a direct link between Yunus Emre's self-discovery and his artistic output. In a way that we might refer to as the ensemble of these two levels of the grammar of the self, life and poetry are connected. I refer to a method of understanding one's own experiences by extrapolating them to another plane, which for Yunus Emre is the poetical aspect of language. I refer to it as grammar because it adheres to certain conventions set forth by the prosody and rhythm of the poems. Poetry's rhythmic language creates a liminal force called a *barzakh*.

In the third chapter, I will analyze some of the poems in the Divan, trying to demonstrate their philosophical intensity. I will take as a starting point some theories of the philosophy of poetry, inspired by Giorgio Agamben's reflection on language, to highlight how one of the possible readings of Yunus Emre's poetics could also be the encounter with language *per se*.

However, I will continue to connect Yunus Emre with the context of the prophetic culture to which he belongs. I will relate some of his poems to the melâmiyye

movement, with which he certainly shares the need to break with the formalisms of religious exotericism. Finally, I will try to show that Yunus Emre relates to the prophetic language that begins with the experience of the prophet Adam. Prophetic speech, which the Qur'an evokes as estranged and exiled.

In the last chapter, I tried to create a connection between contemporary Italian authors who accompanied the writing of this work with a cross-reading of Yunus Emre and Dante Alighieri. This is why I used the term *Italianate*. Above all, I made use of Federico Campagna's work to create a methodological-conceptual horizon capable of connecting these two poets within what this Italian philosopher calls prophetic culture.

Through the interpollination of the two poetic universes, I arrived at the conclusion of a conception of language that has an emancipatory value with respect to contemporary metaphysics. Both poets place their reflection on language in an ontological dimension that presupposes the existence of multiple levels of the real. This conception could create other ways of building worlds that contrast with the tendency of modernity to confine all forms of knowledge to a linear, non-contradictory and absolute rationality.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **MAPPING SECONDARY LITERATURE ON YUNUS EMRE**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

In this chapter, I will explore how scholars in modern works have read Yunus Emre's poetical production. By modern works, I mean secondary literature produced since the beginning of the twentieth century. The modern approach to classics - where Yunus Emre's oeuvre is incontestably one of the classics of Turkish literature - consists of a particular way of reading texts. Scholarly attention to the authenticity of sources, context and reception characterizes the main concern of modern scholarship.

Moreover, modern scholars have tended to read the classics with specific pre-textual perspectives, which have produced a vast range of possible readings and interpretations. This is also the case with Yunus Emre's poetry. For example, Yunus Emre was 'essentially' a Turkish poet for some scholars, a humanist poet for others, and an Islamic poet for some, as opposed to someone else that included him among the antinomian poets. What are the main pre-textual engagements with Yunus Emre's Divan by modern scholars and what are the consequences of the way they talk about Islam in relation to Yunus Emre's Divan?

In order to answer the previous questions in a systematic way, I will distinguish three main categories for secondary literature on Yunus Emre: non-Turkish international scholarship, Turkish international scholarship and Turkish local scholarship. I am using this distinction because I am convinced that pre-textual engagements with Yunus Emre's works are connected with the audience whom secondary literature addresses.

In other words, I think that there are some pre-commitments in reading and writing

on Yunus Emre related to the target group to whom scholars address their works. For example, the writing of scholars who want to reach an international audience will use a different approach to scholars focused on Turkish academicians. The discourse production about Yunus Emre has often changed in relation to the space where it has circulated, and this element should be considered as an important way of classifying secondary literature on him.

For non-Turkish international scholarship, I mean international scholars, recognized in the field of Islamic studies, Sufi Studies or Turkish studies, who wrote on or translated the works of Yunus Emre into European languages. After gaining academic training in Turkish, these scholars wrote their works for an international public of scholars and students of these fields. Among them, I will take into account the works of E.G.W. Gibb, Paul Ballanfath, Annemarie Schimmel and Anna Masala. For Turkish international scholarship, I consider the works produced by Turkish scholars, written in English or translated into English, which have enjoyed an international reception. Among these scholars, I will consider Fuat Köprülü, Sait Talal Halman and Zekeriya Başkal. Finally, the third category refers to the local works written in Turkish but not yet translated into any European language, which circulate within Turkish academia and rarely appear in international scholarship. In limited cases, Turkish international scholars also refer to translated passages of the local Turkish scholarship; however, a significant number of Turkish works and articles are still completely unknown in international networks. My contribution will be to try to give voice to some relevant Turkish scholars such as Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı and Mustafa Tatçı, both of whom have unfortunately still been largely neglected in the international scholarship on Yunus Emre.

By way of introduction, I would also like to summarize the general difficulties present in each category: international, Turkish international and Turkish local scholarship on Yunus Emre. With regard to the first category, one of the main problems resides in the limited interest that international scholars show in Yunus Emre, especially compared to the focus on Arabic or Persian Sufi textual production. In European or North American universities, philological training in Turkish language has less popularity than Arabic or Persian training. For this reason, non-

Turkish scholars have fewer opportunities to access directly the texts of Turkish Sufism, as compared to Arabic or Persian Sufism.

In international scholarship, İbnü'l-Arabî and Celâleddîn-i Rûmî still attract greater attention than Yunus Emre, who has remained in their shadows. Within the Turkish international scholarship, we lack a contemporary Turkish scholar who is specialized in Yunus Emre studies and who has standing in international academia. For example, the distinguished professor Ahmet Karamustafa, who has acquired an important role in the field of Sufi studies, wrote only a brief article on Yunus Emre in Turkish and it has not yet been translated into English. Fuat Mehmet Köprülü and Sait Talal Halman (probably the two best known names among Turkish international scholarship on Yunus Emre) wrote significant works on Yunus Emre, but under ideological paradigms (which we will analyze later) that are remote from the contemporary approach to the Sufi mode of being Islamic. Zakarya Başkal's work with the title Yunus Emre, a poet in Love is the most important contribution to recent international Turkish scholarship. However, it is the work of an emerging scholar, originally written in the form of a PhD dissertation.

When looking at local Turkish scholarship, the number of Turkish authors as well as works produced in Turkish and not translated into English increases exponentially. Here, the main problem lies in the lack of critical editions of Yunus Emre's work. Only in the late nineteen-eighties did Mustafa Tatçı, the most prominent contemporary scholar on Yunus Emre, publish a philologically accurate version of Yunus Emre's Divan. Some of the previous works are based on inauthentic sources. Also, they are not strictly engaged with Yunus Emre but with other textual productions similar to his works.

### **International Non-Turkish Works**

#### **2.2. Gibb: Poetry in the Ottoman Empire**

E.J.W. Gibb, one of the earliest English-speaking Orientalists, specifically of Scottish descent, devoted great intellectual effort to the understanding and translation of poetry in the Turkish language. His monumental work on 'Ottoman' poetry written in 6 volumes and published in 1900 certainly remains a work of extreme interest to those who want to study the main interpretive paradigms of early 20th

century British Orientalism .

I have bracketed the word 'Ottoman' as a term loaded with important ideological-political values that should not be underestimated. If we consider that Gibb's work was published before the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Turkish republic, I think it is understandable that the title of his monumental work had 'Ottoman poetry' as its key word. On the other hand, however, if we consider that Gibb includes in his second book poets who precede the formation and subsequent conquest of the Anatolian peninsula by the ottomans, the title of the book remains somehow not completely justifiable from a historical point of view.

Gibb's own preface to his work gives us some avenues for understanding the question of interpretive paradigms in early twentieth-century British Orientalism. Here, in fact, some of the problems that unmask the limited ability to place the works of the authors treated in a historical and cultural context considered to be completely other than their own are immediately highlighted. For example, one of the particular signs of this lack of openness to diversity can be seen in the term 'Mohammedan literature' that appears on page 8 of the preface<sup>53</sup>.

I think this conceptualization can help us understand how for Gibb the approach to poetry in the Turkish or ottoman Turkish language remains somewhat imprecise and mirrors what might be considered the concept of Christian literature. In any case, if these are limitations related to the historical moment in which Gibb lived and which have already been pointed out by various scholars including notably Edward Said<sup>54</sup>, it can be observed instead that, despite this lack of accuracy in this work, there are interesting insights to be taken into consideration even for a more historicized approach to these texts.

Also in the preface we learn about the sources Gibb uses for his study, many of which are of ottoman origin, and which are specifically the *tezkiresh*<sup>55</sup>. These are a

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<sup>53</sup> Gibb, E. J. W. (1902). *A History of Ottoman Poetry*. London: Luzac.

<sup>54</sup> Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Book.

<sup>55</sup> from <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/tezkire--tabakat> we can read that Tezkire (plural tezâkir), which derives from the root dhikr in the dictionary meaning 'to remember, to remember', means 'that

kind of memorial summaries where the lives and works of the most important poets in the canon are recalled, the word 'tezkire' being derived from the Arabic word 'zikir' which literally means to remember. As for European sources, however, he mentions only the Orientalist Baron Von Hammer-Purgstall<sup>56</sup>, who during the 19th century was in Istanbul as an ambassador and who translated Turkish, Arabic, and Persian texts into German and English.

In the first chapter of the second volume devoted to the early period of ottoman poetry, Gibb analyzes what he refers to as the early mystic poets. In this section he translates and interprets some poems by Celâleddîn-i Rûmî, Sultan Veled, Yunus Emre and Âşik Paşa. Here, he judges Yunus Emre's language as obsolete both semantically and formally, though he does not believe that Yunus Emre could have been an illiterate person as some legends would have it.

In any case we find a clear distinction between what is called learned poetry, which according to Gibb respects the metrical structures of Persian poetry, and uncultivated poetic forms. Yunus Emre, who in any case is credited with originality in the sense of having no predecessors, would be part of this second current of uncultivated poetry<sup>57</sup>.

Regarding the contents of Yunus Emre's poetry, Gibb says that they coincide with those of Celâleddîn-i Rûmî and have as their ultimate horizon that of the doctrine of unity. The term he uses to refer to this doctrine, which in esoteric vocabulary is called *vahdet-el-vucud al wujud*, is called pantheism.

As Nasr rightly argues the use of a category taken from the history of Western philosophy such as pantheism, which also has an often negative value in much Christian theology, is not an appropriate term to refer to one of the pillars of the esoteric currents of Islam . Gibb argues that Yunus Emre expresses this doctrine more explicitly than many of the poets who would follow him.

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which is conducive to remembering'. As a term, it refers to a biographical-anthological work written in ancient times. Works on the biographies of scholars and poets trained in various branches of science emerged under the name of 'tabakât' in Arabic scholarly circles (my English translation)

<sup>56</sup> von Hammer-Purgstall, J. F. (1836). *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches* (Vol. 4). CA Hartleben, see also <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/hammer-purgstall>

<sup>57</sup> Gibb, E. J. W. (1902). *A History of Ottoman Poetry*. London: Luzac.p. 167-169

I was particularly struck by Gibb's analysis of the conception of language in Yunus Emre's poetry. First, he highlights how the poetic voice is identified in the space of the ghazal not only with the voice of different characters but sometimes also with inanimate objects. Second, in a note to a translation of a poem, Gibb recognizes in Yunus Emre's poem a reference to the voice of the invisible (lisan al ghayb). This is something I will consider in chapter three of my thesis when I relate Yunus Emre to the word coming from the inspiration of the ineffable Absolute (hakk) .

In conclusion, I would like to address the poetic value of Gibb's English translations of some of Yunus Emre's poems. His is definitely not a literal translation but one that tries to recreate in the canon of English poetry, under a certain metrical and stylistic rigor, the main ideas of the original poem. Gibb's ideas have profoundly influenced the way Turkish authors themselves, such as for example Fuat Köprülü or Talat Sait Halman, have read and in Halman's case translated Yunus Emre's poetry.

Regarding the former, the interpretive paradigms used, as we shall see later, are similar to Gibb's. Concepts such as pantheism or monism are also adopted by Köprülü, who as we shall see paraphrases entire parts of his work. In the case of Talat Sait Halman, on the other hand, it is very interesting to note how not only the interpretive apparatus, but even the style of English in his translation is inspired by Gibb's work.

### **2.3. Annemarie Schimmel**

Annemarie Schimmel occupied a very important place in European and American Orientalism of the second half of the twentieth century. German-born, she certainly impacted the discipline of Islamic studies and Sufism in general through a philological and academic rigor that had important repercussions in many universities around the world. Her book *The Mystical Dimensions of Islam*<sup>58</sup> has

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<sup>58</sup> Schimmel, A. (1975). *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

become a classic in Sufi studies, and her works have been translated into many languages.

Schimmel has accompanied her historical and philological studies regarding Islamic esotericism with travel and with field contacts engaging contemporary exponents of these currents. Her investigation was not limited to a bookish knowledge of Sufism but also to close proximity with people and practices pertaining to the tradition. She frequently visited Anatolia for this type of investigation and came into contact with important names in the Sufi culture of republican Turkey such as the writer Samiha Ayverdi<sup>59</sup>.

Among her works we can also find texts especially dedicated to Yunus Emre and Turkish language Sufism, along with her analysis of the main figures of Arabic or Persian language Sufism<sup>60</sup>. Regarding her interest in Yunus Emre, Schimmel has always found in his poetry a kind of lyrical expression of Anatolian landscapes. Schimmel identifies the Divan's geographical imagery as a characteristic element of his vernacular poetry.

Schimmel points out how the difference between high-cultural poetry and vernacular poetry depends on the particular use of imagery. The imaginary—or the imaginative exploration—of the vernacular Sufi poetry was used in a less crystalized way than the high cultural poetry, with the frequent use of similes taken from daily life and close landscapes. To Schimmel, this aspect confers a special vitality to the vernacular poetry; its tone directs criticism to the Islamic values of the social urban elites, usually based on the legalistic mode of being Islamic<sup>61</sup>.

This is why Schimmel considers vernacular poetry to be an anti-intellectualist force. Ahmed contests this position, claiming that the vernaculars were indispensable for the circulation of the idea of the high cultural Sufism, producing an intellectual

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<sup>59</sup> See [https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/ayverdi-samiha-COM\\_27650](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/ayverdi-samiha-COM_27650) or <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/ayverdi-samiha>

<sup>60</sup> Schimmel, A. (1989) *Wanderungen mit Yunus Emre*. Köln: Önel-Verlag and Schimmel, A. (1999) *Yunus Emre ile Yollarda*. çev. Senail Özkan. İstanbul: Ötüken Yayınları,

<sup>61</sup> Schimmel, A. (1982). *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam. Lectures on the History of Religions, 1012*. New York: Columbia University Press., p.142.

discourse accessible to the less educated people. Their languages and registers were different from the high cultural products, and they were meant for other ways of fruition<sup>62</sup>. For example, the vast poetical repertoire of the vernacular poet used to be included in the ceremony of Sama, a ritualistic concert. It is unlikely that Yunus Emre wrote poetry to be interpreted through the process of reading, but rather to be listened to with musical accompaniment.

Another major innovation in Schimmel's work compared to an earlier type of Orientalism lies in the intimate connection she finds between Sufi literature and Islam. For example, regarding the poetry of Yunus Emre, she highlights the importance that the figure of the prophet Muhammed occupies in his Divan. The prophet Muhammed assumes the role of a central figure to be imitated in one's spiritual journey. This kind of model influences the very poetic production of Yunus Emre, who as we shall see considers the poetic word not very different from the revealed word of the Qur'an.

Schimmel, in particular, examines the theme of *Shatahat*<sup>63</sup>. This technical term, which comes from Arabic and could be translated as overflowing, refers to the words of ecstasy of some Sufi poets who were criticized and mistreated by the cultural elites of a more legalistic Islam. Mansûr el-Hallâc, a ninth-century Arabic-language poet, uttered the most important of these words of ecstasy in writing *أنا الحق*.<sup>64</sup> Yunus Emre refers to these words several times, and thanks to Schimmel much attention from an academic perspective has been paid to this theme<sup>65</sup>.

This German Orientalist also refers to the theme of love in Yunus Emre, which she links to the theme of self-knowledge. Schimmel recognizes the centrality in Yunus Emre's poetry of the theme of self-knowledge as a lack of something. This lack is

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<sup>62</sup> Ahmed, S. (2016). *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press., p.86

<sup>63</sup> Schimmel, A. (1975). *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press., p. 145, see also <https://www.britannica.com/topic/shath>

<sup>64</sup> A. Schimmel, 'ANA'L-HAQQ,' *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I/9, pp. 1001-1002, available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/anal-haqq-i-am-the-truth-the-most-famous-of-the-sufi-sathiyat-ecstatic-utterances-or-paradoxes> (accessed on 30 December 2012).

<sup>65</sup> Ernst, C. W. (1985). *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*. New York: SUNY Press. and Uslu, Z. O. (2019). The Şaṭhiyye of Yūnus Emre and Kaygūsuz Abdāl: The Creation of a Vernacular Islamic Tradition in Turkish. *Turcica*, 50, Istanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Fen – Edebiyat Fakültesi 9-52.

described as love, love for that which makes human beings aware of their existential poverty. Schimmel finds this theme essential not only in the writings of Yunus Emre, but also in those of Celâleddîn-i Rûmî and İbnü'l-Arabî<sup>66</sup>.

To conclude this brief analysis on Schimmel's contribution to the study of Yunus Emre's work, one could say that the German orientalist has opened the academic world to another kind of investigation both more historically and philologically rigorous but also more sympathetic to her object of study with travel and field investigations.

She has succeeded in getting academia to discover not only the historical importance of Sufism but also its influence in Muslim-majority societies in the contemporary world. From her books and from the experiences of leading scholars who have been influenced by her work, especially Carl Ernst<sup>67</sup>, one feels a love for these figures and texts in the tradition of Sufism that challenge a type of cultural hegemony. Schimmel gives a cultural value to Islamic esotericism no more and no less than any other world cultural phenomenon, without any sense of superiority to it.

#### **2.4. Paul Ballanfat**

Paul Ballanfat is a French scholar who has written several books and articles on Islam in general and on Arabic, Persian and Turkish-speaking authors and currents of Islamic esotericism<sup>68</sup>. In recent years he holds the position of professor of philosophy of Islam at Galatassaray University in Istanbul and has devoted his latest works to Turkish-language esoteric currents. His latest publications concern the melâmiyye in Anatolia and very recently he has published two monographs on Yunus Emre<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> Schimmel, A. (1989) *Wanderungen mit Yunus Emre*. Köln: Önel-Verlag,

<sup>67</sup> Ernst, C. W. (2017). *Sufism: An Introduction to the Mystical Tradition of Islam*. Boulder: Shambhala Publications.

<sup>68</sup> Ballanfat, P. (2005). *The Nightingale in the Garden of Love: The Poems of Üftade*. Oxford: Anqa Publishing, Ballanfat, P. (1998). Quatre Traités Inédits de Rûzbehân Baqlî Shîrâzî. *Bibliothèque Iranienne*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (51), 7-218.

<sup>69</sup> Ballanfat, P. (2013). *Unité et spiritualité: le Courant Melâmî-Hamzevî dans l'Empire Ottoman*. Paris: Editions l'Harmattan., Ballanfat, P. (2020). *Poésie en Ruines: la Pensée et la Poétique de*

The first one which is titled Yûnus Emre, *L'Amour de la Poésie – Les poèmes spirituels de Yûnus Emre*, is a translation of Yunus Emre's Divan poems into French and the other one, also published for Harmattan, is a monograph on its main themes. What Ballanfat finds in the Divan is a thought that I would define as anarcho-mystical because it attempts to demolish, through poetry, any kind of religious, political or communal institution. For this French scholar Yunus Emre would ultimately be a contesting spirit that seeks to dismantle all kinds of systems of domination.

Through the conception of the poetic word, according to Ballanfat, Yunus Emre succeeds in enacting the koranic spirit, which, in his view, is not a mere hermeneutic of the text but a reactivation of its revolutionary and debunking character. The poetic word, contrary to the word of the jurists, is the true heiress of the Qur'an. Because, instead of freezing the meaning through an exegesis aimed at creating public order, the poetic word shows the separation that is inevitable between the spirit and the word.

The central figure in this operation is the lover-poet. Ballanfat refers like Ahmed to Hâfiz-ı Şirâzî's poem but strangely does not mention the *aşk mezhebi*. Also according to Ballanfat there is a rhetoric of love in Yunus Emre that is meant to expose the hypocrisy of a certain Sufism based on the appearance and moral rigor of the master figure. The poet-lover tries not to show himself as someone who deserves respect, but on the contrary as someone eccentric who wants to get rid of all personal character.

Love is the openness to the spirit. This insurgence makes one foreign, the word used by Yunus Emre is *garip*, as we will analyze later. Ballanfat summarizes this experience by saying that 'the spirit is both inscribed and foreign to that in which it is

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*Yûnus Emre*. Paris: Editions l'Harmattan., Ballanfat, P. (2020). *L'amour de la Poésie: Les Poèmes Spirituels de Yûnus Emre (1240-1320)*. Paris: Editions l'Harmattan.

inscribed, so it is the unrecognizable. It is the emergence of the foreigner from a foreign origin that exiles<sup>70</sup>.

One of the aspects that Ballanfat emphasizes is the dialectic between *şeriat* and *hakikat* which he interestingly translates as a meaning. He cites poem 29 which I will also analyze later where Yunus Emre speaks of the metaphor of the ship and the sea to refer to the relationship between *şeriat* and *hakikat*.

The interpretation Ballanfat offers is very interesting: according to him, the aspect that makes the legalist approach precarious in Yunus Emre's eyes is its saturation. Saturation because it wants to solve all kinds of problems through its technicality, but which is instead stripped in the clash with the deep sense of truth. In other words, Yunus Emre in his metaphor between ship and sea wants to show that any kind of human construction is nevertheless limited and at the mercy of something that always escapes it and exceeds it. His is a kind of reading that is not far from what I will give in chapter three.

Ballanfat, similar to Sells though in other terms, recognizes the performative dimension in Yunus Emre's conception of the poetic word. He argues that 'the poetic word is that poetization of phenomena which is not satisfied with expressing one thing through another, but rather with passing one thing into another<sup>71</sup>.' In this way the poetic word creates a world that seems to be a continuous relationship between the *bâtin* and *zâhir* aspects. Here again the word *barzakh*, which Ballanfat strangely does not use, might help us understand this situation of ambivalence and contradiction.

In substance, the poetic word is a veil that conceals and at the same time shows something that cannot be visible. Ballanfat recognizes *tekerleme* as a linguistic strategy that Yunus Emre uses to talk about language as a kind of veil that covers the ineffable. *Tekerleme* in Turkish properly means to go round and round, to return, to

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<sup>70</sup> Ballanfat, P. (2020). *Poésie en Ruines: la Pensée et la Poétique de Yûnus Emre*. Paris: Editions l'Harmattan. (my translation p.120)

<sup>71</sup> Ballanfat, P. (2020). *Poésie en Ruines: la Pensée et la Poétique de Yûnus Emre*. Paris: Editions l'Harmattan., (my translation p.269)

repeat and is used in the sense of tongue twister. It is tongue twister that lacks a specific semantic sense yet spins words rhythmically to create a kind of incantation. Annemarie Schimmel<sup>72</sup> also dwells on this cultural dimension of Yunus Emre's poetry and this use of wordplay is also similar to what Keshavarz<sup>73</sup> refers to as playfulness in Rûmî's poetry.

Regarding Yunus Emre's irony, according to the French orientalist, we are dealing with a cruel kind of irony, an irony that wants to combat all forms of dogmatism through a poetic form that unmasks what Ballanfat calls the theological-political system. By this term he means the metaphysical system based on an idea of the one as a supreme being that can be achieved through the perfecting of human virtues. In his view this is nothing more than a form of vulgar neoplatonism, which Yunus Emre's poetry radically challenges.

From this point Yunus Emre becomes an interlocutor with Wittgenstein. In fact, Ballanfat uses Yunus Emre to criticize the famous phrase that says 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence'<sup>74</sup>. According to Ballanfat, this phrase presupposes some important aspects that Yunus Emre disputes. First, that language is a vehicle for knowing things, and second, that the opposite of speaking is keeping silent. According to the French scholar, these are ideas that Yunus Emre's poetry rejects and lead to the conception of a negative theology foreign to the Turkish poet.

Interestingly, Ballanfat himself in his book challenges this duality of language based on the principle of contradiction by inserting within some word pairs the colon sign, as for example in the terms poet: lover. A stratagem also to be traced back to Derrida<sup>75</sup> who used the misspelling of the french word *differance* or Levinas<sup>76</sup> for the term *essance*. Ballanfat challenges in this way any kind of binary categorization. Locuteur-auditor, speaker-writer or body-roller are other pairs of terms that are put in

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<sup>72</sup> Schimmel, A. (1982). *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam. Lectures on the History of Religions, 1012*. New York: Columbia University Press., p.142

<sup>73</sup> Keshavarz, F. (1998). *Reading Mystical Lyric: The Case of Jalal al-Din Rumi*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press., p.118

<sup>74</sup> Wittgenstein, L. (2002). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London & New York: Routledge.

<sup>75</sup> Derrida, J. (2001). *Writing and Difference*. London & New York: Routledge.

<sup>76</sup> Levinas, E. (2012). *Autrement Qu'etre, ou, Au-dela de l'Essence (Vol. 54)*. Berlin: Springer Science & Business Media.

direct relationship through the colon. In a sense it is as if he listens to Yunus Emre's invitation to reject the duality of language and enacts it in his own work.

All this has not only philosophical but also poetic value. Ballanfat's text on Yunus Emre and his translation of the Divan are surely works that will remain influential in the history of French Orientalism. Of course, this poetic dimension of Ballanfat's writing, even in his prose, often makes his writing not very accessible. Reading his French is like entering a stream of consciousness that overwhelms the reader through philosophical terms, poetic prose and a huge variety of references.

In his long paragraphs Ballanfat includes quotations from the Qur'an, contemporary Turkish poets, classics of ancient, medieval and modern philosophy, cited from languages ranging from Arabic to Latin or modern European languages. His is an overwhelming experience of love for various cultural networks more or less known.

On the other hand, all this overflow of culture cannot always be traced through a precise set of notes, and his reading of Yunus Emre's thought remains very personal without a true comparison to other scholarly works on the author. Sometimes one cannot tell whether the speaker is the 13th-century Turkish poet or the 21st-century academic philosopher. But perhaps this too is a result of the effect of Yunus Emre's poetry taking shape in Ballanfat's poetic:academic words. All this has not only philosophical but also poetic value.

## **2.5. Anna Masala**

I could not conclude this part devoted to non-Turkish-speaking scholars who have studied or translated Yunus Emre's work without mentioning Anna Masala, the leading Italian-speaking turcologist. Being Italian, her translation and research work on Yunus Emre's poetry has a relevant place in my studies on the Turkish poet. Masala, through her academic work at Rome's Sapienza University, has contributed to the importance of Turkish culture in Italian academia. Similarly to Annemarie Schimmel, though with a decidedly less international profile, Masala's research transcended a mere academic interest and became an integral part of her biography.

Her love of the Turkish language even led her to write a book entitled *Love Letters to Turkey*<sup>77</sup>, written in Turkish.

Finding Masala's publications is not so easy, as they are works mostly written in Italian and, in most cases, published by Italian university publishing houses with a small print run. UNESCO, thanks mainly to pressure from some Turkish intellectuals, including Talat Sait Halman, consecrated the year 1991 to Yunus Emre. On that occasion, the Turkish Ministry of Culture promoted many publications on Yunus Emre in various languages and also published Masala's translations of Yunus Emre's Italian poems along with a short introduction that the Italian orientalist wrote to celebrate the year of Yunus Emre<sup>78</sup>.

Probably due to institutional circumstances, in the introduction of this text published by the Turkish Ministry of Culture, Masala emphasized the national character of Yunus Emre's poetry by calling him the Dante of the Turks. Alongside this national characterization, Masala also emphasized the spirit of tolerance found in Yunus Emre's poetry, calling him a brother of humankind.

Regarding Yunus Emre's poetry, Masala identifies two main trends: one didactic and one lyrical. What she finds exceptional in *Divan* is the combination of motifs from Arabic-Persian-influenced learned poetry, mystical poetry and popular literature. According to Masala, Yunus Emre manages to combine these three elements in an absolutely exceptional way and achieves a result that in some ways takes on a tone close to European romantic poetry.

Masala, in a manner similar to Annemarie Schimmel, does not detach Yunus Emre's poetry from Islam. She also notes, for example, the centrality that the Prophet Muhammed holds in *Divan*. At the same time, she understands that Yunus Emre's poetry is addressed to people on the esoteric path, whom she calls initiates. In any case, Masala reads in the Anatolian poet's verses an expression of faith in God and in the human being.

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<sup>77</sup> Masala, A. (2002). *Türkiye'ye Aşk Mektuplarım*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı.

<sup>78</sup> Masala, A. (1991). *Yunus Emre*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı.

In addition to the book published in 1991 by the Turkish Ministry of Culture, I also managed to find a volume with the translation of Yunus Emre's poems into Italian published by Masala with the Sapienza editions of Rome<sup>79</sup>. In the *Quaderni di Turcologia* published in 1978, Masala published her translations of some of Yunus Emre's poems with the Turkish text on the front. The book is dedicated to the Turkish people and the works from which she drew these poems, which predate the 1991 Tatçı edition, come from Burhan Toprak, Abdalbaki Golpınarlı and Sabahattin Eyuboglu.

Aside from the literary value of this work it should also be acknowledged to have a divulgative and pedagogical value. For example, Masala divided her translation of Yunus Emre's poems into seven sections, giving each of them a title. In order: this world is fallacious, mystical love, true science, mystical asceticism, mystical state, divine glory and, lastly, union. In this way, the Italian reader is taken on a journey through Yunus Emre's literary production, passing through the basic contents of Yunus Emre's poetry, finally ending with mystical union.

Masala uses an everyday and contemporary language to translate Yunus Emre's Turkish into Italian. It seems that the Italian orientalist has chosen to make Yunus Emre's poetry as accessible as possible to any kind of reader. Although she also pays attention to the prosodic aspects of Italian metrics, Masala definitely prefers to convey the meaning of the poem instead of its formal aspects. She thus succeeds in conveying the contents of the Turkish poet's form of life and thought to the Italian reader.

In conclusion, we can say that Masala plays a key role in bridging Turkish and Italian cultures. Her work on Yunus Emre succeeds perfectly in achieving this goal. One of the most interesting things that shows Masala's humility and love for Yunus Emre is a sentence in which she says: 'many in Europe can read and translate Yunus

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<sup>79</sup> Masala, A. (1978). *Yunus Emre*. Università degli Studi di Roma, Roma: Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia-Lingua e Letteratura Turca.

Emre better than I can; few, I believe, have been able to search and love him more than I<sup>80</sup>.

With this profound and explicit declaration of love, Masala offers Italian readers the fruit of her love. What remains unfortunate is the fact that Masala did not use the Divan edition published by Tatçı<sup>81</sup>. For this reason, many of the poems in Italian do not correspond with those in the Divan edition that has been used as a reference in recent years by leading Turkish and international scholars, and is used in this dissertation.

## **Turkish International Secondary Literature on Yunus Emre**

### **2.6. Mehmet Fuat Köprülü**

The spread of European and North American Orientalism at the beginning of the nineteenth century profoundly influenced Mehmet Fuat Köprülü's general conception of the esoteric movement in Anatolia. In some passages of his work, *İlk Mutassavvuflar Türk Edebiyatında*<sup>82</sup>, Köprülü even paraphrased parts of Gibb's *A history of ottoman Poetry* in Turkish.<sup>83</sup> For instance, Köprülü borrowed the idea from Gibb that Neoplatonism profoundly influenced esoteric Islam.

On one hand, if we cannot exclude the impact of Neoplatonic philosophy in the western part of the B-to-B complex, on the other hand the relation between Neoplatonism and Sufism fomented a common orientalist prejudice. In fact, by attributing the 'essence' of sufism to neoplatonic philosophy, many Orientalists locate Sufi practices and texts outside the 'core' of Islam.

As we saw in the first chapter, Ahmed and Saif, under a post colonial paradigm of interpretation, contest this perspective. Even Hodgson proposes considering these

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<sup>80</sup> Masala, A. (1991). *Yunus Emre*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı. (my translation ) p.7

<sup>81</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı.

<sup>82</sup> Koprulu, M. F. (2006). *Early Mystics in Turkish Literature*. London & New York: Routledge.

<sup>83</sup> Koprulu, M. F. (2006). *Early Mystics in Turkish Literature*. London & New York: Routledge., p. 309. In some passages of the English translation of Koprulu's work the editor even decided to take the original passages from Gibb and not translate his paraphrases.

aspects part of the cultural umbrella of Islamicate, and not Islamic. On the contrary, Ahmed contests this idea and demonstrates that the plurality of sources is innate to the nature of Islamic revelation, in order to negate the idea of a core of Islam<sup>84</sup>.

Köprülü's perspective, as most of the scholars of his time, does not totally consider the complexity of Sufism in its historical development. He tends to give a monolithic picture of Sufism, which takes İbnü'l-Arabî and Celâleddîn-i Rûmî as the unique representative figures of this high cultural movement without taking into consideration other practices. For Köprülü, these figures exemplify an Islam open to external influences, in contrast to the Legalistic mode of being Islamic which is more orthodox and is the real 'essence' of Islam. Here we can see the typical orientalist dichotomy between the Sufi mode of being Islamic (unorthodox and less Islamic) and the Legalistic mode of being Islamic (orthodox and essentially Islamic). In addition, Köprülü interlinks this orientalist bias with a Turkish nationalistic perspective.

Köprülü analyzes Yunus Emre under the nationalistic ideological spectrum of the cultural milieu of Turkey at the beginning of the twentieth century. *Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutasavvıflar* was published in a period of crucial political and cultural changes during the transition from the Ottoman Empire to Republican Turkey. Köprülü aspired to build a national literary canon that could provide a foundation for the new Turkish republicanism.<sup>85</sup> Guided by this aim, Köprülü considers Yunus Emre and Ahmed Yesevi the first geniuses of the Turkish nation. Influenced by the European national movements embedded with Romantic ideals, literature became a way to express the genius of the nation and to create a common ground between people of the same nation. In Köprülü's words:

It was Yunus Emre who combined this foreign philosophical element with the national element, according to the peculiar genius of the Turkish aesthetic, and created a Turkish Sufi literature that accorded with popular taste and, aesthetically speaking, was completely different from that of Persian Sufi works. The role of Yunus Emre in the birth of this distinctive literature, which flourished vigorously in the bosom of the nation for centuries

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<sup>84</sup> Ahmed, S. (2016). *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. pp. 117-129

<sup>85</sup> It is interesting that the book was published in Ottoman scripture and Latin scripture, playing a role of transition from the Ottoman culture to the new Republican culture.

and was rooted in it, was to understand with the genius of a national artist the need of the milieu and to combine and synthesize with overwhelming success a number of different elements that the centuries had brought forth. Thus, he was able to epitomize the national taste for centuries.<sup>86</sup>

Köprülü posits Yunus Emre as the father of Turkish mystical literature, who succeeded in differentiating his poetry from the ‘other’ prominent mystical literature: Persian Sufi literature. In this manner, Yunus Emre built a new model for Turkish aesthetic values. Köprülü wrote at a moment when the Turkish national canon needed to be separated from external sources. The especially crucial element was creating a distance from the previous ottoman identity, where high culture had been profoundly permeated by Arabic and Persian, thereby marginalizing the Turkish elements.

For this reason, Köprülü devised a Turkish cultural utopia in the Seljuks of Anatolia, where Turkish vernacular cultures developed in an original way. Although he recognizes that the Seljuk court was profoundly under the influence of Persian culture, he contends that they did not impose this high culture upon the masses. Consequently, the genuine Turkish culture of the masses could develop its original spiritual and aesthetic values during their reign, perfectly embodied in Yunus Emre’s poetry. We can see that in Köprülü’s reading of Yunus Emre, the focus is on connecting the national genius of Yunus Emre with his ‘Islamic’ peculiarity.

Köprülü also claims a heroic spirit for Turkish Islam. Unlike Arabic and Persian Islam, which was connected to spiritual and cultural centers like mosques or *tekke* in urban areas, the Turks used to be fighters engaged in the holy war (i.e.) against Christians. Köprülü connected the figure of the Sufi saint in Turkish culture with the *alp*, the warrior hero. During the Crusades and later on, *alp erenler* were mythical figures who combined spiritual realization with warrior activities against the Christians.

Distinct from the decadent Sufi masters living comfortable lives in the urban *tekke*, Köprülü depicted the *alp erenler* as examples of austerity and bravery. Here again,

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<sup>86</sup> Koprulu, M. F. (2006). *Early Mystics in Turkish Literature*. London & New York: Routledge., p.214

the ideological element of nationalism plays an important role in Köprülü's discourse. When Köprülü wrote these passages, the ottoman Empire was close to collapse and the European forces were ready to take advantage of the situation.

Köprülü wished to create an image of Turkish Islam which (in contrast with the passivity of the Arabic and Persian Islam) could provide inspiration for resistance against the contemporary difficulties in which Turks were living in those moments. Köprülü reinvented a genealogy of the Turkish Islam, which starts with the migrations of the Turkic tribes from Central Asia to Anatolia and realizes its perfect form in Yunus Emre's poetry. To Köprülü, the main characteristics of this Islam resides in the individualistic spirit, in contrast with the authoritarian elements of Islam; the focus on the spiritual aspects against the legal dimension, and finally the love of God and nature, as opposed to the fear of punishment.

Using this paradigm of national poetry, Köprülü differentiates national form from external contents. Köprülü claims the originality of Yunus Emre in its poetical form, but not in its contents. To him, Yunus Emre borrowed his main ideas from İbnü'l-Arabî or Celâleddîn-i Rûmî, but without adding crucial elements in terms of contents. On the contrary, Yunus Emre's ingenuity resides in his capability to translate these sophisticated ideas into a fresh Turkish poetical language. Köprülü pays attention to Yunus Emre's major innovation whenever his poetical tone aims unconventionally to transcend the moral values of the legalistic mode of being Islamic.

In contrast, those poems which are in line with the morality of the jurists, deserve less attention. Köprülü wants to demonstrate that Yunus Emre embodies the essence of a different Islam, Turkish Islam, which rearticulates the formalistic doctrines of the legalistic mode of being islamic in a genuine and tolerant Islam. To Köprülü, the dialectic between form and contents produces a double level of moral teachings in Yunus Emre's poetry.

Köprülü underlines Yunus Emre's moral teachings and differentiates between two main levels. In the first case, Köprülü conceives the moral teaching derived from the scriptural sources, Qur'an and *hadith* corpus, common to all Muslim and that express

conformist attitudes. In the second case, Köprülü points out the Sufi moral teaching, elaborated freshly in a Turkish poetical form with the aim of emancipating Muslim from the orthodoxy of the jurist morality and the values of a kind of conventional Sufism. True Sufi morality goes beyond formalism and incorporates more serious duties, which for Köprülü are more refined and humane (*insani*).

This aspect of humanism will be crucial in all the following secondary literature. Different from legalist morality, Sufi moral teachings are influenced by external doctrines of the neoplatonism and its cosmology, which Köprülü defines as pantheisme idealiste (a term borrowed from Gibb<sup>87</sup>). With this term, he refers to the doctrines of the self- disclosure of God (*tecelli*) and the unity of being (*vahdet-al-vucud*) of İbnü'l-Arabî and the poetical versions of this doctrine present in the Persian poetry of Celâleddîn-i Rûmî. Both of these levels of morality are present in Yunus Emre's Divan.

Köprülü stresses the contradictory tone of Yunus Emre's Divan, intermittently conforming with and being polemical towards elements of the legalistic mode of being Islamic. As mentioned previously, Köprülü pays more attention to the polemical aspects, leaving overlooking the elements of Yunus Emre's moral teachings which coincide with the doctrines of the Legalistic mode of being Islamic on the margins.

Among them, Yunus Emre's conception of knowledge takes a central position. Köprülü puts in evidence the criticism that Yunus Emre manifests against the *ahl-i kal*, the people of the traditional koranic school, who remain superficially attached to external and bookish knowledge. Yunus Emre's teachings advocate a different level of knowledge, founded on self-knowledge as the principle of all wisdom.

In conclusion, Köprülü's Early Mystic in Turkish literature merits being called the pioneer scientific work on Turkish literature, one which follows certain parameters of a modern paradigm, but nevertheless reflects the bias of a nationalistic ideological perspective. We have already underlined the critical context in which this work

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<sup>87</sup> Gibb, E. J. W. (1902). *A History of Ottoman Poetry*. London: Luzac.

emerged: the collapse of ottoman culture and the need to create an alternative Turkish canon. Of special interest is its frame: the canon starts with Ahmet Yesevi and Yunus Emre, considered as ‘mystical poets’ who embodied the values of a specific Islam: Turkish Islam.

Köprülü considers Turkish Islam as an emancipatory force present in the past which can be rejuvenated in the present of Turkish history by bringing its values in line with the need of contemporary times. His reading of Yunus Emre’s Divan is within the sphere of modernist interpretation. Köprülü wants to extrapolate a set of values from this work which are useful for his modern times, and in the process does not totally respect the context in which Yunus Emre’s Divan was produced.

The imaginative Turkish cultural utopia during the Seljuk time appears an evident ideological way to look at the past of Turkish history. Moreover, Köprülü depicts the relation between this ideal Turkishness and external sources in a contradictory way. On one hand, Turkish Islam consists of an individualistic and dogma-free approach to Islam which has taken a distance from the high cultural Arabic and Persian Islam and their conformist elements since its origin. On the other hand, the mystical Islam of Yunus Emre derives its metaphysical and cosmological doctrines from İbnü'l-Arabî and Celâleddîn-i Rûmî, who elaborated those doctrines from the neoplatonist philosophy. Influenced by the American Orientalism of the early twentieth century, Köprülü locates the origin of mystical Islam outside it.

In this sense, Turkish Islam finds its essence in the combination of Turkish heroic values with the Neoplatonic tradition, marginalizing the elements of Arabic and Persian culture. While the latter cultures are depicted as force of corruption, neoplatonism plays a role of emancipation of mystical Islam from legalistic arabocentric Islam.

In this way, Köprülü claims the ‘genuine’ Turkishness of Yunus Emre, without paying too much attention to the influences that Arabic and Persian had in Yunus Emre’s language, replete with terms that are coming from those languages. Above all, he seems to forget the importance in Yunus Emre's poetry of the Qur’an. Indeed, the Qur’an is one of the basic interpretive and existential resources not only for

Yunus Emre but for most currents of Islamic esotericism, as I will demonstrate in succeeding chapters.

## 2.7. Talat Sait Halman

Talat Sait Halman holds a distinctive place among–Turkish international scholars who have worked on Yunus Emre. He was an erudite academician who taught in different universities of Turkey and the United States, focusing his interest on world literature. In addition, he was a talented poet who translated verses of different Turkish poets into English, among them several poems from Yunus Emre’s *Divan*. He also translated some of the classics of English literature into Turkish, such as Shakespeare’s sonnets<sup>88</sup>.

Parallel to his academic life, Halman played significant roles in national and international politics. During the seventies, he was for a brief period the first Minister of Culture in Turkey, and a member of UNESCO’s executive board in the nineties.<sup>89</sup> In this position, he succeeded in giving Yunus Emre’s poetry global recognition with UNESCO’s proclamation of the ‘International Yunus Emre Year’ in 1991, celebrating the 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Anatolian poet’s birth. Halman, following the heritage of Köprülü, focuses his attention on the humanist values of Yunus Emre’s teachings - values which give dignity to human existence, humanitarianism and universal brotherhood.

Similarly to Köprülü, Halman identifies Yunus Emre as a Turkish poet rooted in his vernacular culture who was able to express the universal values of humanity. Since the beginning of the Republican era, Turkish intellectuals have been looking for Turkish literary figures who could be placed side by side with the giants of world literature, such as Dante or Shakespeare. In the early years of the Turkish Republic,

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<sup>88</sup> Halman, T. S. (1968). Turkish Humanism and the Poetry of Yunus Emre. *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (10). Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi 231-240., Halman, T. S. (1972). Modern Turkish Literature: Disorientation and Reorientation. *Books Abroad*, 46(2).Oklahoma City: Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma 226-231, Halman, T. S. (1969). Nâzım Hikmet: Lyricist as Iconoclast. *Books Abroad*.Oklahoma City: Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma 43(1), 59-64.

<sup>89</sup> <http://www.turkishculture.org/whoiswho/memorial/talat-sait-halman-1467.htm>

Turkish cultural policies put much efforts in translating the classics of the western literary canon.

This promotion of the translations ran parallel to the creation of the Turkish canon, in which Yunus Emre occupied a prominent position. Halman forms part of the Turkish intelligentsia who believe that the most relevant literary works display the universal concerns of human beings, transcending the cultural boundaries in which they are conceived. To him, Yunus Emre deserves the role of the paradigmatic figure of Turkish literature, being of those one authors who have proposed a universal standpoint on what it means to be an authentic human being through his Turkish vernacular poetry.

Halman defines humanism as the system of beliefs that places human beings at the center of creation. In the humanist perspective, unlike religiously weighted attitudes, the role of human being is prioritized over God, society or nature. This does not mean that humanism refuses the transcendence of God; on the contrary, it recognizes in the human being the possibility to internalize and humanize God. While the general religious approach tends to emphasize the frailty of human existence, especially in relation to the magnificence of God, humanism recognizes the spiritual value of the human existence.

To Halman, the humanist perspective generates joy of life in contrast with the orthodox religious tenets, strictly bounded, as they are, by dogmas, norms and in a radical distinction between God and human being. In contrast with the orthodox interpretations of Abrahamic religions which focus on the inevitable punishment of God, humanism underlines God's compassion and mercy. Moreover, humanism points out the centrality of the individual person, in contrast with the religious focus on institutions. To Halman, these characteristics of humanism are particularly congenial to Turkish people, many of whom embraced Sufi values after their Islamization. In fact, Halman claims that Sufi values share many aspects with the humanist philosophy.

Halman wants to prove the strict connection between humanism and Sufism, considering Sufism the mystical dimension of Islam. He uses the terms mysticism

and Sufism interchangeably. Sufism, or mysticism, is depicted as a tradition which gives dignity to human beings and which promotes the values of peace, anti-sectarianism and understanding among different religions. In this sense, it encourages humanitarianism and universal brotherhood. In the mystic attitude, the quest for God is undertaken in one's own Self, instead of in the externality of dogmas and practices.

The main relation between mysticism and humanism resides in the search for God's essence in the inner sphere of human beings. In short Halman claims that Yunus Emre's teachings reflect a pantheistic doctrine that looks for the Godliness of the human being. Halman identifies Sufism with the doctrine of the unity of existence (*vahdet-al-vucud*), a doctrine which identifies the presence of God in each element of existence. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Celâleddîn-i Rûmî developed this doctrine in Anatolia, where the pre-Islamic values of Turkic humanism contributed a particular angle. Yunus Emre is the paradigmatic model of this combination of pre-Islamic Turkish humanism and Islamic Sufism. He invites human beings to free themselves from the chains of dogmatism and to establish a relation of love with God.

The key word for understanding Halman's reading of Yunus Emre is 'synthesis.' To him, Yunus Emre was able to create an original amalgamation including aspects of Islamic theology and Turkish humanism. To Halman, Yunus Emre's vernacular poetry becomes 'the quintessence of the Turkish Anatolian Islamic humanism'<sup>90</sup>. Promoting the value of freedom of consciousness, Yunus Emre's teachings attack the rigid formulas of orthodox Islam and create a fundamental ethos for love among human beings, nature and God. Among the elements of synthesis, Halman highlights the role of love as the crucial bond in the relation between human being and God.

Yunus Emre, according to Halman, classifies human beings as an extension of God's Love. Love is depicted as the supreme force that transcends the limits of the earthly and bodily existence of humanity. For humans, love consists of a process of purification that can lead to reunification with God. Death is not the only way to

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<sup>90</sup> Halman, T. S. (1968). Turkish Humanism and the Poetry of Yunus Emre. *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (10). Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi 231-240., p. 232

return to the source. Moreover, God has not merely created human beings, but has also wanted to be reflected in them. Human beings are God's mirror. For this reason, mundane beauty can play a crucial role in the process of the spiritual realization by love. For Halman, Yunus Emre conceives of love as the all-embracing force which goes beyond the border of any religion and is contrary to the sectarianism of orthodox readings of Islam.

I am convinced that Halman also interprets Yunus Emre's poetry in a modernist way. By modernist I mean the perspective that searches in the past for the values that are needed in the present time. Instead of being contextualized in its own historical and geographical milieu, Yunus Emre's poetry becomes a source of inspiration to solve the problems of our present or modern world. In this sense, literary and political interests are combined in Halman's works on Yunus Emre. On one hand, Yunus Emre is depicted as the Turkish poet who starts to trace the line of Turkish literary humanism, while on the other hand his teachings are useful for finding solutions to the conflicts to which humanity is exposed in the present days. Regarding the last aspect, Yunus Emre is depicted as an originator of interfaith dialogue and humanitarian values, a poet who stood on the side of the oppressed and who fought against the structures of power. Even if it is incontestable that these elements can be extrapolated from Yunus Emre's Divan, they should still be considered as part of a different ethos and analyzed as such. The Sufi values of the thirteenth century did not always converge with the values of the modern world and for this discrepancy alone they should be analyzed in a more historically conscious manner.

Yet Halman also gives an over-simplistic picture of Sufism, in line with some of the most widespread orientalist bias. Halman proposes a strong dichotomy between orthodoxy and Sufism, the former extremely enclosed in dogmas and the latter open to free thought. As we wrote in the first chapter, recent research has contested this dichotomy, making the relation between the different modes of being Islamic much more complex. In Halman's understanding, Sufism, as other forms of mysticism, consists of a sort of meta-religion that transcends and unifies all the different traditions. In some sense, Halman's position resembles the perennialists or

traditionalists point of view, which believe in a *philosophia perennis* as the source of all the world religions<sup>91</sup>. However, different from perennial philosophy, Halman considers Sufism as a tradition which also promotes modern values, for example, individual freedoms against institutional constraints, or struggle for the emancipation of the oppressed.

The historicity of Halman's reading of Sufism in general and Yunus Emre in particular is at once reductive and simplistic. Sufism does not appear as a complex historical phenomenon, but rather as a unique discourse, that contrasts with orthodox Islam. Celâleddîn-i Rûmî becomes the spokesperson for all Sufis, with Yunus Emre as his Turkish delegate. Halman does not consider the variety of Sufi discourses nor does he explain what he means by orthodox Islam. Just as Köprülü did previously, Halman seems to believe in a sort of Turkish Islam profoundly influenced by Sufi teaching that remains distant from the Arab dogmatic version of Islam.

There is no dispute that the Balkans-to-Bengal complex experienced a great variety of Islamic modes of being, with the articulation of diverse vernacular cultures. However, the distinction between an open-minded Turkish Islam and a dogmatic Arab Islam has no historical basis. On the contrary, it is founded on an ahistorical and national bias. I think that the real contribution of Halman has been to give an international relevance to Yunus Emre's poetry and to transmit some poems from the Divan into a beautiful and poetical English, more so than his analysis of their contents. Halman does not succeed in thinking outside the widespread framework of Western academia of his time. He wants to look to Yunus Emre as the vernacular poet of Anatolia parallel to Dante in Italian culture. In reality, there are important differences between these two contexts. For example, in Yunus Emre's time the high culture used both Arabic and Persian as cosmopolitan languages, while the vernacular of Dante contrasted solely with Latin, the unique language of European high culture as we will see at the end of my work.

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<sup>91</sup> About Perennialism see the works of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Frithjof Schuon and others. For its critique see Sedgwick, M. (2009). *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## 2.8. Zakariya Başkal

Zakariya Başkal's *Yunus Emre, a Sufi poet in Love*<sup>92</sup> is the book written by a Turkish scholar in the last years that is most relevant for an international audience. Published in 2010, this important work is an adaptation of his PhD dissertation at Madison Wisconsin University, which openly rejected Halman's thesis about Yunus Emre's humanism and instead tried to read Yunus Emre's poetry in a specific Islamic mode of being. Another merit of Başkal's work is that it gives voice to Turkish authors not yet translated into English. Some of these works have recently contributed to profoundly changing the field of Yunus Emre's studies.

Among them, Başkal quotes Mustafa Tatçı and his crucial influence in crafting a fresh approach to Yunus Emre's work within a new philological and interpretative frame, which we will try to analyze at the end of this chapter. Moreover, through the methodology of reception theory, Başkal has examined how Yunus Emre's poetry was received in Turkish literature throughout different centuries, showing his influence on the Sufi mode of being Islamic in the ottoman Empire, as for example in the poetry of Niyazi Misri. Başkal's work puts the contemporary approach of literary studies in dialogue with a monographic study on Yunus Emre, creating an interesting mixture of insights and bibliographical sources.

Başkal also attempts to provide an historical perspective on Sufism, in order to collocate Yunus Emre's poetry in its historical and geographical context. He succeeds in giving a more accurate account of Sufism in its historical development, distanced from the Orientalist biases present in the works of Köprülü and Halman. Başkal denounces the ahistorical image of Sufism created by certain Orientalists to promote a kind of soft and moderate Islam, in contrast with what are perceived as dogmatic and radical voices. He makes a genealogical analysis of the word Sufi and connects it directly to the revelation to the prophet Muhammed.

In addition, when he considers Celâleddîn-i Rûmî, indisputably one of the most influential figures of Sufism and contemporary to Yunus Emre, Başkal takes into

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<sup>92</sup> Başkal, Z. (2014). *Yunus Emre: The Sufi Poet in Love*. Istanbul: Işık Yayıncılık Ticaret.

account three different socio-religious movements to understand his works. To him, Rûmî amalgamated the Sunni Islam of the *madrassa*, the school where the legalistic mode of being was transmitted. In fact, Rûmî was working as a teacher of *usûlû'l-fikh*, the legal system derived from the koranic revelation and the *hadith* corpus, and his father was one of the most important scholars of this tradition. Secondly, Rûmî absorbed elements of the intellectual Sufism that had been developed in those years by the Andalusian İbnü'l-Arabî, who visited Anatolia several times. Thirdly, Rûmî's thought expressed elements of the Iranian Islam which Rûmî inherited through the teaching of his master, Shams of Tabriz. From this analysis, we can see how Başkal's perspective on Sufism articulates a complex historical framework, influenced by the work of Hodgson, whom Başkal quotes in some passages.

However, Başkal tends to propose an idea of Sufism that remains in harmony with the Sunni Legalistic mode of being Islamic, marginalizing the antinomian voices that contested the Legalistic approach to Islam, as well as the Shia elements. On one hand, Başkal wants to underline the connection between Sufism and the Sunni Legalistic mode of being Islamic, while on the other hand he aims to integrate Yunus Emre into the canon of the mystical poetry of Sunni Islam. In order to achieve this goal, Başkal tends to give a unilateral perspective on what Islam is, on Sufism and the role of Yunus Emre in its contexts.

I think that Başkal manages to demonstrate the pitfalls of the orientalist perspective on Sufism and Yunus Emre, but he does not consider the plurality of aspects that these complex historical phenomena involve well enough. For example, his theoretical framework remains dependent on categories such as orthodox and unorthodox or religious and non-religious. In this way, Başkal tends to consider religious and orthodox the elements of Islam that are directly connected with the Sunni legalistic mode of being Islamic and marginalizes the rest. Başkal tends to interpret Sufism in harmony with the Sunni legal hermeneutical engagement with the revelation, avoiding considering the Sufi voices which contest this approach. In addition, he takes meticulous measures or refutes the reading of Yunus Emre's works that creates a distance between Yunus Emre and Sunni Legalistic Islam. In other words, Başkal's approach risks giving a Sunni supremacist viewpoint on Islam, Sufism and Yunus Emre's poetry.

Başkal claims it is anachronistic to classify literary products by language. In the thirteenth and fourteenth century, the Anatolian context was not characterized by an ideological use of languages as in our modern time. To Başkal, Yunus Emre's and Rûmî's works should be considered part of the same literary history, and not differentiated by the language in which they are elaborated. Unlike Köprülü or Halman, Başkal criticizes the nationalistic approach to literary history, as he finds the similarity between Yunus Emre and Rûmî in terms of content to be more relevant than the different languages used to express those contents.

I do not agree completely with Başkal's thesis. While it is clear that the use of language in that period was not related to national chauvinism, to write in Persian or Turkish definitely had different consequences. In fact, an author using Arabic or Persian could have a highly cosmopolitan reception of his/her works while the Turkish language had a much more limited audience. For this reason, Rûmî and İbnü'l-Arabî's works spread throughout Islamicate civilization, while Yunus Emre achieved only a local diffusion. Though Anatolia of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was a multilingual landscape, there was a distinction between vernacular and cosmopolitan languages. As we have mentioned before, Persian and Arabic were the cosmopolitan languages in Anatolia, while Turkish remained a vernacular idiom. Vernacular, as mentioned in the introduction, means that it was a language addressed to a local audience, while the works that could be read throughout Islamicate civilization were cosmopolitan. For this reason, I think that the parameters of vernacular and cosmopolitan are crucial elements when classifying literary works.

Başkal proposes a classification of Yunus Emre's poetry following the main themes present in the poems and argues that divine love remains at the center of Yunus Emre's poetry. He claims that most of Yunus Emre's poems are *yekahenk*, poems that can easily be related to a single theme<sup>93</sup>. Among these single themes, Başkal claims that in Yunus Emre's Divan the majority of poems are dedicated to love, the second-largest chunk to death and the transitory nature of human beings, the third-largest to the unity of being (*vahdet-al-vucud*) and the perfect man (*insan-i kamil*),

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<sup>93</sup> Başkal, Z. (2014). *Yunus Emre: The Sufi Poet in Love*. İstanbul: Işık Yayıncılık Ticaret, p. 59

the fourth-largest to didactic topics, fifth-largest to the Prophet, sixth-largest to daily prayers, seventh-largest to social criticism, eighth-largest to nature and the ninth-largest to figurative love.

About love, Başkal states that with the exception of one poem, the rest of his love poems refer specifically to divine love. Başkal underestimates the polysemy of Yunus Emre's language, due to which it is often difficult to understand to whom Yunus Emre's poems were addressed. I agree with Ahmed when he claims that one of the specificities of the poets of the *aşk mezhebi* derives from the ambiguity of their language<sup>94</sup>. Yunus Emre's poetry exemplifies this ambiguity.

Başkal dedicates an interesting sub-chapter to the question of language in Yunus Emre. Using several quotations from prominent scholars of literary theory, such as Roland Barthes and Noam Chomsky, Başkal argues that many scholars have misinterpreted Yunus Emre's language. To him, Turkish and international scholars have tended to label Yunus Emre's language as a simple and plain Turkish, easily understandable by any Turkish reader and uncontaminated by Arabic and Persian words.

Başkal highlights the prejudices of this characterization, noting that scholars should pay attention to the Anatolian context of the thirteenth and fourteenth century to understand Yunus Emre's language., We cannot understand Yunus Emre's language, he argues, without considering the development of Sufi literature in that region and that means taking into account the presence of Arabic and Persian words in Yunus Emre's poetry.<sup>95</sup>

I agree with the perspective of Başkal, although he sometimes seems to assert the possibility of a single true reading of Yunus Emre, closing Yunus Emre's poetry to other possible interpretations. Başkal's main question is how to correctly interpret the meanings of the words of Yunus Emre, but I am not sure that we can find 'a correct' way. While we do have to consider the historical context and the knowledge

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<sup>94</sup> Ahmed, S. (2016). *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. p.39

<sup>95</sup> Baskal, Z. (2014). *Yunus Emre: The Sufi Poet in Love*. İstanbul: Işık Yayıncılık Ticaret, p.76

networks to which Yunus Emre was connected, I do not believe that an analysis of Yunus Emre's language should merely aim to understand what Yunus Emre means with his words. There is more than meaning here. In the third chapter of my thesis, for instance, I will pay special attention to the question of Yunus Emre's language, not for understanding what he 'really' means in his poems, but how he considered his own language, what its source and its main character are.

## **Local Secondary Turkish Literature on Yunus Emre**

### **2.9. Abdlbaki Glpınarlı**

Abdlbaki Glpınarlı was one of the most prominent Turkish scholars specializing in Sufism. In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he contributed to the study of several Sufi movements in Anatolia. He also translated some of the Persian classics of Sufism into Turkish, such as Rm's *Mesnevi* (on which he also provided a commentary) and Hafiz's *Divan*<sup>96</sup>. Most of his work is oriented toward the anti-nominian or meta-nominian currents of Sufism, such as the melmiyye, the *Bekti* or the Urufi schools<sup>97</sup>. Among his work, he also dedicated two important monographs to Yunus Emre. One consists of an edition of Yunus Emre's poetry with an introduction to Yunus Emre's life and his historical context.<sup>98</sup> The other work contains a comparison between Yunus Emre and Aık Yunus, another poet who lived and wrote around the same period as Yunus Emre.<sup>99</sup> In this last work, Glpınarlı analyzes the *btn* (esoteric) elements of Yunus Emre's poetry.

Glpınarlı takes an historical approach to Sufism. In his book about Yunus Emre's life, he starts with an accurate description of the historical background of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. He underlines the importance of the Seljukid period when different cultural groups, especially Turks and Byzantines, were amalgamated in Anatolia. In those times, Anatolia became a land of refuge for different peoples escaping from the

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<sup>96</sup> Glpınarlı, A. (2011). *Mesnevi'nin VIII. Cildi*. İstanbul: arkiyat Mecmuası., Glpınarlı, A. (1985). *Hafiz Divanı*. İstanbul: Mill Eđitim Bakanlıđı ark İlm Klasikleri.

<sup>97</sup> Glpınarlı, A. (1931). *Melmlik ve Melmler*. İstanbul: Devlet Matbaası., Glpınarlı, A. (1992). *Yunus Emre ve Tasavvuf*. İstanbul: İnkılp Kitabevi, Glpınarlı, A. (1992). *Alev Bekti Nefesleri*. İstanbul: İnkılp Kitabevi.

<sup>98</sup> Glpınarlı, A. (1992). *Yunus Emre ve Tasavvuf*. İstanbul: İnkılp Kitabevi.

<sup>99</sup> Glpınarlı, A., Can, N., & Gke, S. (1941). *Yunus ile Aık Paa ve Yunus'un Batniliđi*. İstanbul: Kenan Basımevi.

Mongol invasions. However, Anatolia also came under attack by the Mongols and their incursions destabilized the social order, creating enormous problems in the daily life of Anatolians. To Gölpınarlı, Sufism played an important role in those times of crisis. Sufi teachings were a source of inspiration for people who lived in those tumultuous times, giving them the ability and motivation to bear their difficult destinies. It was in this volatile context that prominent figures such as Celâleddîn-i Rûmî, İbnü'l-Arabî and Yunus Emre lived and produced their works.

Gölpınarlı finds Yunus Emre's poetry profoundly influenced by the socio-historical conflicts of his time. He interprets some of Yunus Emre's *beyts* as invitations to be detached from the difficulties of this life and instead to turn one's attention to the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). Moreover, since the path to the ineffable Absolute cannot be other than the sacrifice of oneself, a context of war helps remind one of this challenging truth.

However, Gölpınarlı also quotes some *beyts* in which Yunus Emre denounces the injustices of this world. Yunus Emre specifically wrote scathing verses against religious scholars pretending to have knowledge about Islam and the capacity to guide people. To Yunus Emre, some of them retain only superficial knowledge and are merely interested in earning material benefits. This polemical tone of some of Yunus Emre's poems leads Gölpınarlı to claim that Yunus Emre was part of some of the heterodox Sufi movements.

Gölpınarlı gives importance to the biography of Yunus Emre, connecting his teaching to the *Alevi-Bektâşî* movement. Looking to historical sources and Yunus Emre's poetry, Gölpınarlı tries to put together the fundamental elements of Yunus Emre's life. One of the less controversial aspects is Yunus Emre's attachment to Tapduk Emre, his master (*mürşid*). The name of Tapduk appears in different poems and most of the secondary literature accepts this as the name of Yunus Emre's master. However, the affiliation of Yunus Emre to the *Alevi-Bektâşî tarika* remains a controversial aspect of Yunus Emre's biography.

Gölpınarlı not only claims that Yunus Emre was a *Bektâşî*, he also argues that this aspect emerges from an attentive reading of his works. In fact, Gölpınarlı highlights

several commonalities between Yunus Emre's poems and the work of *Hacı Bektaş Veli*, the eponymous founder of the *Bektâşî* order. The *Bektâşî* Sufi movement played a central role in the spiritual landscape of Anatolia from the thirteenth century until recent times. As a Sufi order, it has a complex history and different regional characteristics. Among the most common aspects of this esoteric movement we find the centrality of the figure of Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammed, producing discourses and practices different from the Sunni legalistic mode of being Islamic.

Gölpınarlı's thesis about Yunus Emre's affiliation with the *Bektâşî* order has not produced a consensus among scholars. Recently, both Turkish international and Turkish local scholars have contested this position<sup>100</sup>. They critique Gölpınarlı for wanting to demonstrate how Yunus Emre's teaching was at the periphery of the legalistic Sunni mode of being Islamic and the affiliation to the *Bektâşî* order, although lacking of solid historical proves, was an excuse to give power to this statement. The complexity and contradictions present in Yunus Emre's poetry make it difficult to hold a definitive position on Yunus Emre's affiliation. We need an adequate theoretical framework that can help us understand the complexities and contradictions involved, without paying too much attention to the problem of labeling his poetry as Sunni, *Bektâşî-Alevi* or some other.

In the article '*Yunus İle Aşık Paşa ve Yunus'un Batinliği*',<sup>101</sup> Gölpınarlı asks the question of the parallel between the poetry of Yunus Emre's Divan and its esoteric (*bâtunî*) character. Regarding the first point, Gölpınarlı analyzes some previous investigations that show how there is a problem of authenticity about some of the poems of Yunus Emre. In fact, Yunus Emre's style looks like a contemporary poet of his, called Aşık Yunus. This problem of authenticity is seriously taken into account by Mustafa Tatçı, who analyzed the differences and similarities between these two poets in the nineteen and published the first accurate philological edition of Yunus Emre's Divan, rejecting the poems which were previously ascribed to Aşık Yunus.

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<sup>100</sup> Başkal, Z. (2014). *Yunus Emre: The Sufi Poet in Love*. İstanbul: Işık Yayıncılık Ticaret

<sup>101</sup> Gölpınarlı, A., Can, N., & Gökçe, S. (1941). *Yunus ile Aşık Paşa ve Yunus'un Batinliği*. İstanbul: Kenan Basımevi.

Regarding the question of Yunus Emre's Esoteric (*bâtînî*) character, Gölpınarlı connects some *beyts* from the Divan with a corpus of beliefs which he defines as esoteric. To him, the main relation between Esotericism (*bâtın*) and Yunus Emre resides in the relation between Yunus Emre and Hacı Bektâşî's teachings. Gölpınarlı claims that the esoteric (*bâtînî*) school, in contrast to the exoteric (*zâhir*) school, puts the ritualistic elements of Islam (*ibadet*) in a secondary position, giving priority to the elements of gnosis (*tefekür*).

Here we can see how Gölpınarlı, similarly to Saif, finds the distinction between esoteric (*bâtînî*) and exoteric (*zâhir*) an important conceptual classification that some of the current in Islamic civilization have elaborated from the Qur'an. Gölpınarlı, like the French orientalist Henri Corbin, analyzes these *bâtînî* elements in connection principally with the Shia tradition. The figure of Ali, who symbolizes the *Velayet* (the friendship with God), becomes the vehicle of a corpus of inner teachings (*batini/esoteric*) that have priority over the teachings of the Prophet Muhammed.

In fact, to some extent, the teaching of the Prophet Muhammed remains external (*zâhir*); it is addressed to the generic believer (*ehl-I zâhir*). In contrast, the inner dimension (*bâtînî*), which the Prophet Muhammed secretly transmitted to Ali, consists of a corpus of teaching that is addressed to a restricted number of believers. Both in Gölpınarlı and Henri Corbin, this distinction can become a way of disconnecting some of the discourses and praxis of Muslim from Islam, presenting Islam as an external and formalistic Religion (*zâhir*) in contradiction with the inner and esoteric dimension (*bâtînî*), which is related to Shia movements and also other sunni Sufi orders.

In summary, Gölpınarlı's perspective on Yunus Emre remains one of the most important contributions of Turkish local scholarship. He questioned many important aspects of Yunus Emre's life and works, but his answers remain overly conditioned by his preference for the anti-nominian and non-legalistic mode of being Islamic. For this reason, his reading of Yunus Emre's Divan and his investigation about his life seems to aim to demonstrate that Yunus Emre was not an Islamic poet, but a Shia oriented Sufi poet (*bâtînî*), one who could, and should, be considered different from an Islamic poet.

As we will see in the third chapter, there are elements in Yunus Emre's poetry which show Gölpınarlı's perspective to be in some way reductionist. As Başkal noticed, there are several poems in which Yunus Emre praises the external elements of Islam and these *beyts* are overlooked in Gölpınarlı's reading. Yunus Emre's mode of being Islamic reflects the complexity that Ahmed points to in his work, *What Is Islam, the importance of being Islamic*.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, according to Ahmed, this complexity is such that it encompasses the contradictions between the esoteric (*bâtınî*) and exoteric (*zâhir*) elements which are characteristic of Yunus Emre's poetry.

## 2.10. Ahmet Karamustafa

In this subchapter, I will analyze an article by Ahmet Karamustafa dedicated exclusively to Yunus Emre with the title: *İslam Tasavvuf düşüncesinde Yunus Emre'nin Yeri* (Yunus Emre's position in Islamic Sufi thought)<sup>103</sup>. Although Karamustafa is a Turkish international scholar, he is also a distinguished professor in the U.S. Among his crucial works published in the field of the Sufi Studies<sup>104</sup>, he wrote only one article on Yunus Emre in Turkish (which has not yet been translated into English). The main contribution of this article is Karamustafa's analysis of the concept of love, which he considers the central aspect of all of Yunus Emre's poetry. Karamustafa invites us to consider Yunus Emre as one of the most important Sufi poets in the Turkish language: together with Celâleddîn-i Rûmî and Fahrettin İrakî, he articulates the best poetical expression of the *aşk mezhebi*, the school of Love.

The first part of the article is dedicated to a genealogy of the concept of love in the Sufi mode of being Islamic, focusing on the two words used to express this concept in Arabic, Persian and Turkish: *mahabbe* and *işk*. *Mahabbe* was the first word to express the love relation between God and the human beings, especially in the texts

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<sup>102</sup> Ahmed, S. (2016). *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>103</sup> Karamustafa, A. T. (2012). İslam Tasavvuf Düşüncesinde Yunus Emre'nin yeri. *Yunus Emre*, 287-305. Ankara: T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı

<sup>104</sup> Karamustafa, A. T. (2007). *Sufism: The Formative Period*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, Karamustafa, A. (1994). *God's Unruly Friends. Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200 - 1550*. Salt Lake City : Utah University Press., Kafadar, C., & Karamustafa, A. (2019). Books on Sufism, Lives of Saints, Ethics, and Sermons. In *Treasures of Knowledge: An Inventory of the Ottoman Palace Library (1502/3-1503/4)*(2 vols) (pp. 439-507). Leiden: E.J.Brill.

of the first centuries after the revelation<sup>105</sup>. However, especially in the texts of the Sufi mode of being Islamic, even prior to the emergence of the Bengal-to-Balkan complex, the term *işk* started to be used as synonymous with *mahabbe*.

This use was not accepted by everyone and some of the voices of the legalistic mode of being Islamic criticized the use of the word *işk*. For them, the right term to indicate the love relation between God and the human beings had been and should exclusively be *mahabbe*. However, important authors of the Sufi mode of being Islamic such as Junaid, Bâyezid-i Bistâmî and Mansûr el-Hallâc popularized—the term *aşk*, which later became the central term of the school of love (*aşk mezhebi*)<sup>106</sup>.

Karamustafa designates Ahmed Ghazali as the founder of this school of love (*aşk mezhebi*). In his *Sevanih*, Ghazali explores in a marvelous poetical form what Karamustafa defines as the metaphysic of love (*aşk*). Following the path of Mansûr el-Hallâc, Ghazali not only defines love (*aşk*) as the essence (*zat*) of God, but also bases the relation between God and the human being on it. In fact, the primordial pact between God and the human being, known as *elest*, takes its force from their reciprocal love (*ask*).

For Ghazali, the breath of God which blew into the human being is not different from love (*aşk*). Now, the task for humanity consists of going back to the source of this breath of divine love. Karamustafa recognizes this discourse on love as the more mature exploration of the theme in the Persian language - a discourse which influenced several other sufis such as Celâleddîn-i Rûmî and Fahrettin Irakî, as also Ferîdüddin Attâr and Sana'î. Some of these authors circulated the ideas of the *aşk mezhebi* in Anatolia, also reaching Yunus Emre.

Karamustafa claims that even though the similarities between Ghazali's and Yunus Emre's conceptions of love are significant, this does not mean that Yunus Emre had read the *Savanih*<sup>107</sup>. In fact, there are no traces of intertextuality between the literary

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<sup>105</sup> Karamustafa, A. T. (2012). İslam Tasavvuf Düşüncesinde Yunus Emre'nin yeri. *Yunus Emre*, 287-305. Ankara: T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı

<sup>106</sup> Ibidem, p. 289

<sup>107</sup> Ghazzali, A. (2014). *Sawānih: Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits*. London

productions of these two authors. However, the Turkish and Persian Sufi texts of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century were so closely connected that the possible influence of Ghazali on Yunus Emre, although not direct, remains a crucial point highlighted by Karamustafa.

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of Karamustafa's article lies in his statement that we can find in Yunus Emre's conception of love (*aşk*) elements that are absent in the *Sawānih*. For Ghazali, love (*aşk*) is relegated to the relation between God and the human beings and does not transcend this relational dimension. On the contrary, Karamustafa presents a series of quotes where Yunus Emre conceives love (*aşk*) as the eternal (*kadim*), uncreated (*yaratılmamış*), source of every existence being (*varlığın aslı*). For Karamustafa, Yunus Emre's conception of love, as the force which fills everything, resembles the perspectives of Celâleddîn-i Rûmî and Fahrettin İrakî much more closely than Ghazali's.

Karamustafa claims that all of Yunus Emre's works reflect the influence of the *aşk mezhebi*. In fact, *aşk* becomes the central element in all of Yunus Emre's poetical production. In the last part of the article, Karamustafa takes some of the most relevant *topoi* of Yunus Emre's poetry and connects them to the theme of love (*aşk*). Among them, he underlines the relation between love (*ışk*) and Yunus Emre's words (*söz*)<sup>108</sup>.

He quotes different *beyts* in which Yunus Emre claims that he is not the source of his own words, but that his words come from love (*ışk*). Karamustafa notices how this claim has been criticized by several authors. However, the theme of the dissolution of self-identity '*kendilikler*,' and the source of the poet's words, is part of a long and controversial debate in the history of the Sufi mode of being Islamic. I find it interesting that Karamustafa pays attention (albeit briefly) to Yunus Emre's reflection on his own language, a topic that will be central in the third chapter of my thesis.

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& New York: Routledge

<sup>108</sup> Karamustafa, A. T. (2012). İslam Tasavvuf Düşüncesinde Yunus Emre'nin yeri. *Yunus Emre*, 287-305. Ankara: T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, p. 296-297

In conclusion, Karamustafa's article provides an interesting perspective on the role of Yunus Emre in the history of the Sufi mode of being Islamic. It traces the genesis and the development of the *aşk mezhebi* in a clear and historically well documented way. Moreover, the pivotal function of love (*aşk*) in Karamustafa's interpretation explains difficult and contradictory elements of Yunus Emre's work in an accessible way. A valuable academic article such as this, with an outstanding and rigorous apparatus of references, deserves an English translation; it should also be circulated in international bibliographies along with the rest of Karamustafa's works.

### 2.11. Mustafa Tatçı

Among the contemporary Turkish local scholars on Yunus Emre, Mustafa Tatçı occupies a central role. He successfully published the first accurately edited version of Yunus Emre's Divan with a meticulous philological apparatus, separating Yunus Emre's poems from the poetry of Aşık Yunus. Published in the nineties, this work was originally Mustafa Tatçı's PhD dissertation, and later became the most reliable edition of Yunus Emre's Divan for both Turkish and International scholars<sup>109</sup>.

Furthermore, Mustafa Tatçı's interpretation of Yunus Emre's poetry reflects an interesting synthesis of philological erudition and experiential knowledge of the Sufi mode of being Islamic. His numerous works distinguish themselves through this dual characteristic: an accurate academic perspective and a personal engagement with the Sufi path, which he defines as the main driving factor behind his meticulous work.

During the last few decades in Turkey, the interest in Islam in general and Tasavvuf in particular has come to occupy a significant share of media attention. Mustafa Tatçı has also become a public speaker, receiving an offer to hold monthly seminars dedicated to the reading of Yunus Emre's Divan in public conference halls, normally recorded and uploaded on social media platforms.<sup>110</sup> He also took part in several TV shows dedicated to Yunus Emre and other important figures of Tasavvuf. In 2008, Mustafa Tatçı founded a publishing house, *H Yayınları*, which has published

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<sup>109</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı.

<sup>110</sup> For example, the youtube channel of Esenrel Kültür Sanat  
[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLF4PLrnZcgPW3W5zjbAefhU9H24o\\_vLdP](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLF4PLrnZcgPW3W5zjbAefhU9H24o_vLdP)

different contemporary works dedicated to Tasavvuf, included Mustafa Tatçı's own works, and classics of the Sufi literary tradition<sup>111</sup>. For Turkish readers, *H Yayınları* is playing a leading role in divulging the Turkish context of the Sufi mode of being Islamic, both in past and present times.

Among the latest publications of *H Yayınları*, *Yunus Emre Yorumları, İşitin Ey Yârenler*<sup>112</sup> (Yunus Emre's commentaries: Listen, Oh Friends) helps us understand Tatçı's general perspective on Yunus Emre. The book is dedicated to analyzing the hagiographic aspects of Yunus Emre's life, the main elements of his teachings, commentaries and paraphrasing of Yunus Emre's poetry in modern Turkish. Yet another one of Tatçı's contributions is his successful translation of the ancient Turkish of Yunus Emre into a more accessible language for modern readers and listeners.

In this sense, Başkal rightly denounced the bias of the modernist interpretations of Yunus Emre, especially in Köprülü and Halman, who claim that Yunus Emre's language is easily comprehensible to the modern Turkish speaker. I am convinced that Tatçı's popularity comes in part from his ability to render the teachings of Yunus Emre's poetry more familiar to a larger audience. Tatçı also adopts a writing style that facilitates access to the meaning for the reader, using metaphors and expressions close to the daily Turkish language. One good example is the sub-chapter of *Yunus Emre Yorumları*, titled *Yunus Ne Diyor*, roughly translated as 'What is Yunus saying?' In this part of the book, Tatçı covers how Yunus Emre was a person who experienced and completed a process of spiritual education (*nefs terbiyesi*), attaining the highest level of this process<sup>113</sup>.

Tatçı strictly links the words of Yunus Emre with his life experiences. To him, Yunus Emre's poetry is not merely ordinary words, but the expression of a man who achieved a spiritual realization (*tahqiq*). Tatçı pays attention to the biography of Yunus Emre, but unlike Gölpinarlı, he gives great importance to the hagiographical elements, rather than the 'accurate' historical sources (which are extremely rare).

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<sup>111</sup> See <https://hyayinlari.com/>

<sup>112</sup> Tatçı, M. (2014). *Yunus Emre Yorumları İşitin Ey Yârenler*. H Yayınları

<sup>113</sup> İbidem pg. 85

These stories depict Yunus Emre as an illiterate person who dedicates his life to manual labor and the service to his master (*mürşid*). This humble occupation, after many years, conferred extraordinary spiritual power on Yunus Emre.

Tatçı thinks that this extraordinary life had an effect on Yunus Emre's poetical production, which is full of love, patience and tolerance. Yunus Emre's poetry does not derive from an intellectual and theoretical reflection; it is the result of a modest life dedicated entirely to the spiritual path. Like Köprülü and Halman, Tatçı underlines how Yunus Emre's teachings promote peaceful understanding among human beings. In several *beyt*, Yunus Emre makes reference to the transitory character of this life and calls humanity towards universal friendship. Tatçı quotes Yunus Emre's famous *beyt*:

Come and get to know us. Let's just make it simple  
Let's love and be loved. No one will remain in this world

*Gelin tanışık edelim işi kolay tutalım  
Sevelim sevilelim dünya kimseyene kalmaz<sup>114</sup>*

For Tatçı, this message of unconditional love and friendship is the consequence of Yunus Emre's realization of all the levels (*makam*) of *din*. Tatçı uses the word *din* to refer to the ensemble of levels (*makam*) that are part of Islam: *şariat*, *tarikât*, *marifet* and *hakikat*. Here, Tatçı reproduces a classical distinction of the Sufi mode of being Islamic which identifies different dimensions in the engagement with the revelation to the Prophet Muhammed.<sup>115</sup> Unfortunately, Tatçı does not explain what the main features of these different steps are in detail, taking the reader's knowledge of them for granted. However, he claims that the goal of the spiritual path consists in completing these different steps and arriving at the position of divine love (*muhabetullah*).

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<sup>114</sup> Tatçı, M. (2014). *Yûnus Emre Yorumları İştin Ey Yârenler*. İstanbul: H Yayınları., p.85

<sup>115</sup> Ibidem p.86

Yunus Emre's poetry expresses the voice of a person who climbed the peak of the mountain and arrives at the summit, to transcend the boundaries of any sectarianism. For Tatçı, in order to express this existential achievement, Yunus Emre elucidated the importance of respecting the diverse modes of being human in several poems. Yunus Emre used the metaphor of the seventy two communities (*yetmiş iki millet*) to express respect for the plurality of modes of being human, as a fundamental aspect of understanding the unity of being (*tevhid*)<sup>116</sup>.

Tatçı challenges the interpretations of Yunus Emre's unconditional love as an expression of a humanist perspective. To him, both Köprülü and Halman misinterpreted the centrality of the human being in Yunus Emre's poetry. Tatçı considers those philosophies which give centrality to human beings and puts the transcendental aspect of the existence in a secondary position as humanist. These humanist philosophies tend to create a Weltanschauung founded on the mundane elements of the human lives, their moral principles based on material terms. On the contrary, Yunus Emre's teaching does not reflect this attitude. If there is any centrality of the human in his poetry, this is because of its relation with the divine.

Only a vertical relation between God and human beings gives the latter a central position among His creations. Without this vertical relation, human beings would not be different from the other creatures. Here, Tatçı criticizes Halman's perspective on Yunus Emre and the humanist philosophy which does not differentiate the position from which human beings are speaking, in general. Halman does not take into consideration that Yunus Emre's words are the result of his personal spiritual realization. Not every human being can teach and experience unconditional love, only the ones who completed a spiritual process of education are able to call humanity to universal friendship and tolerance.

This hierarchical distinction among human beings is characteristic of the Sufi mode of being Islamic. Different from the 'horizontality' of the humanist philosophies, every person occupies a different position in a hierarchy within the Sufi mode of being Islamic. This position depends on the extent to which the person has completed his or her spiritual journey. Only those who have completed the journey, like the

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<sup>116</sup> Tatçı, M. (2014). *Yunus Emre Yorumları İştin Ey Yârenler*. İstanbul: H Yayınları., p.87

*insan-i kamil*, deserve centrality among the creations and are capable of unconditional Love for every human and not human beings, recognizing that everything is the manifestation (*tecelli*) of the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*).

To Tatçı, Yunus Emre testifies the perspective of the *insan-i kamil* who died with the existential awareness of the unity of being (*vahdet-al-vucud*). Yunus Emre witnessed the existence of Allah as the manifestation of the ineffable Absolute and in the multiplicity of beings he recognized its reflection of the same. Moreover, Yunus Emre arrived to the experiential assumption that the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) resides in oneself and for this reason if one wants to find the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*), one has to look inside oneself. To demonstrate his perspective, Tatçı quotes this famous *beyt* from Yunus Emre:

The ineffable Absolute fills the world but no one knows the ineffable Absolute.  
You seek it from yourself, it is not separated from you.

*Hak cihana dolududur kimsene hakk'ı bilmez  
Onu sen senden iste o senden ayrı olmaz*<sup>117</sup>

Tatçı reads Yunus Emre's Divan as the testament of a person who transcended the duality of 'I' and 'You'. The awareness of unity of being (*vahdet-al-vucud*) erased in him all the clear boundaries between his own identity and the 'other', shifting all the focus on the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*), represented in the pronoun of the third person 'he' (in Turkish *o* and in Arabic *Hua*). Yunus Emre accomplished the process of unification (*tevhid*), plunging into the ocean of unity (*ahadiyet deryası*) and giving up his own individuality. After this spiritual achievement, from this special position (*makam*), he speaks in the name of 'we' (*biz*)<sup>118</sup>.

This 'we' does not consist of a social 'we' in contraposition with a social 'they'; on the contrary, it denotes the voice which testifies the realization (*tahqiq*) of the

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<sup>117</sup> Tatçı, M. (2014). *Yunus Emre Yorumları İştin Ey Yârenler*. İstanbul: H Yayınları., p.89

<sup>118</sup> Ibidem p.100

ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). Against modernist readings of Yunus Emre, Tatçı rejects attempts to read this ‘we’ from the perspective of mere social inclusion, without taking into account the spiritual realization behind the process. For Tatçı, Yunus Emre was more than a philosopher who promotes the unconditional love and friendship among humans from a purely intellectual perspective. In fact, he was a person who passed through a forty-year process of spiritual education, which confers this special perspective to him.

To conclude, Tatçı reads Yunus Emre following a personal engagement with the Sufi mode of being Islamic, which transcends the nationalistic interpretation. Although his language remains accessible to the vast public, his exegesis demands an effort of detailed study. His analysis of Yunus Emre as an epitome of the Turkish Sufi mode of being Islamic, contests both Köprülü’s and Halman’s readings. Tatçı does not aim to use Yunus Emre’s poetry to create a common ethos among Turkish people. On the contrary, for him Yunus Emre’s Divan represents a relevant source for people who are interested in intellectually and existentially exploring the Sufi mode of being Islamic. Tatçı considers Yunus Emre’s poems among the first Turkish texts that attest to the spiritual realization of a person. Their values rely on the element of *tahqiq* of the poet, a term that Ahmed translates into English as ‘Truth-ization’<sup>119</sup>, which gives priority to their literary values. Tatçı reads Yunus Emre’s Divan as a trace of a spiritual realization by an illiterate person: one of the first traces in which the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) signed His presence in the Turkish language. In this sense, Yunus Emre’s testament uses the Turkish vernacular language as a medium to teach how to live the experiences of love, knowledge and the process of unification with the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*).

## 2.12. Conclusion

I would like to end this chapter by pointing out that, especially with regard to the Turkish-language literature on Yunus Emre, my mapping is limited. I had to make a choice due to issues of space and, for example, I chose to disregard the works of

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<sup>119</sup> Ahmed, S. (2016). *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Pp.338-339

Burhan Toprak and Sabahattin Eyubođlu though they have been prominent in the Turkish sphere.. Both of these authors proposed their own edition of Yunus Emre's Divan in early modern Turkish<sup>120</sup>. Both are interested not only in Turkish literature, but also in European literature, and they were, together with K p rl , among the intellectuals who put Yunus Emre's poetry at the center of the literary republic canon by adapting Yunus Emre's language to the new Turkish.

What we can say at the conclusion of this general overview is the fact that in each type of work about Yunus Emre the main themes and references to different poems, despite the variances of the various editions, of Yunus Emre are very similar. What changes is the interpretation and angle that different scholars of Yunus Emre give to these poems and themes. Let me underscore that precisely this variety confirms the greatness of Yunus Emre's poetry: its very polysemy gives rise to multiple readings from Turkish and non-Turkish scholars alike.

I would also like to end this map of the secondary literature written on Yunus Emre by marking the importance of Mustafa Tatçı's critical edition of Yunus Emre. We can speak of a fundamental breakthrough in the studies on the Turkish poet that marks a before and an after. We are truly indebted to this Turkish scholar, since it is his contribution that in recent years has led to a certain consensus on which poems should be attributed to Yunus Emre and which should not. Of course, we must also regret a lack of cosmopolitan spirit in Mustafa Tatci's work given its limited connection to a type of scholarship with a more international standing. The fact that the scholar has decided to set up his own publishing house in order to make his work known, instead of collaborating with university publishing houses or those with a more international character would certainly help to make Yunus Emre known on a more cosmopolitan level.

I think that after this outline we can see how the three subgroups of essays on Yunus Emre that I have created to simplify my work have limited interconnection in terms of contents with each other. We can certainly see that in recent years there has been a

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<sup>120</sup> Emre, Y., & Eyubođlu, S. (1991). *Yunus Emre*. Bilgi Yayinevi, Toprak, B. (1972). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. İstanbul: İnkilâp ve Aka.

reaction, understandable and justified against a humanist and Islam-free type of reading of Yunus Emre's work. See especially the work of Baskal and Tatci. But apart from this critical strand of work on the humanism of Yunus Emre, I have not found a certain coherence or a kind of academic discourse on our poet. Paul Ballanfat is perhaps the most striking example. Although I find the French orientalist's ideas extremely original and stimulating, I repeat that his anarcho-mystical reading is too disconnected from the rest of the studies on Yunus Emre.

It is certainly noteworthy that Gölpınarlı is the only figure to emphasize the esoteric (*bâtinî*) aspect of Yunus Emre. Unfortunately, this reading has overly Corbin-like sides, as Saif would say. In fact, for Gölpınarlı, Yunus Emre's esotericism derives from his connection with Bektâşî elements and thus is close to the esoteric currents of Shiism. One can certainly see irrefutable proximity, but I do not think that esotericism, exactly as Saif proposes, is a phenomenon exclusively influenced by Shiism. There is also an esotericism that rightly goes beyond these outward and more esoteric divisions. Yunus Emre is one of the most original examples of Turkish culture that goes in this direction.

What I think these texts I have analyzed generally lack is a perspective that admits the complexity and contradictory nature of Yunus Emre's poetry and thought. This would be precisely my contribution. To try to point out how Yunus Emre's poetic work is inherently characterized by contradictions and paradoxes. It is precisely these that make our author so alive and contemporary. In the course of my work, I will try to avoid labels and listen to the poet's words, in their contradictory nature, to understand where they lead us.

Finally, I have noticed that many of the texts I have analyzed recognise the importance of Yunus Emre's discourse on language. At the same time, however, none have gone into exploring this aspect in depth. Paul Ballanfat has certainly devoted many pages to this line of investigation, but in a way that is not always easy to follow and is detached from detailed work on the poems that deal with this issue. This I hope will be the main contribution of my research.



## CHAPTER 3

### YUNUS EMRE'S GRAMMAR OF THE SELF

#### 3.1. Introduction

In this chapter I would like to take into account some of the main elements that forge Yunus Emre's form of life and that are directly reflected in his Divan, one of the most important works of Turkish poetry written during the XIII and XIV centuries. Although we have little information about Yunus Emre's life, we know for sure that he was a *dervish*, a person who followed the path of Sufism. I will investigate to what extent Yunus Emre's Divan is related to his experiences on his spiritual journey. What can we understand about his life by reading his poetry? Did he write to witness his innermost experiences? Did he write to understand his own journey toward the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*)? What is the relationship between his way of walking along the spiritual path and his conception of language?

There is a direct correlation between Yunus Emre's discovery of himself and his artistic production. Life and poetry are intertwined in a sense that we can call the ensemble of these two dimensions the grammar of the self. By grammar of the self, I mean a way to understand the experiences of the self by translating them onto another plane, which for Yunus Emre is the poetical dimension of language. I call it grammar because it follows some patterns that are determined by the prosody of the poems and their rhythm. Poetical language, with its rhythm, becomes a liminal space or *barzakh*<sup>121</sup>.

This Persian word, *barzakh*, is present in the Qur'an and indicates a space of interaction between two different elements, as, for example, between fresh and saltwater. *Barzakh* can be considered as a force of union and differentiation at the same time, a correlation that pits opposing forces against each other and drags them

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<sup>121</sup> For the concept of *barzakh* in Islamic Civilization see Lawrence, B.B. (2021). *Islamicate Cosmopolitan Spirit* (Vol. 20). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, cooke, m. (2014). *Tribal Modern: Branding New Nations in the Arab Gulf*. Berkeley: University of California Press and Lawrence B.B. (2015). *Who Is Allah?*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina., p. 40–45

towards the abyss. It is a space of contradictions that relates differences and puts distance between them; a sort of dialectic that does not find a point of synthesis in the Hegelian way and maintains the point of contradiction in a continuous relational tension. I believe that this element of contradiction can help us to better understand Yunus Emre's Divan.

A close reading of Yunus Emre's Divan enables the reader to find multiple perspectives that are related to this *barzakh* logic. In fact, there is a liminal space traced in the poetical works that can be an area of tension between Yunus Emre's form of life and his achievements in the world of the spirit. Can we read his poetry as a sort of bridge between his life and his experience of the world of the unseen (*ghayb*)? Does poetry function as a vehicle to achieve another dimension of reality, or is poetry the outcome of Yunus Emre's spiritual achievements? How does he refer to his own poetical work? Is poetry his way to know himself or the result of his knowledge about himself? I am convinced that the *barzakh* logic can help us to understand this tension between Yunus Emre's life and the \ form that it acquired throughout his poetical work.

For Yunus Emre, poetry becomes a dynamic force where the rhythm of the uttered words is not merely grammar but comprises elements of the Self. On the other hand, the Self becomes different from himself by giving to it a sort of order, a grammar. The poetic space, constitutes a location where special language transcends ordinary language. It is Language without being language and it is the Self without being the self. Simultaneously, we can also state the opposite: Language is language, as long as Self is self.

In this chapter I will investigate what the main values that constitute Yunus Emre's *Weltanschauung* are. I will analyze some poems to explain my personal interpretation of Yunus Emre's grammar of the self. I will start with the importance of contradictions in his poetry and go on with an analysis of some poems where the difference between the *şeriat* plane and the *hakikat* and *bâtîni* and *zâhir* planes are addressed. One of the key features of Yunus Emre's poetry is the differentiation of these two planes that starts from a precise consideration of language. Furthermore, I will take into analysis two fundamental concepts in Yunus Emre's poetry such as

*hakikat* and *hakk* to give a personal interpretation from their differentiation. I will go on with an analysis of the conception of knowledge in Yunus Emre and its relation to language. Later I will give an analysis of a poem that highlights not only the importance of the Qur'an but how the koranic language can be understood in a general way as the voice of those who speak from the position of the heart (*gönül*), the position of those who have succeeded in achieving the loving union (*ışık*) with the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*).

### **3.2. ‘At One Instant It cannot Pronounce Even One Word and Cannot Explain Anything’: Yunus Emre’s Contradictions**

There are many poems in Yunus Emre's Divan which indicate the transformative value of oppositions. These contradictory elements of reality have a dynamic and creative force, lived in the interior experiences of the poetic voice. Yunus Emre presents to the addressees of his poems the drama of these contradictions of the interior life, referring to them as both a yearning (*dert*) and a remedy (*dermân*). The poetic gesture becomes an essential tool to give voice to the never-ending war between the polarities of human existence, as the following poem expresses in unique words.

God gave me a heart that becomes bewildered at a moment's notice.  
It's joyful for one moment, tearful for the next.

In one instant you would say it is like winter, like those icy days.  
In another, it appears with glad tidings to become a garden, an orchard.

At one instant it cannot pronounce even one word and cannot explain anything.  
At another, it spills pearls from its tongue and becomes a remedy for the seekers.

*Hak bir gönül viridi bana hâ dimedin hayrân olur  
Bir dem gelür şâdî olur bir dem gelür giryân olur*

*Bir dem sanasın kış gibi şol zemheri olmuş gibi  
Bir dem beşâretten togar hoş bâgıla bostân olur*

*Bir dem gelür söyleyemez bir sözi şerh eyleyemez  
Bir dem dilinden dür döker dertlülere dermân olur*<sup>122</sup>

In this poem, the *incipits* of all *beyts* (except for the first) start with the locution, in 'one instant' (*bir dem*), that provides the rhythm for the poem both at the structural and at the semantic dimension. This poem expresses the contradictions that the poet experiences on his personal journey. His own self, here represented by the word *gönül*, seems to be the victim of contrary forces that give the poet the feeling of bewilderment (*hayrân*), a keyword of the poem which appears at the beginning and at the end of the poem. The poetical voice, despite being bewildered, assumes and accepts his changes of disposition and his ability to express his own inner experiences. There is an emphasis on the transition of the states (*hal*) in which the poet is immersed. Yunus Emre uses the metaphors of joy (*şâdî*) and sadness (*giryân*), dark winter (*sanasın kış*) and warm summer, silence (*bir sözi şerh eyleyemez*) and valuable loquacity (*dilinden dür döker*), to express the contradiction in which he finds his own self.

Moreover, in the last *beyt*, it is possible to read the opposition of the constraints that move the author's poetic gesture. Here, we begin to see an important aspect of the whole grammar of the self in Yunus Emre. If all his poetic work advances an attentive, deep, and precise mirroring of the spiritual life of the *dervish* Yunus, indirectly of all *dervishes*, the meditation on his word (*söz*) and language (*dil*) acquires an absolute centrality in the whole *Divan*. By reading this poem, we can notice that also the poetic word (*söz*) seems immersed in the logic of contradiction. The heart is disputed between two forces: on the one hand the inability to utter any words (*söyleyemez bir sözi*) and on the other the impulse to create words of extreme value (*dilinden dür döker*).

To conclude my reading of the last *beyt* previously quoted, which refers directly to the sphere of language, a theme that I will deal with more comprehensively in the next chapters, I would like to point out that here, the metaphor of the pearl (*dür*)

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<sup>122</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.49

recalls the koranic text I quoted earlier which refers to the *barzakh* as a tension between two seas which produces pearls (الْوَلُّوْ) and corals (الْمَرْجَان). In Yunus Emre's verse these pearls are a remedy (*dermân*) for the seekers (*dertlüler*).

The words *dert* and *derman* are a central pair of terms in Yunus Emre's poetics. In modern Turkish, the word *dert* is used to indicate a problem to be solved that creates a strong emotional tension. In Yunus Emre's conception, on the other hand, it is related to an existential dimension typical of those who are searching not for something particular but instead for a sense of wholeness. This seems to be a similar drive to what Jaqui Alexander expresses in her definition of yearning: 'a yearning for wholeness, often expressed as a yearning to belong, a yearning that is both material and existential, both psychic and physical, and which, when satisfied, can subvert, and ultimately displace the pain of dismemberment.'<sup>123</sup>

In this case I decided to translate the word *dertlüler*, those who experience this state of yearning as seekers. But who are the seekers? And what kind of remedy do the poet's words offer to them? The seekers are in yearning. The awareness of their distance from the beloved makes them suffer and to get close to the beloved is their main purpose. The poet's words, like the words of the Qur'an, remind the *dervishes*, the seekers, of the distance of the lover from the beloved and they concomitantly rejoin one to the other. For this reason, Yunus Emre considers his words a remedy (*dermân*). They replenish the relationship between lover and beloved, the archetypal structure that grounds human existence.

In one instant it rises beyond the throne and in another, it descends under the earth.  
In one instant you would say it is just a drop, but in a moment it becomes an ocean.

In one instant it is ignorant, it does not know anything.  
In another instant he dives into wisdom; he becomes Galen and Luqman.

In one instant he becomes a demon or a fairy, and his place is the ruins.

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<sup>123</sup> Alexander, M. J. (2006). *Pedagogies of crossing: Meditations on feminism, sexual politics, memory, and the sacred*. Duke University Press. p.256

In another, he flies with Belkis, and becomes the king of both human beings and genies.

In one instant he appears as a mendicant, naked except for a cloak.

In another, brimming with aspiration, he becomes the emperor of China, the king of kings of the Turks/Mongols.

In one instant he becomes a rebel, and God takes away his mind

But reaching another, he has asceticism and faith as fellow travelers.

In one instant he contemplates his sins and goes straight to Hell.

In another, he sees the mercy of the ineffable Absolute and becomes Ridvan for Paradise.

*Bir dem çıkar 'Arş üzere bir dem iner tahte's-serâ  
Bir dem sanasın katredür bir dem taşar 'ummân olur*

*Bir dem cehâletde kalur hiç nesneyi bilmez olur  
Bir dem talar hikmetlere Câlinûs u Lokmân olur*

*Bir dem dîv olur ya perî vîrâneler olur yiri  
Bir dem uçar Belkîs'ila sultân-ı ins ü cân olur*

*Bir dem görür olmuş gedâ yalın tene geymiş 'abâ  
Bir dem ganî himmet ile Fagfûr u hem hakân olur*

*Bir dem gelür 'âsî olur hak zihnini yavı kılır  
Bir dem gelür kim yoldaşı hem zühd ü hem îmân olur*

*Bir dem günâhın fikr ider tos-togru tamu'ya gider*

Yunus Emre continues to use contradictory terms to express the journey of his own self: knowledge (*hikmet*) and ignorance (*cehâlet*), elevation (*uçar Belkîs'ıla*) and lowliness (*ya perî vîrâneler olur yiri*), richness (*ganî*) and misery (*gedâ*), rebel (*âsî*) and asceti (*zühhd*), paradise (*rıdvân*) and hell (*tamu*), are all different positions through which the self is passing. In this description, there is no space for an equilibrium. In fact, the heart (*gönül*) represents the relationship between these contradictory positions that in no way can be surpassed by a synthesis in the Hegelian sense of the term.

The heart (*gönül*) is depicted as a pendulum that relates to contradictory aspects of life, without resting on either one of them, but rather, experiencing a continuous fluctuation between them. By composing this poem, Yunus Emre tries to understand what the main forces are that influence his form of life. There is a parallel between expressing in poetical words how these contradictory forces play their games to direct his existence and the understanding of the real dynamism of Yunus Emre's spiritual life. It seems that the words of the poem incarnate the bewilderment of Yunus Emre on the cusp of his spiritual journey at the same time that they provide the function of witnessing his state.

Witnessing this state, however, inevitably passes through what Sells calls apophatic language. A language that can only affirm something and then immediately deny it. This existential dimension of continuous search and change must express itself through a particular linguistic practice that instead of remaining silent, what Wittgenstein<sup>125</sup> suggests we should do, constantly asserts and negates. This is the paradox of all those who feel the need to express their experiences of the ineffable through language.

What Yunus Emre is telling us here is that not only the experience of the spiritual journey entails a constant coming and going between different states of the soul but

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<sup>124</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür bakanlığı. p.49

<sup>125</sup> Wittgenstein, L. (2002). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London & New York: Routledge.

that any attempt at witnessing them always remains imprisoned in the inherent duality of language. Yunus Emre does not express it with mere words but he lives it and brings it to life through his poetry. We, as receivers, who are exposed to this sequence of linguistic oppositions cannot but realize this dual reality of language and the impossibility of speaking of the ineffable except from this duality. Contradictions are used as a vehicle that instead of speaking of the ineffable evokes it. It does not speak of the ineffable but gives it a linguistic form.

We return here to see the concept of performance so important both for Sells in his analysis of apophatic language in different authors of esotericism, influenced by different spiritual traditions, and in Keshavarz's reading of Rûmî's poetry. Yunus Emre in this poem shapes the contradictory nature of language and through this practice takes us beyond its duality. This experience of language is closely related to the experience of its inner journey and is related to a certain way of experiencing the prophetic culture that different traditions propose. This kind of prophetic culture, which is esoteric in character, sees language as a shaping of the occult dimension of the real and not as a technical tool for ordering what seems to be the real.

To what extent throughout the form of the poem does Yunus Emre explore his spiritual journey? I am convinced that there is a direct correlation between the poem and the form of life of the poet. I think that Yunus Emre uses the practice of poetry to explore and give meaning to the experience of his deeper heart (*gönül*). The relation between the poetical voice and Yunus Emre's form of life remains extremely blurred throughout the Divan.

Certainly, poetical form and form of life are intrinsically connected. On the one hand, it is clear that Yunus Emre uses the practice of poetry to explore his own spiritual life; on the other hand, it is possible that the same practice of poetry produced different spiritual experiences in the life of the poet. In this sense, it is very difficult to trace a boundary between literary production and the form of life of the poet, since the poem and the poet are in a constant dynamic of mirroring and influencing each other. However, as we said before, these two seas (the form of life of the poet and his poetry) are connecting and remaining separate at the same time.

In one instant he goes to mosques and rubs his face on the ground.

In another instant he goes to the monastery, where he reads the Gospels and becomes a monk.

At one moment he is Moses and has thousands of intimate heart conversations with the ineffable Absolute<sup>126</sup>.

At another, he enters the house of arrogance: he is Pharaoh and Hâmân.

In one instant he resurrects the dead like Jesus;

In one instant he is disorientated like those who deviate from the path.

In one instant he becomes Gabriel and spreads compassion to all communities.

In another, he is lost, poor Yunus is left bewildered.

*Bir dem varur mescidlere yüzün sürer anda yire  
Bir dem varur deyre girer İncil okur ruhbân olur*

*Bir dem gelür Mûsâ olur yüz bin münâcâtlar kılur  
Bir dem girer kibr evine Firavn'ıla Hâmân olur*

*Bir dem gelür 'Îsâ gibi ölmüşleri diri kılur  
Bir dem gelür güm-râhleyin yolunda ser-gerdân olur*

*Bir dem döner Cebrâîl'e rahmet saçar her mahfile  
Bir dem gelür güm-râh olur miskîn Yûnus hayrân olur<sup>127</sup>*

Here, Yunus Emre's sensibility regarding contradiction even comes to consider his own engagement with the Islamic revelation. In fact, at the conclusion of the poem, Yunus Emre takes different approaches to revelation as metaphors of his complex,

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<sup>126</sup> The term *münâcât* is used in many of Yunus Emre's other poems and I decided to translate it as intimate heart conversation.

<sup>127</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.49

ambiguous and contradictory spiritual journey. Islam, Judaism, Christianity and Polytheism all represent diverse territories through which his own self intermittently passes. To what extent can we read this poem as a Sufi promotion of religious diversity? I am convinced that Yunus Emre does not consider these traditions through the historical perspective of a modern author but as a pupil of different and complementary teachings.<sup>128</sup>

Yunus Emre's Sufi mode of being Islamic differs from the legalistic discourse which tends to create a sharper identitarian distinction between the different traditions, with a historical categorization and hierarchy based on their levels of realizing the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). The message of these verses points out the distinction between the planes of the textual (*şeriat*) and ineffable Absolute (*hakikat*). The *şeriat* approach, whether it be Islamic, Christian or Jewish, promotes a personal responsibility about the actions which are taken by the Self. These responsibilities give an ideal identity to the self as well as its counterpart.

This is the reason why Yunus Emre uses so many contradictory elements. He wants to underline that, at the level of *şeriat*, the self lives in a continuous passage between the ideal realization and an inevitable distance from its realization. Again, it does not matter what the form of the law is (islamic, christian or jewish), none of them can offer a solution to this inevitable contradiction. Only the plan of the ineffable Absolute (*hakikat*), can offer a solution. But how does one enter that dimension?

My reading of the last verses of the poem is that Yunus Emre testifies his achievement of that dimension of *hakikat*. By claiming that he is lost (*güm-rah*) and in bewilderment (*hayrân*), he wants to express his achievement of the plane of *hakikat*. While the *şeriat* plane generates dispersion in the self of the poetic voice,

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<sup>128</sup> Ahmed's thesis about contradiction as both inherent and coherent makes it easier to understand such pluralistic claims than William Chittick's discourse in his study of İbnü'l-Arabî. Chittick, starting from a famous poem of İbnü'l-Arabî's which shares several similarities with this poem, wants to show the pluralism of the Sufi in terms of religious diversity. However, I think that for Yunus Emre, as for İbnü'l-Arabî, the question does not concern religious diversity *per se*. Instead, they arrive at a spiritual apotheosis and the development of a Self in which contradictions are integral aspects of their lives and thoughts, at once inherent and coherent, not to be eliminated or resolved but held in continuous, and fruitful, tension, as in the *barzakh* leitmotif of the Qur'an, see Chittick, W. C. (1994). *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity*. New York: SUNY Press.

the end of the poem indicates the place of return. From the dispersion which is manifested by the constant movements present all along the poems, changes in terms of places, character and tradition, Yunus Emre declares the achievement of the final destination of his spiritual journey with the words: ‘the poor Yunus is bewildered’ (*miskîn Yûnus hayrân olur*).

Here, in this simple nominal sentence, we can read the experience of *hakikat* of the poetical voice. The verb to be (*olmak*) connects the three elements of the sentence which are two adjectives, ‘poor’ (*miskin*) and ‘in bewilderment’ (*hayrân*), with the name of Yunus. Both these adjectives are Arabic words with a profound value in the Sufi mode of being Islamic. *Miskin* refers to the person who is ontologically poor, in the sense that he or she is aware of the fact that the only existent is the face of Allah, as is reported in the Qur’an by the verse ‘(...) Everything will be destroyed except His Face (...) كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ لَهُ الْحُكْمُ <sup>129</sup>. The adjective *hayrân* indicates the loss of consciousness that the poetic voice experiences in the achievement of the *hakikat* level. In this plane, the only existent is Allah and there is no space for other identities than Her.

Finally, we are exposed to the *barzakh* logic of the tension between two seas. On the one side, we find the *şeriat* plane with its dispersion, dynamism and multiplicity. On the other side, the *hakikat* plane with its unicity, concentration and God self-identity. At the end of the poem, these two seas are interrelated through the spiritual journey that the poetic voice which travels along the *ghazal*. Moreover, *hayrân olur* are the words that conclude the first verse and the last, creating not only a circularity to the poem but also a sense of bewilderment and admiration that pervades the poem from beginning to end.

### **3.3. ‘The Law Is a Ship, the Ineffable Absolute Is the Sea’: The Relationship Between the Textual Level (*Seriat*) and the Ineffability (*Hakikat*) and Exotericism (*Zâhir*) and Esoterism (*Bâtinî*)**

In the next poem that I will comment on, Yunus Emre continues to explore the

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<sup>129</sup> Qur’an (28.88, 55:26-27), *Sahih International*

relationship between *şeriat* and *hakikat*, by referring to a metaphor related to the sea. In this case, however, he clarifies the two levels of compromise with koranic revelation by highlighting not only the ontological diversity of the two planes: concentration versus dispersion, unity versus duality, etc. but also the functional difference of the two planes. We see how the level of *şeriat* is described as an aid to the ineffability of *hakikat* :

I am going to describe the ineffable Absolute to you from the point of view of the law;

The law is a ship, the ineffable Absolute is the sea.

The wood of the ship may be perfectly fashioned.

But when the wave rushes, the sea breaks it apart.

*Şer'ile hakikatün vafını eydem sana  
Şerî'at bir gemidür hakikat deryâsıdır*

*Niçe ki muhkemise tahtaları geminün  
Mevc urıcağaz deniz anı uşanasıdır<sup>130</sup>*

In the first verse, the poetic voice expresses the relation between *şeriat* and *hakikat*, from the perspective of the *şeriat*. In this sense, Yunus Emre argues that, even for the Muslim who look at the textual truth (*şeriat*) as the final source of truth, it ultimately remains a limited tool also in a state of precarity. Yunus Emre uses the metaphor of the ship (*gemi*) that has to traverse the ocean (*derya*) to describe the relation between these two dimensions. On the one hand, the image of the boat evokes the technological dimension of the *şeriat* as a human artifact, requiring human intelligence to devise its structure. On the other hand, the poem presents the ocean (*derya*) as the symbol of the ineffable Absolute (*hakikat*) that transcends all limitations.

In contrast to the *şeriat*, which seems to include the effect of human activity, the

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<sup>130</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.29

ocean (*hakikat*) remains an agent uncontrolled by humans. Moreover, the waves on the sea will always have the power to destabilize even the best designed ship. Through this metaphor, Yunus Emre clearly gives priority to the pre-textual ineffable Absolute (*hakikat*) as compared to the textual truth (*şeriat*), which is considered to comprise the legalistic aspects of the revelation. As Saif notices in her reading of the esoteric Islam: 'at the core of this discourse on esoteric exegesis and its legitimacy is navigating the spectrum of *hakk* (the ineffable Absolute) and *şeriat* (the law), the attainment of the former being the ultimate objective of esotericists<sup>131</sup>.

In another part of the Divan, Yunus Emre again proposes the metaphor of the boat and the ocean to give priority to the *hakikat* dimension over the *şeriat* in the following form:

The ineffable Absolute is an ocean; its ship is the law;  
Many do not leave the ship to dive into the ocean.

These observe the law [even] at the gate.  
They do not enter to find out what's inside.

*Hakikat bir denizdür şerî'atdur gemisi  
Çoklar gemiden çıkup denize talmadılar*

*Bular geldi tapuya şerî'at tutdı turur  
İçerü girübeni ne varın bilmediler<sup>132</sup>*

What if the metaphor of the ship refers to *şeriat* as a merely technical and utilitarian dimension of revealed language? Perhaps we can say that Yunus Emre identifies the *şeriat* as an approach to revealed language seen as an artificial vehicle that serves as a means to a certain end. At the same time, the *şeriat* is also in close contact with the sea, the ineffable and more than human dimension of the real. Seen from the perspective of *barzakh* logic, both the ship and the revealed language present an in-

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<sup>131</sup> Saif, L. (2019). What Is Islamic Esotericism?. Online: *Correspondences*, 7 (1) p.21

<sup>132</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.38

between space that is ambiguous. The revealed language is human but at the same time divine like the ship that in part has to be immersed in the sea to cross it.

Unlike the philosophers who, as Shahab Ahmed explains, have always seen reason as the main means to reach the ineffable, making the koranic and revealed language only one of the possible receptacles of it, for Yunus Emre the revealed language is an indispensable tool to sink into that which is beyond language<sup>133</sup>. However, it is not the ultimate goal as is the case with the legalist compromise with revelation. In the end, what Yunus Emre seems to be suggesting is that the greatest challenge is to abandon the ship.

I consider the subordination of the plane of textual truth *şeriat*, an exoteric (*zâhir*) engagement, to the esoteric (*bâtîni*) of the ineffable as one of the main characteristics of Yunus Emre's poetic message as closely related with his conception of language. A conception that clearly distinguishes his esoteric engagement with the koranic revelation from the legalistic tendencies in Islam.

In the exoteric (*zâhir*) approach Truth is conceived as inherent in the koranic text, together with other corpus of textualities like the *hadith* collections, under a technicist and utilitarian thought of language. These corpus of textualities, specially the Qur'an but also some of the *hadith*, are conceived as the words of Allah. At the same time they are translated into human language, Arabic language, becoming the main resource to save humanity, both individually and collectively, from chaos. Those textualities are considered as a form of exemplary language containing the absolute truth to be followed for this soteriological perspective.

On the other hand, Yunus Emre's viewpoint follows an esoteric (*bâtîni*) approach to language and its relationship with the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). By the reading of the previous verses it seems clear how he relativises the dimension of absolute truth of the text *şeriat* by contrasting it with the primacy of *hakikat*. Particularly in the verses where Yunus Emre denounces the inability of the many to jump from the ship

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<sup>133</sup> Ahmed, S. (2016). *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

(*şeriat*) and dive into ineffable Absolute (*hakikat*) points precisely to the insufficiency of a utilitaristic, technician and too human perspective on language.

Again, if we have to speak of a fundamental difference between the Sufi and the legalist approach with respect to textuality and thus with respect to language, we must dwell on the distinction that Yunus Emre proposes between the ship and the sea. The denunciation that Yunus Emre seems to express through these verses is against those who focus on the ship, an image that stands for the exoteric (*zâhir*), without having the courage to dive in. The ship is primarily a technical artifice to overcome the human dimension.

Yunus Emre seems to think that exotericist (*zâhir*) are ultimately advocating no more than navigational rules. These rules in fact allow humanity to traverse the voyage of life until death after which they will be judged according to whether or not they adhere to them. For Yunus Emre, the challenge is different. This challenge is linked to death which makes the traveller aware of the artificiality of the norms themselves. The important thing is to get in touch with the more than human dimension of reality, the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). This experience of the ineffability of the ocean becomes a possibility open to the traveller who has the courage to dive into the sea by abandoning ship and the metaphor refers to those who have an esoteric (*bâtinî*) engagement with revelation. Those who remain attached to the rules of navigation will never be able to enter the depths of the sea.

But how much is the word *bâtin* present in the Divan? We actually find this word in a few poems: 54, 139, 211, 214, 281, 356, 373. I will analyze poem 54 because it is the only one where the word *bâtinî* is contrasted with *zâhir*. It is a poem that seeks to shape the practice of (*vahdet-al-vucud*) or unity of being. The main theme in fact is the presence: absence of the ineffable everywhere. It is by these two words *batin* and *zâhir* that Yunus Emre shapes this contradiction.

Wherever your eyes look, God is absolutely present.

That soul, which has not worshiped the true, gains nothing. It is burdened with debts.

Demolish your appearance; it is the secret of the soul that joins it.

The hidden eye sees the friend; the visible eye is in the wilderness.

*Her kanda ki gözin baka çalap hâzırdur mutlaka  
Şol cân ki tapmadı hak'a assısı yok ziyândadur*

*Eyle sûretüni vîrân cân sırrıdur ana iren  
Bâtın gözidür dost gören zâhir gözi yabandadur<sup>134</sup>*

The first two verses express precisely the idea of the pervasive presence of the divine, expressed here by the Turkish word *çalap*<sup>135</sup>. This presence is a lack for those who do not revere the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). But what is the form of worship to achieve this presence? The secret (*sirr*) lies in destroying all appearances (*sûretüni vîrân*). The esoteric perspective (*bâtın göz*) and the exoteric perspective (*zâhir gözi*) differ precisely in the courage to destroy the appearance of forms.

As we have also seen in previous poems, Yunus Emre's emphasis on the esoteric perspective takes its starting point from this ability to go beyond the form that claims to be identity. The esoteric perspective is disposed to the destruction of form or its abandonment, as in the case of the metaphor of the ship in the previous verses about the relation between *şeriat* and *hakikat*.

Another important element that fails as form is the identification of the source of the words with the words of the poet. The anonymity of Yunus Emre's word, as in all prophetic culture, can only be the initial step in the process of language destruction. Language is revealed insofar as it is anonymous. Indeed, it comes from a source that rightly cannot be identified with a form:

Yûnus did not pronounce these words. The voice of the friend filled his soul.

Blind is the eye of the hypocrite. How then shall I make him see it?

*Yûnus dimedi bu sözi cânâ toldı dost âvâzi*

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<sup>134</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.54

<sup>135</sup> <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/calap> last access 10/09/22

In this verse we see how Yunus Emre's own words are attributed to the voice of his friend (*dost âvâzı*), as a formless source. In these verses it is the eyes of the hypocrite that do not see the esoteric dimension of these words. They merely see their outward and formal dimension without going beyond it. This attitude can relate back to the koranic narrative concerning the curse of Iblis or Şeythan.

Specifically, in one of the many versions of this story narrated in the Qur'an, in surah الأعراف , ayah number 12 we see how Iblis refuses to prostrate himself before the Prophet Adam by claiming his superiority in that he was created from fire and not from earth<sup>137</sup>. This theme is interpreted in Yunus Emre in some detail in a poem where the poet in this case makes himself a spokesman for the words of the Prophet Adam ending with this verse:

Adam, who has been alive for six thousand seven hundred years.

Yunus has spoken about him; he has encapsulated the message.

*Altı bin yidi yüzi yıldan geçen Âdem'i  
Dile getürdi Yûnus söz muhtasâr eyledi*<sup>138</sup>

The prophetic culture taking shape in the Qur'an identifies Adam's superiority in his ability to know names. In other words, his ability to use language. But especially his ability to teach the visible and invisible aspects of reality<sup>139</sup>. This, on the other hand, is what Yunus Emre blames on Iblis. His inability to go beyond the form, to remain grasping at the external, becomes the ground for condemnation. In this sense we can see the centrality of language as a tool that can take us beyond form. But let us see how Yunus Emre criticizes Iblis' formal perspective:

Out of the earth God made the body of Adam.

Satan came to submit to Adam and was ashamed.

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<sup>136</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n. 268

<sup>137</sup> The Qur'an (*Sahih international*), (7,12)

<sup>138</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n. 356

<sup>139</sup> The Qur'an (*Sahih international*) (2.33)

He said: 'I come from fire and light and he from a handful of earth.'

He did not know that he had made a jewel of the interior of Adam.

He saw the *zâhir* and did not look at the *bâtın* of Adam.

He did not know that he had made Adam a prince for the creation.

*Çalap Âdem cismini toprakdan var eyledi*

*Şeytân geldi Âdem'e tapmaga 'âr eyledi*

*Eydür ben oddan nûrdan ol bir avuç toprakdan*

*Bilmedi kim Âdem'ün için gevher eyledi*

*Zâhir gördi Âdem'ün bâtınuna bakmadı*

*Bilmedi kim Âdem'i halka server eyledi<sup>140</sup>*

In these verses we hear the poetic voice's denunciation of the devil. Rightly, his inability not to look with an esoteric perspective (*bâtınuna bakmadı*) makes him incapable of recognizing the role of the prophet Adam. This role is represented by the pearl (*gevher*) that makes him different. The pearl that perhaps represents his ability to know names and to see things from both an apparent and occult point of view.

Thus we can conclude this analysis of the relationship between *şeriat* and *hakikat* on the one hand and his relationship with the other pair of terms *batın* and *zâhir*, which are fundamental to interpreting in its complexity some of the poems in the Divan. A reading of Divan without taking into consideration these word pairs would make it very reductionist to fully understand the grammar of the self in Yunus Emre. Analyzing these word pairs also led us to confirm the importance that Yunus Emre gives to language as on the one hand a quintessential 'form' and on the other hand a tool, in the case of poetic language, that contradictorily seeks to destroy the word through its anonymity and thus lead us to the ineffable that comes before all form.

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<sup>140</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n. 356

### 3.4. 'If You Have Opened the Eye of the Soul, You Will Find the Ineffable Absolute ': *Hakikat* and *Hakk*

In the following poem that we are going to analyze, Yunus Emre relates the *şeriat* to the *hakikat* by adding two more concepts between them. This is the famous metaphor of the four doors, quite common in Sufi literature, where the *şeriat*, *tarikât*, *marifet* and *hakikat* are described as doors with distinct functions<sup>141</sup>. In this case, I will not focus on the relationship between *şeriat* and *hakikat* but on the relationship between *hakk* and *hakikat*.

Both terms *hakikat* and *hakk* refer to something which precedes both ontologically and chronologically the koranic Text. How does Yunus Emre make use of these two words which are so semantically close to each other? What can we understand about his personal engagement with this dimension of the language of the revelation; a dimension that influences his engagement with the Qur'an? To start with, I will argue that Yunus Emre uses the term *hakikat* to differentiate this level from the other 'doors' (*kapı*) to attain proximity to the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). For example, this is how Yunus Emre uses *hakikat* in the following poem:

The first door is the law; it makes the commands and the prohibitions known;  
Every syllable of the Qur'an washes away sins.

The second is the path, one should get ready to become a servant [of God].  
The master forgives the one whose path is right.

The third is knowledge, it opens the eye of the soul and the heart.  
Look at the palace of meaning, its zenith touching the throne.

The fourth is the ineffable Absolute. Do not look to the faults of the nobles;  
Every day is a feast and every night is a night of destiny.

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<sup>141</sup> Kahraman, A. (2017). Yunus Emre Divanı'nda Şeriat, Tarikat, Hakikat ve Marifet (Dört Kapı) *Kocaeli İlahiyat Dergisi*, 1(1). Kocaeli: Kocaeli Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi 1-18.

*Evvel kapu şerî'at emr ü nehyi bildürür  
Yuya günâhlarını her bir Kur'ân hecesi*

*İkincisi tarîkat kulluga bil bağlaya  
Yolu togrı varanı yarlıgaya hocası*

*Üçüncisi ma'rifet cân gönül gözün açar  
Bak ma'nî sarâyına 'Arş'a degin yücesi*

*Dördüncüsü hakikat ere eksük bakmaya  
Bayram ola gündüzi Kadîr ola gicesi<sup>142</sup>*

In this quotation, Yunus Emre uses the term *hakikat* as the fourth door of access to the friendship with God (*vilayet*). By describing the different gateways that can enable the disciple (*mürîd*) to become a friend of God (*veli*), Yunus Emre indicates *hakikat* as the higher stage (*makam*). *Hakikat* corresponds to the ultimate gateway through which proximity to the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) can be achieved. In this way, Yunus Emre connotes *hakikat* with the meaning of a way of walking through the spiritual path or in a more simple way a form of life.

Yunus Emre emphasizes how the disciple (*mürîd*) has different options to reach proximity to the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*), and proposes a plural perspective on how to accomplish this goal. However, the disciple (*mürîd*) will achieve different positions depending on which door he will pass through. Some authors note how from the Balkans to Bengal some Sufis have even contested the harmony between these stages (*makam*) and have taken a critical position against the legalistic mode of being Islamic, which sees the only possible way of engaging with revelation to be by passing through the 'door' of the *şeriat*<sup>143</sup>.

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<sup>142</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n. 351

<sup>143</sup> See Karamustafa, A. (1994). *God's Unruly Friends. Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200 – 1550*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.

Also, as we saw before, Yunus Emre clearly distances himself from this legalistic perspective, but he never specifies whether these four doors are interconnected among themselves. Does Yunus Emre think that it is necessary to open these four doors in a specific sequence? He gives neither a positive nor a negative answer to such a controversial question. From my reading of Yunus Emre's poem, one finds a certain respect for certain practices of the exoteric Islam, especially toward the ritual prayer he refers to by the Persian name *namaz*<sup>144</sup>. What is generally criticized, however, is the attitude of seeing in these worship practices (*ibadet*<sup>145</sup>) an end in itself. Or, even worse, using this outward and formal dimension of Islam to gain earthly power and recognition.

However, the disciple (*mürîd*) who wants to have access to one of these doors cannot do so on his own, especially to reach the highest stage of proximity to the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). Only under the supervision of a guide (*mürşîd*) can the *mürîd* have access to the privileged perspective of *hakikat* and reach proximity with the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). Probably, from this perspective, the basic function of *şeriat* consists of accepting the indispensable function of the guide (*mürşîd*) which can bring the disciple (*mürîd*) to the higher level of engagement with revelation. As we saw before, Yunus Emre refers to the *şeriat* with the metaphor of a boat (*gemi*). While the legalistic mode of being identifies this boat (*gemi*) as the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) of the text, Yunus Emre considers it as the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) of the guide (*mürşîd*).

Here we see again how the difference between the esoteric (*batin*) and exoteric (*zâhir*) dimensions refers to a different conception of language. For *şeriat*, the ineffable Absolute resides in the textual scriptures, Qur'an and *hadith* corpus, which are regarded as the unique vessels of the truth of the divine words. It is the experts in jurisprudence (*fakı*) who extrapolates it from these textual entities. In the esoteric engagement with the language of revelation, on the other hand, the guide, through his or her particular way of life, undertakes a kind of radical exegesis with the text that makes him or herself the same vessel of the ineffable Absolute.

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<sup>144</sup> <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/namaz> last access 10/09/22

<sup>145</sup> <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/ibadet> last access 10/09/22

If Yunus Emre refers to *hakikat* as a stage, a perspective or a point of view (*makam*), how does he use the term *hakk*? Yunus Emre makes an important differentiation between these two terms, which has interesting philosophical consequences. After a close reading of Yunus Emre's Divan, I notice that while *hakikat* has epistemological connotations, *hakk* assumes an ontological nuance. To demonstrate my hypothesis, I will take into consideration the following *beyt*, where the two terms appear together:

If you've become a real lover, come and learn from the book of love,  
If you have opened the eye of the soul, you will find the ineffable Absolute.

*Girçek 'âşık oldunısa gel 'ışk kitâbından okı  
Cân gözini açdunısa hakikat bulasın hak'ı*<sup>146</sup>

The first part of the *beyt* indicates the 'book of love' (*ışk kitabı*) as a source of knowledge for lovers (*aşık*). Yunus Emre uses the metaphor of this 'other' textuality to provide an alternative to the koranic text, as conceived in the legalistic mode. Only the person who reads the 'book of love' (*ışk kitabı*) and opens the eyes of the soul (*can gözünü*) will find the ineffable Absolute (*hak'ı*). In the last part of the *beyt* (*hakikat bulasın hak'ı*), the terms *hakikat* and *hak'ı* are interconnected in such a way as to delineate their reciprocal relation and differentiation.

*Hakikat* refers to the epistemological perspective achieved by the real lover (*girçek aşık*), who can have access to the ineffable Absolute (*hakk'ı*). Here, Yunus Emre uses the term *hakk* to indicate the ontological dimension of the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). Undoubtedly, the epistemological and ontological dimensions are strictly intertwined and reciprocally banded together. Also in the following quotation Yunus Emre expresses the ontological dimension of the ineffable Absolute using the term *hakk*:

You who are looking for the ineffable Absolute night and day, don't you know where it is?

Wherever I am, there it is present, and wherever I look, there it is.

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<sup>146</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n. 410

Do not wish to be separated from the ineffable Absolute, in the heart is its refuge.  
Renounce your own self, it is in your soul inside your body.

*İy dñn ü gün hak isteyen bilmez misin hak kandadur  
Her kandasam anda hâzır kanda bakarsam andadur*

*İstemegil hak'ı irak gönüldedür hakk'a turak  
Sen senligün elden bırak tenden içeri cåndadur<sup>147</sup>*

From these *beyts*, I would like to emphasize not only the ontological connotation of the term *hakk* but also its relationship with the poetic voice of the poem. In the first part of the *beyt*, Yunus Emre announces again the ontological paradox of the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). This seems to be the ultimate 'being', which paradoxically remains hidden to most people.

In the poem, Yunus Emre describes these common persons as the people who are looking day and night for the ineffable Absolute (*iy dñn ü gün hak isteyen bilmez misin hak kandadur*). By speaking in the name of the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*), the poetic voice gives a clear message to those seekers. It claims that its own presence and perspective opens the possibility of meeting with the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). Is this poetic voice speaking in the name of Yunus Emre?

Yunus Emre's words do not belong to him anymore here. He uttered these words from the epistemological perspective of *hakikat* and from this position he can point to the ontological dimension of *hakk*. Where is the place to find proximity to the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*)? The poem indicates the heart (*gönül*) as the territory where the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) takes refuge (*hakk'a turak*). The poetic voice urges the listener to renounce the self (*senligün*), in this case called 'yourselfness'. By distancing from the circumstances of the outer self, the poetical voice traces the path to the encounter with the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) at the deepest level of the soul (*can*).

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<sup>147</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.54

In a contradictory way, in another poem Yunus Emre recognizes the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) as the unachievable foundational source of everything. Having carried out a close reading of Yunus Emre's Divan, let us consider the extent to which Muslim can be engaged with this ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). Yunus Emre's proposal about the necessary relation with this dimension of revelation can be inscribed again in the sphere of a *bâtunî* engagement with the revelation of the Qur'an. In fact, Yunus Emre contemplates a possible connection with the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) via experiential and personal knowledge. In this important extract from the Divan, he sheds light on this aspect:

The ineffable Absolute fills the world but no one knows it;  
Look for it within yourself, it is not separate from you.

You believe in the world and you claim your material subsistence: 'It's mine'.  
Why are you lying, since nothing you say happens?

*Hak cihâna toludur kimsene hakk'ı bilmez  
Anı sen senden iste o senden ayru olmaz*

*Dünyâyı inanursın rızka benümdür dırsın  
Niçün yalan söylersin çün hiç didüğün olmaz*<sup>148</sup>

The first *beyt* enunciates the contradictory side of this engagement with the ineffable Other (*hakk*). On the one hand, the ineffable Other (*hakk*) fills all existence, and on the other hand it is inaccessible. As Saif shows the specificity of the esoteric engagement with the Islamic revelation can reside precisely in the domain of the personal self, what in Yunus Emre is called heart (*gönül*)<sup>149</sup>. The poetic voice explicitly indicates that the territory in which the exploration of the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) should take place is an existential area.

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<sup>148</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C.Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.103

<sup>149</sup> Saif, L. (2019). What Is Islamic Esotericism?. Online: *Correspondences*, 7 (1). P. 49

In this sense, the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) does not belong to the text but is instead grounded in the personal dimension. Who is the person to whom the poem is addressed? The poem refers to a generic 'you' (*sen*) from whom the ineffable Absolute is not separated. However, not every person can be aware of his/her unity with the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*), because one of the major obstacles to this realization dwells in the consideration of the materiality of this world as personal property. Very few are those who can arrive at the point where they are engaged with the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*); and when they do, they become the door of access for the realization of others.

Thanks be to the ineffable Absolute because the friend told us to contemplate the face;

I too opened the eyes of my heart, I saw the absolute king.

Because I saw my ineffable Absolute with the ineffable Absolute I became intimate

Wherever I look, what is manifested, is the ineffable Absolute.

Open is the door of prayer for the friends of the ineffable Absolute;

If you want to be a friend, learn a lesson from the friends.

*Şükür hakk'a kim dost bize eyitdi dost yüzine bak  
Açdum ben de gönlüm gözün sultânımı gördüm mutlak*

*Çünkü gördüm ben hakk'ımı hakk'ıla olmuşam biliş  
Her kancaru bakdumısa hep görünendür cümle hak  
Açuk duvacuk kapısı dostları için ol hakk'un  
Dostı olmak dilerisen dostlardan okı bir sebak<sup>150</sup>*

In the second *beyt* of this poem, the poet explains the process which has enabled him to connect with the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). The poetic voice uses the word *hakk* twice, with two different suffixes. First, with the suffix 'ım' (my ineffable Absolute), indicating a relation of possession and personal engagement with it. The second time,

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<sup>150</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C.Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n. 128

it is used with *hakk 'ila'* (with the ineffable Absolute), highlighting the close connection *with* the it. The poetic voice indicates that the encounter with one's own ineffable Absolute (*hakkım*) becomes an indispensable step towards attaining proximity to the ineffable Absolute (*hakk'ıla*).

Moreover, the poet writes that the friends of the ineffable Absolute (*hakk'un dostları*) operate like a door, without which it is impossible to connect with one's own ineffable Absolute (*hakkım*). Yunus Emre puts the focus on the indispensable encounter between the self and the friends of the ineffable Absolute. It is an encounter between two persons, the disciple (*mürid*) and the guide (*mürşid*). From this relation, the guide (*mürşid*), considered as a friend of God, can educate the *mürid* to connect with his or her own ineffability.

Only few of those among the disciples (*mürid*) are destined to connect completely with their own truth, transforming themselves into friends of the truth and thus becoming a source of enlightenment to other *mürids* as doors of access to the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). Yunus Emre points to this process as the condition for any 'personal revelatory engagement' with the ineffable Absolute ; it is the real goal of the spiritual process of the esoteric mode of being Islamic.

### **3.5. 'The Study and Knowledge of Science Means Knowing Oneself ': Yunus Emre on Experiential Knowledge (*Ilm*) and Its Language Expression**

But if the encounter with the figure of the guide (*mürşid*) is for Yunus Emre a key step in gaining the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*), I would also like to examine carefully a poem that can help us understand the role of knowledge (*ilim*) in Yunus Emre's grammar of the self. I will explore why, for Yunus Emre, knowledge is not a mere accumulation of information, but also a practice of self-inquiry. We will read criticism of the bookish knowledge proposed by some of the erudite scholars of his time and his consequent advice for persons engaged in following the path of knowledge<sup>151</sup>.

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<sup>151</sup> See Chittick, W. C. (2010). *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*. New York: SUNY Press.

You say not to associate with God, a partner and later you just do that.  
Whose advice do you rely on when you take one for two?

Reality and honesty are the foundations of religion and faith;  
when they're not there, what do you build religion with?

*Lâ-şerîkden okursın sonra şerîk katarsın  
Bire iki dimeği kimden fetvâ dutarsın*

*Dîn ü îmân bünyâdı togrulukla gerçeklik  
Ol tamâm olmayıcak neyile dîn çatarsın<sup>152</sup>*

From the beginning of the poem, one can glimpse Yunus Emre's denunciation of a particular conception of knowledge attached to the exterior (*zâhir*) meaning of words. In a polemical way, the poetic voice attacks a hypothetical listener who entrusts his or her knowledge entirely and exclusively to a superficial reading of the Qur'an. However, it is the Qur'an itself, with its invitation not to associate anything with God (*lâ-şerîk*), but to maintain a distance from this narrow conception of knowledge. After all, what is language if not a product of duality? How can it be confused with the true source of knowledge?

The lack of awareness of the dualistic dimension of language is the main complaint that Yunus Emre addresses to the *zâhir* reading of the koranic text. What the poetic voice indicates as the foundational principles of Islam, here the word *din* is used as a synonym for Islam, is something that surpasses the dual nature of the word<sup>153</sup>. Honesty (*doğruluk*) and reality (*gerçek*) are the sources of knowledge (*ilim*) that go beyond the duality of the words.

If we look at the etymology of these two Turkish terms we can see how the word *doğru*, which I translated as 'honesty', refers to the semantic field of being born or

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<sup>152</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C.Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n. 248

<sup>153</sup> For this topic I refer to the reading of Karamustafa, A. T. (2017). 16. Islamic Dîn as an Alternative to Western Models of 'Religion'. In *Religion, Theory, Critique*. New York: Columbia University Press (pp. 163-172).

passing from one point to another<sup>154</sup>. *Gerçek* is a Turkish term close to the Arabic word *tahqiq*, which we could translate as a 'realization of the truth'. In both concepts we can recognize an element of union with something that goes beyond. Words are only a vehicle that allows the passage to another horizon of meaning, but they must not be confused with either the goal or the source. Here we return to the theme of the opposition between *bâtın* and *zâhir* that we analyzed earlier with the metaphor of the ship (*gemi*) and the ocean (*deniz*).

God commanded it and the Qur'an came down from heaven;  
why don't you [really] relate from it instead of reciting it parrot fashion?

You read the grammatical and formal aspects of the book,  
You have no fear or hope, you are like a Tatar.

The study and knowledge of science means knowing oneself.  
So if you don't know yourself, you are worse than an animal.

*Çün Kur'ân gökden indi anı Allâh buyurdu  
Andan haber virsene hâ kitâbdan ötersin*

*Okursın tasnif kitâb niçe binâ vü i'râb  
Havf ü recâ sende yok eyle ki bir Tatar'sın*

*'İlm okumak bilmeklik kendözini bilmekdür  
Pes kendözün bilmezsen bir hayvândan betersin<sup>155</sup>*

The poetic voice proceeds by acknowledging the Revelatory character of the koranic Text as descended from Heaven (*gökden*), and as the word of God (*Allah*). Therefore, the Qur'an is indeed a revealed word but without losing its complete character; therefore, in a certain sense, it doesn't lose its dualism. This aspect of the koranic word as created or uncreated has given rise to many debates in the history of

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<sup>154</sup> <http://www.lugatim.com/s/DO%C4%9ERU> last access 10/09/22

<sup>155</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n. 248

Islamic thought. Above all, the Mutazilites defended the idea of the created nature of the Qur'an<sup>156</sup>. However, Yunus Emre is not interested in approaching the controversy in theological terms.

In the poem we find a profound criticism toward the general engagement with the Qur'an. On the one hand there are those who drone the text like parrots (*hâ kitâban ötersin*) and on the other hand those who destroy the profound meaning of the text (*Tatar*). The *Tatar* is the one who is chained to the external aspect of the text, represented here by its grammatical analysis.

*Bina*<sup>157</sup> and *I'rab*<sup>158</sup> are parts of the classical treatises of the Arabic language that have always had a didactic purpose in creating understanding of the koranic language. Here the poetic voice seems to denounce the appropriation and consequent destruction of the wisdom of the Qur'an by those who study only the formal aspect of the language. In both cases what seems to be missing from this type of reading is the recognition of the text as revealed. Both those who concentrate on pure recitation and those who try to investigate the grammatical aspects of the text fail to penetrate the ambivalent nature of the koranic word, a word that is more than human.

The last *beyt* of the quote seems to point out that the knowing oneself (*kendözini bilmek*) is what leads to the humanization process. Here the philosophical anthropology of Yunus Emre clearly appears. Bare life is not synonymous with humanity. Conversely, those who do not take responsibility for knowing themselves miss the opportunity to attain the human form of life. The poetic voice, severely considers those people worse than animals. The mere acquisition of notions related to the external aspects of the revealed text does not save the human being from the bare life. On the contrary, it is the gift of self-recognition and self-inquiry that elevates humans to a level of profound humanity.

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<sup>156</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mutazilah> last access 09/10/22

<sup>157</sup> <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/bina> last access 09/10/22

<sup>158</sup> <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/irabul-kuran> last access 09/10/22

The meaning of studying science lies in drawing a lesson.

Since you are unaware of the lesson, you are shooting in the dark.

Mustafa collected twelve thousand maxims.

Although you have listened to them, you still sell words with interpretations.

You pray in hypocrisy, with many sins and few meritorious works.

Listen to where the word leads, you will lie in hell.

*‘İlm okımak ma ‘nîsi ‘ibret anlamagiçün  
Çün ‘ibretten degülsin görmedin taş atarsın*

*On iki bin hadîsi cem‘ eyledi Mustafâ  
Anı işitdün meger şerh ile söz satarsın*

*Kılursın riyâ namâz yazugun çok hayrun az  
Dinle neye varur söz Cehennem'de yatarsın<sup>159</sup>*

The poem highlights the double nature of knowledge. Knowing means learning the lesson (*ibret*) from what one learns and not attaching oneself to the outward appearance of what one reads. In the second case, in fact, knowledge is seen as an acquisition of power that affects not only those who take pride in it themselves but also those around them. This is evidently a criticism of a certain type of cultural elite, belonging to the legalistic mode of being Islamic. Such people claim to have obtained knowledge through the study of the classical texts of the religious canon, and consider themselves superior from a moral point of view.

The poetic voice becomes more and more cutting and is directed at a hypothetical scholar of the law, and at the consequent legalistic mode of being Islamic. There is a reminder that the knowledge of the whole corpus of *hadith* does not imply the achievement of any kind of spiritual goal. Instead of learning to know oneself by

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<sup>159</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C.Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n. 248

means of the multitude of words of wisdom, the jurist does nothing but interpret them in a superficial way to make economic profit.

The denunciation of this type of formalism does not only concern knowledge through reading but also the ritualistic and moral aspects of the hypothetical scholar. Despite the respect for the rituals observed/seen in such a person, Yunus Emre does not find in these acts an authentic form of life, but an existence that is really in hell (*cehennem*). This hell is due to a lack of awareness of the goal that the Word indicates.

You give to the people legal responses and so why don't you follow them?

You have a lot of science but no good deeds; alas, you sink into sin.

You are an expert in legal matters; I am poor in spirit and have no anger against you.

If you come with integrity, you might even gain something from us.

Are you saying that the pre-established order has become something else?

You can't do it, master, you are confused with worries.

Poor Yunus utters these words from the world of love.

Do not say what you do not know, add something yourself.

*Halkı fetvâ virürsin yâ sen niçün dutmazsın  
İlmün var 'amelün yok hâ günâha batarsın*

*Sen fakîhsün ben fakîr sana tanumuz yokdur  
İhlâsıla gelürsen bizden nesne ütersin*

*Bu düzilen tertîbi ayruksıdı mı dirsın  
Başaramazsın hâce endîşeden yitersin  
Yûnus miskîn bu sözi 'ışk 'âleminden söyler  
Dime bilmedin ana kendözünden katarsın<sup>160</sup>*

The poem continues with a harsh criticism of the elite of the legal mode of being

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<sup>160</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n. 248

Islamic and with a clear accusation of hypocrisy. Their bookish knowledge has no effect on their actions (*amel*) which remain sinful (*günah*). Despite giving moral exhortations (*fetva*) to the people (*halk*), they themselves are not capable of respecting what they preach as morally correct behaviour.

At the end of the poem, the word *fakih* appears to refer to this juristic elite. The Turkish term *fakih* comes from the arabic term *faqih*, which refers to the practitioner of the traditional discipline of jurisprudence in Islam. In the formative period of the history of the Islamic civilization, this discipline played a crucial role in the formation of what Talal Asad defines as the traditional normative discourse of Islam<sup>161</sup>. The architects of these discourses are the jurists (*fuqaha*) who used specific technologies to create norms based on the textual dimension of revelation (Qur'an and *hadith* corpus).

As Ahmed points out, by the end of the 13th century, the main disputes about the normative approaches to the revelation had been resolved to reach a general consensus with the formation of the principal schools of law (مذاهب). What tone does Yunus Emre use to refer to the *fakih* in this *beyt*? This *beyt* demonstrates the irony of the poet.<sup>162</sup> The poetical voice humorously uses the proximity of sound between the word *fakih* (jurist) and *fakir* (indigent) to create a contrast between the Legalistic and the sufi modes of being Islamic. Here Yunus Emre succeeds in conveying one of the deepest tensions between an esoteric and exoteric engagement with the revelation in a very playful manner, making use of some sound games exactly like those that Keshavarz identified in Rûmî's poetry<sup>163</sup>.

*Fakir*, in contrast with *fakih*, refers to the person who has lost any sense of property in this world (*dünya*) and has achieved proximity with the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). The *fakir* (indigent person) remains the ontological and ethical model of the Sufi

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<sup>161</sup> For more on this topic, see Asad, T., (2009). The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam. *Qui Parle*. Durham: Duke University Press 17(2), pp.1-30.

<sup>162</sup> As Ahmed notices jokes and irony tends to be marginalized in the mainstream scholarly approach to Islamicate civilization. See Ahmed, S. (2016). *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. P. 321

<sup>163</sup> Keshavarz, F. (1998). *Reading Mystical Lyric: The Case of Jalal al-Din Rumi*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, .pp. 100-118

mode of being Islamic. Here Yunus Emre succeeds in conveying one of the deepest tensions between an esoteric and exoteric engagement with the revelation in a very playful manner, making use of some sound games exactly like those that Keshavarz identified in Rûmî's poetry. One of the most powerful metaphors which poetically expresses this is the moth.<sup>164</sup> This metaphor is widespread in the literary works of Sufi Islam throughout its history.

The moth experiences annihilation by the fire to which it feels attraction. This constitutes one of the main images of the *fakir* or *miskin* (indigent person). And so in our *beyt*, the poetic voice expresses itself in these terms and endows the indigent person with a sense of superiority in relation to the *fakih* (jurist). Contrasting with the idea that the jurist tended to feel superior to the others, the poetic voice here expresses its superiority to the legalistic discourses. Under conditions of trust and respect (*ihlas*), the jurist (*fakih*) can even benefit from the teaching of the Sufi (*fakir*), who holds a closer position to the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*).

In this negotiation regarding the status of truth of knowledge, the poetic voice denounces the inability of the juridical approach to give meaningful answers. Despite the excuse of a progressive corruption of values, the legalistic way of being Islamic does not find an answer to the problems of society. Where can the answers come from? In the last *beyt* it is clear that the answers come through words from the realm of love (*işk*). Yunus Emre prays to those who do not know this kingdom to be silent. He also begs to add something from his own spiritual experience instead of repeating formulas in a superficial way.

Starting from this poem, we can say that for Yunus Emre knowledge is something that passes through the Word but transcends it, due to the fact that words have a pharmacological nature. *Pharmakon*<sup>165</sup>, in the ancient Greek language and philosophy, is something that can heal us and at the same time poison us. I think that Yunus Emre sees in the Word a powerful means of liberation and therefore access to

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<sup>164</sup> Seyed-Gohrab, A. A. (2012). Waxing Eloquent: The Masterful Variations on Candle Metaphors in the Poetry of Hâfiz and his Predecessors. In *Metaphor and Imagery in Persian Poetry* (pp. 81-123). Leiden: E.J. Brill.

<sup>165</sup> Derrida, J. (2014). Plato's Pharmacy. In *Tragedy* (pp. 338-360). London & New York: Routledge.

knowledge as well as, on the other hand, an instrument of imprisonment. This poem is an open denunciation of those who take the divine word as poison instead of as a bridge that leads to the dimension of profound knowledge. Unequivocally, the koranic text is, for Yunus Emre, a vehicle to reach this ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) rather than the end of the quest.

### 3.6. 'Whatever the Heart Says When It Speaks to the Friend Is the Qur'an': Love (*Aşk*) and the Heart (*Gönül*)

I would like to conclude this chapter on the grammar of self in Yunus Emre with an analysis of a poem that summarizes the main aspects I have touched on so far. The poem starts with a reference to the source of love (*işk*) and the function of the Prophet Muhammed:

He who deposits love in the soul of the lover is this sublime God.  
In my soul I have found him; he is even the soul for souls.

Mustafâ is the friend we love; from him come affinity and loyalty.  
His sincerity is absolute, his heart is purity, he is the faith for us.

*'Âşık cânına 'ışk koyan ol bir yüce Sübhân'ımış  
Cânım içinde bulmuşam cânlara dahı cânımış*

*Sevdük yâridür Mustafâ andan ola meyl ü vefâ  
Sıdkı bütün gönli safâ hem bize ol îmânımış<sup>166</sup>*

In the first *beyt*, the poetical voice claims that the source of love (*aşk*) is the absolute, here identified with the term the most glorious (*yüce Şubhan*). This source, once faced, manifests itself as the soul of souls (*cânlara dahı cânımış*). In the second *beyt*, Yunus Emre presents the figure of the Prophet Muhammed as the beloved friend (*sevdük yâri*) from whom we can learn affinity and loyalty (*meyl ü vefâ*). The Prophet Muhammed's sincerity can be considered as the source of faith (*îmânımış*).

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<sup>166</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.121

Moreover, these first two *beyt* serve as a preamble to go deep into Yunus Emre's personal experience of language in his poetic production. Here the Prophet Muhammed is presented as an epigone of prophetic culture; a culture that recognizes in revealed language an absolute centrality in its metaphysical framework. In this context, the experience of the ineffable primarily passes through an experience of another language, precisely the revealed language. Indeed, immediately after this recognition of the Prophet Muhammed's position, Yunus Emre begins to refer to his language in these terms:

The words of this language is for the people [while] the secret of the friend is in the heart.

Whatever the heart says when it speaks to the friend, is the Qur'an.

For a moment I leaned over this heart, I looked at this secret page.

Now I have exposed my secret to the people, it is the bottomless ocean.

*Halk içindir bu dil sözi gönüldedir dostun râzi  
Gönül dosta söylediği ne dir ise Kur'an'ımış*

*Bir dem gönüle kayıkum ol gizli varaka bakdum  
Uş sırrımı halka çakdum bir pâyânsuz 'ummânımış'<sup>167</sup>*

To begin with, we can argue that Yunus Emre's thoughts on language, in other words his philosophical intensity as we will see in the next chapter, recognizes language as a complex and ambiguous phenomenon. The dimension of language can change in relation to who receives the message. One of the main theses that we can extrapolate from these verses consists of the fact that language includes different levels of profundity; some aspects of language, in this case poetical language, remain external (*zâhir*) and accessible to the general people (*halk*).

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<sup>167</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.121

This is why Yunus Emre, referring to his own poetical production, claims that to the general people (*halk*) his poetical language is nothing more than words (*halk içindir bu dil sözi*). However, this is only the external (*zâhir*) and limited dimension of his poetical production. The inner (*bâtınî*) dimension has another function that does not arrive to the general people (*halk*) and which resides in the deepness of the self: the heart (*gönül*). We have already seen how the metaphor of the heart (*gönül*) represents the deep level of the self.

In fact, there is a connection between the invisibility of the heart as an organ, and the invisibility of the most profound layers of personality. If for the general people (*halk*) Yunus Emre's language is merely a combination of words, in the inner dimension it corresponds to a praising of God, here identified as the friend (*dostun râzı*). In this example, Yunus Emre follows the same metaphysical conception of İbnü'l-Arabî, with a coexistence of two dimensions of reality which are in a continuous process of reciprocal 'constriction' (*taskhir*).

These two dimensions be described in the following terms: on the one hand the dimension of *tanzih*, where everything is run by an unnameable one, and on the other hand, *tashbih*, in which the linguistic realm defines any empirical and rational particular of the reality in its linguistic individuality. To İbnü'l-Arabî, as well as to Yunus Emre, the reality should be considered in the coexistence of these two contradictory dimensions. Exactly as the aspect of exteriority (*zâhir*) and interiority (*bâtın*), the self manifestation of God passes by both *tanzih* and *tashbih*. The extent to which a person can approach the reality on the side of its undefined and incommunicable unicity (*tanzih*) or on the side of its definable and communicable phenomenality (*tashbih*) depends on his or her level of knowledge<sup>168</sup>.

In the previous quotation, Yunus Emre points out how, for the general people (*halk*), the dimension of his words does not go beyond the linguistically definable realm, and that they are merely pure *tashbih*. On the contrary, what is the relation between the *tanzih* dimension of language and the language of revelation? Here, Yunus

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<sup>168</sup> See Chittick, W. C. (2010). *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*. New York: SUNY Press. and Almond, I. (2004). *Sufism and Deconstruction: A Comparative Study of Derrida and Ibn'Arabi*. London & New York: Routledge.

Emre's verses become quite controversial, especially for the eyes and ears of a person, with the tendency to be engaged with revelation under the legalistic mode of being Islamic.

In fact, for the legalistic mode of being Islamic the koranic language cannot be compared with other forms of language and it is in itself the unique self-manifestation of the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). On the contrary, to Yunus Emre, whatever the heart, as the deepest element of the self, says to the friend, can be considered as revealed text (*gönül dosta söylediği ne dir ise Kur'an'ımı*). Once again, Yunus Emre's thought about language deconstructs the idea that the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) resides exclusively in the text. Here Yunus Emre considers every kind of text, if uttered from the heart (*gönül*), as a revealed text and, in this sense, under a regime of the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) comparable to the Qur'an.

It is interesting to notice how this heart (*gönül*) does not belong to a single person. My hypothesis is that this inner dimension excludes the identification with someone and for this reason, in all the poem, the heart (*gönül*) does not receive any suffix which could indicate the possessive case in Turkish. How can the dimension of *tanzih* be personalized if it affirms and negates the linguistic individuality of the reality? Here, Yunus Emre presents his journey and how he has suddenly made contact with this inner heart (*bir dem gönüle kayıkdum*). From this perspective he can see the hidden paper (*gizli varaka*) which becomes the source of his own poetical language.

Again following the connection between the koranic revelation and Yunus Emre's self-referential discourse on his own source of inspiration we can relate this hidden paper (*gizli varaka*) to the Preserved Tablet (*al lawh mahfooz*). The Preserved Tablet corresponds to the ideal model of inspiration for the prophet Muhammed, an imaginary recipient where everything is written and from which the Qur'an is created ( .<sup>169</sup> فِي لَوْحٍ مَّحْفُوظٍ )

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<sup>169</sup>The Qur'an (*Sahih international*) 85, 21-22

What did Yunus Emre learn from his poetical inspired language? From a language which comes from the heart (*gönül*) and can be compared with koranic revelation? However, the normal people (*halk*) do not understand his words. He wants to reveal his secret (*uş sırrımı halka çakdum*) and he claims the infinity of the ocean (*bir pâyânsuz 'ummânımış*) as the space in which to plunge and to find oneself. The image of the ocean (*'ummân*) indicates the profundity of the space where to find the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) and its infinity (*pâyânsuz*) refers to the impossibility of reaching a stable position within.

### 3.7. Conclusion

In this chapter we have tried to highlight how Yunus Emre's form of life is reflected in his poetic work, starting with concepts that we have not found in the secondary literature on Yunus Emre so far. In particular, we paid attention to the role of contradictions in the Divan and tried to interpret these contradictions from a *barzakh* logic. As mentioned earlier, this methodological approach, promoted by scholars such as miriam cooke and Bruce Lawrence<sup>170</sup>, starts from the conviction that binary oppositions are somehow reductive and that it is right to start from them in order to relate different planes of interpretation.

Yunus Emre's poetry seems inherently to require such an approach, being a language that seeks to take to its limits, trying to enact form to that which form prefigures. For this it needs to enact what Sells calls the strategies of apophatic language to try to reveal the ineffable in a performative way. We are thus faced with a poetic gesture that gives form to an existential linguistic plan that we have decided to call a grammar of the self.

A grammar of the self that not only acts as a barrier between the poet's life and work, relates and excludes them from each other but, at the same time includes in itself contradictory elements. See for example the juxtaposition between words such as

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<sup>170</sup> Lawrence, B. B. (2021). *Islamicate Cosmopolitan Spirit* (Vol. 20). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, cooke, m. (2014) *Tribal Modern: Branding New Nations in the Arab Gulf*. Berkeley: University of California Press and Lawrence B.B. (2015) *Who Is Allah?*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press p. 40–45

*şeriat:hakikat* or *bâtın:zâhir*. These are binary pairs that put the whole of Yunus Emre's poetic work in tension, giving rise to an incessant reflection on the poet's words and their relation to the words of the Qur'an.

These juxtapositions also make explicit the complexity of the knowledge dimension of the Divan. Indeed, considering these pairs of terms highlights how Yunus Emre respects different epistemological approaches regarding the textuality of the Qur'an and *hadith* corpus. What he continuously criticizes, however, is starting from the more external aspects of these textualities in order to draw power from a moral and political standpoint.

If we think about Saif's work and its categorization to esoteric engagement in Islamicate we find that certainly Yunus Emre's poetry tends to propose a type of esotericism that starts from an individual exegesis and of a more revelatory than intellectual sort<sup>171</sup>. In Yunus we find elements of the more intellectualistic esotericism of an Ibn Arabinian tenor but these elements are certainly less present than those of the revelatory style. The cognitive mode seems more entrusted to the poetic experience that draws Yunus Emre onto a prelinguistic revelatory plane that is explicated through the metaphor of love. As we shall see in the conclusion of my thesis we are faced with another binary pair that relates love to poetic language.

This metaphor of love is accompanied by another key term which is *hayrân*. This term refers to a kind of amazement that assails the poet. Astonishment that encompasses the experience of poetic inspiration, the inability to grasp the ineffable and his inadequacy when confronted with it. This lack, however, which is related to the idea of ontological poverty (*fakir*), becomes an impulse to seek in the poetic endeavor an answer.

It is not unlike the motif Keshavarz finds in Rûmî's poetry when she says that the poetic gesture of the poet is meant to bring joyfulness to the drama of the finitude of human experience and its inadequacy<sup>172</sup>. The transformation of a funeral, the life of

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<sup>171</sup> Saif, L. (2019). What Is Islamic Esotericism?. Online: *Correspondences*, 7 (1) p.47

<sup>172</sup> Keshavarz, F. (1998). *Reading Mystical Lyric: The Case of Jalal al-Din Rumi*.

human beings, into a celebration where the beauty of the poetic word or dance, particularly in Rûmî's case, can still connect a person with the ineffable.



## CHAPTER 4

# YUNUS EMRE'S PHILOSOPHICAL INTENSITY AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE PROPHETIC CULTURE

### 4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I would like to take into consideration the question of language in Yunus Emre's works from a philosophical perspective. While Yunus Emre was not a philosopher, I think that his Divan undoubtedly presents a philosophical intensity which concerns different topics in general, and language in particular. By philosophical intensity, I refer to Giorgio Agamben's usage which he explained as follows:

*It is my conviction that philosophy is not a discipline of which one can define a subject and boundaries (as Gilles Deleuze attempted to do) or, as it occurs in universities, pretend to trace a linear and hopefully progressive history. Philosophy isn't an essence, but an intensity that can suddenly give life to any field: art, religion, economics, poetry, passion, love, even boredom. It resembles something more like the wind or the clouds or a storm: like these, it suddenly produces, shakes, transforms and even destroys the produced place, but just as unpredictably, it passes and disappears.<sup>173</sup>*

For sure, Yunus Emre's Divan cannot be considered a text within the boundaries of philosophy as a discipline like, for example, Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina or Ibn Rushd's works; however it is imbued with philosophical intensity which permeates its aesthetics, love and language's conception. As Ahmed shows, Muslim have a repertoire of plural ways for engaging with the revelation. The sufi and the philosophical modes of being islamic present different features in their commitment to it. In this way, Ahmed's distinction focuses on philosophy as a discipline and its specific way of being connected to the revelation through a pre-textual, textual and con-textual engagement from the heritage of the Greek philosophers, especially Plato and Aristotle, the Philosophical mode of being islamic has conceived the pre-textual

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<sup>173</sup> <https://jcrt.org/religioustheory/2017/02/06/philosophy-as-interdisciplinary-intensity-an-interview-with-giorgio-agamben-antonio-gnolioido-govrin/> last access 23/10/22

engagement with the revelation under the concept of reason which pervades every aspect of reality. Consequently, reason precedes the text and the philosophers can have access to it without the mediation of the revealed words of the Qur'an<sup>174</sup>.

As we saw before, this conception differs from Yunus Emre's personal engagement with revelation; Yunus Emre's grammar of the self follows the esoteric commitment with revelation which includes the mediation of the revealed text and the indispensable connection with a guide (*mürşid*). Yunus Emre claims the importance of the connection with the guide (*mürşid*) in order to achieve the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*), a connection that is based (as we will see later), on the language relation (*sohbet*) between the guide and the disciple (*mürşid* and *mürid*).

Going back to the previous quote, Agamben claims that defining philosophical intensity remains more difficult than defining philosophy as a discipline or, in our case, a mode of being engaged with the revelation, due to its transitory character. Philosophy as intensity produces effects and can contaminate any field. I will try to analyze these influences in Yunus Emre's Divan, paying special attention to the question of language. Why could language be a crucial point in investigating Yunus Emre's philosophical intensity? To what extent does Yunus Emre think about language? Why does Yunus Emre's poetry insist on the source of his poetry? Is language a mere event to describe the world? To what extent can Yunus Emre's conception of language be ascribed to a magical cosmology? What is the role of *melâmiyye*' intensity in Yunus Emre's thought about forms and speech? Words like 'language' (*dil*), and 'words' (*sözler* or *keleci*) appear several times in Yunus Emre's poetical production and they are portrayed as important elements of human beings' spiritual journey. In his poetry, Yunus Emre explicitly presents his own thoughts about language and the source of his poetical words crossing the intensities between poetry and philosophy.

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<sup>174</sup> Ahmed, S. (2016). *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. pp. 256-257

#### 4.2. 'Love Has Rendered Yunus Speechless, for Yunus It Is Lawful to Shed Blood for Love': Yunus Emre and the Speech Event

If I have spoken of philosophical intensity starting from a definition by Agamben, this is partly because some of the Italian philosopher's thoughts on language may be useful for understanding some aspects of Yunus Emre's own conception of language. For some scholars of Agamben's philosophy, the linguistic dimension represents a central aspect of his philosophical proposal, even if this has frequently been underestimated due to the greater attention that the political Agamben has received in recent years<sup>175</sup>. Personally, I am also of the opinion that the philosophy of language is a central part of Agamben's thought and, above all, with regard to poetic language and its relationship with philosophy, original ideas can be found to open up new horizons of interpretation with respect to poetic texts from various epochs and cultures.

Agamben has presented his reflections on language and the importance of reconciliation between philosophy and poetry in several of his works. If we were to summarize the complexity of his point of view, we could say that Agamben, in accordance with Heidegger, sees language as a dimension with an ontological precedence over the subject. Language potentially precedes the use humans can make of it, as we can read in the following lines:

*But once stripped of all extra-linguistic meaning and constituted as a subject of enunciation, the subject discovers that he has had access not so much to a possibility of speaking as to an impossibility of speaking or, rather, that he has had access to being always already anticipated by a glossolalic potentiality over which he has neither control nor mastery.*<sup>176</sup>

In this quotation, Agamben highlights an intriguing dynamic. Firstly, we read how the linguistic plane in which the subject of enunciation handles itself is produced by a movement of spoliation. The flesh-and-blood subject must rid itself of its extra-linguistic traits to become a subject of enunciation and in this way speak for itself. This act of liberation from the extra-linguistic elements that should give the authority

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<sup>175</sup> Watkin, W. (2010). *The literary Agamben: Adventures in Logopoiesis*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, p.2

<sup>176</sup> Ivi, p.30-31

to enunciate a discourse based on subjectivity ascertains, however, to be an impossibility of speech. The linguistic subject finds itself anticipated by a potentiality of speech that determines it mercilessly. In other words, this encounter with a linguistic dimension that precedes the enunciative subject constitutes, for Agamben, the speech event, an event of language in its primordial dimension.

Poetry tries to react to this event with words that of course are incapable to answer this call. Poetic language gives form to the unruly dimension of speech and it paradoxically becomes the bearer. The subject enunciation moves in a double direction. On the one hand, it loses the extralinguistic elements by the use of shifters, words like pronouns. These are linguistic technologies to communicate meaning to other human beings. generalizing identities in common words. For example the pronoun 'I' is a common word that every subject of enunciation can use in order to talk about itself.

On the other hand, the subject of enunciation finds itself in front of the infinite potentiality sounds that are not translatable into the limited language range of possibilities that any human language provides. This is why in the use of any language we experience a limitation of a primordial language that remains always partially unexpressed. In this sense, the linguistic answer to the event of this primordial language remains unsatisfactory.

What in Agamben's secular conception comes to indicate the intermediary forces between this chaotic linguistic vitality and the domesticated sounds of poetic language are the muses. Agamben calls this experience poetic dictation. The problem lies in the fact that when the poet puts into words the inspiration coming from the muses, inevitably s/he kills them at the same moment in which the speech is uttered or written down. The muses, transformed into the poetic word, lose their identity and die. In this sense, poetry can recount and recall what cannot be said or remembered: the speechlessness of a direct experience of language *per se*.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Watkin, W. (2010). *The literary Agamben: Adventures in Logopoiesis*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, p.132

This perspective on poetry as a desperate gesture that reacts to the impossibility of an experience of language for its own sake can help us open a new key to reading Yunus Emre's poetry. What if his constant reflection on his own words depends precisely on an awareness that the experience of language *per se* remains untranslatable but must be witnessed at the same time? And to be even more radical, what if his experience of transcendence is not precisely the experience of language *per se*, which can only be partially exposed through the rhythmicity of poetry? Let's listen to Yunus Emre's words to look for answers:

My dear friends, I cannot say where my soul has plunged.

My tongue cannot describe who has taken possession of my heart.

My heart is overflowing, my tongue does not contain it, the lover is the one who understands this condition.

Love has submerged many in its flood, one cannot figure out what has occurred.

Concerning those who from love know messages, suffused with the suffering of love  
Do not find fault with the laughter of those whose unbelief is faith.

*İy yârenler eydimezem cânım neye taldugını  
Dilile vasf idemezem gönlümi kim aldugını*

*Gönlüm tolı sıgmaz dile 'âşıkdur ol kim hâl bile  
'İşk niçeyi virdi sile anlayamaz n'oldugını*

*'İşkdan haber bilenlerin 'ışk derdile tolanların  
Küfri îmân olanların 'ayıblaman güldüğünü'<sup>178</sup>*

First of all, I would like to point out how the four verbs of the first two *beyt*, 'I cannot say' (*eydimezem*), 'I cannot describe' (*vasf idemezem*) 'it does not contain' (*tolı sıgmaz*) 'one cannot figure out' (*anlayamaz*) are all negative form which make

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<sup>178</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.390

explicit the limitations of language. It seems that Yunus Emre wants to emphasize the impossibility of remaining faithful through poetic language to his own poet's source of inspiration. However, the inability to express what cannot be put into words must still be shared with his companions of journey (*iy yârenler*). It cannot remain an individual experience, but needs to be interchanged with those who can understand it.

We can find a correspondence between what Yunus Emre describes in this poem and Agamben's philosophy of poetry. However, differently from Agamben's perspective, Yunus Emre emphasizes the communitarian dimension of the poetic gesture. In fact, he addresses his fellow travelers, other people who have had the same experience. Moreover, the metaphor that is used to talk about this encounter with a language that precedes words is the metaphor of love. We can interpret the depersonalization of the subject and the encounter with the linguistic universe that precedes words as one of the aspects that can describe the experience of love not only in Yunus Emre, but throughout all the *aşk mezhebi*.

The poet experiences the suffering of love (*'ışk derdile tolanlarun*) because he cannot convey what happened to him through words. It provokes confusion and misunderstanding. The suffering of love springs from an awareness of the gap between the poet's words and the experience itself. In this sense we can read an implicit reference to a type of language that is more-than-human language.<sup>179</sup> A language that can only be translated into human language with an approximation that implies a negation. In this way, poetic language becomes the bearer of a message that surpasses it. It recalls another metaphysical plane that goes beyond the human.

Crying and laughing, living and d for the lover.

For him [the lover], wrath and grace are one; he is not aware that he is distressed

Love has rendered Yunus speechless. It is lawful for love to shed Yunus's blood.

Let him throw his being underfoot [so that] he does not experience separation.

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<sup>179</sup> This term was coined by David Abram in Abram, D. (2012). *The Spell of the Sensual: Perception and Language in a More Than Human World*. New York: Vintage.

*Ağlamak gülmek 'âşıkla dirilmek ölmek 'âşıkla  
Kahırla lutfi bir bilir bilmez melûl olduğunu*

*'İşk Yûnus'ı eyledi lâl Yûnus kanı 'ışka helâl  
Kon varın itsün pâyimâl görmesün ayrılduğın'<sup>180</sup>*

In the first *beyt* of this quotation we return to read several pairs of opposite terms that remind us of the concept of apophatic language proposed by Sells. Crying (*ağlamak*) or laughing (*gülmek*), living (*dirilmek*) or dying (*ölmek*), pleasures (*lutfi*) or difficulties (*kahır*) are in close relation for the lover, the one who has experienced the paradox of the unity of existence and is aware of the possibility of the continuous identity shift. Sells speaks of an aporetic meditation that highlights the singularity of what precedes form through a perpetual transformation of opposites. In this way duality is not denied but becomes the force that leads to fusion and the continuous leap of a new form<sup>181</sup>.

The poem ends with the affirmation that the poet has been left speechless and can only abandon his presence beneath his feet. In an extremely performative way, it is as if Yunus Emre is asking the reader to end his words by leaving an emptiness that can only be filled by another experience of love, that the addressee could live in his or her own life. In this sense we can read the poem as an invitation to the experience of love, which must be implemented by the receiver of the poetic word. A practice very similar to the one Keshavarz describes in the poetic work of Rûmî, who sometimes interrupts his poem so that the addressee can complete it with his own words or experiences.<sup>182</sup>

The ending shows us how even poetic language has obvious limitations for Yunus Emre. Also for Yunus Emre, as for Agamben, the process of poetic diction remains a betrayal to the linguistic event that precedes it. Yunus Emre, too, is aware that he is

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<sup>180</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.390

<sup>181</sup> Sells, M. A. (1994). *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press p.112

<sup>182</sup> Keshavarz, F. (1998). *Reading Mystical Lyric: The Case of Jalal al-Din Rumi*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press., p.59

betraying his muses and for this he must react in some way. Perhaps, in this sense putting one's own being underfoot and a form of awareness of these limitations to return to the unity of prelinguistic experience where everything is but one.

#### **4.3. 'Without Ears One Must Listen to the Announcements of the Tongue-Less': Yunus Emre and the Magic Cosmology**

Yunus Emre's philosophical intensity about language concerns its metaphysical dimension. By metaphysical dimension, I mean Yunus Emre's conception of reality and its consequences. As Federico Campagna shows in his *Technic and Magic, the reconstruction of Reality*<sup>183</sup>, in order to understand the metaphysical perspective of a thought it is crucial to understand the articulation through three concepts: reality, essence and existence<sup>184</sup>. Ibn Sina (Avicenna) was the first author who presented these concepts in detail and, without a doubt, the first to influence the esotericism in Islam, the context in which Yunus Emre produced his poetry. As well as other important voices of this tradition (e.g. İbnü'l-Arabî, Sühreverdî, Celâleddîn-i Rûmî), Yunus Emre succeeded in expressing a sort of equilibrium between the polarity of existence and essence, in his Turkish poetical production.

For this reason, I claim that Yunus Emre's conception of language belongs to what Campagna defines as magic cosmology. In magic cosmology, the reality is 'a continuum between the two poles of ineffability and language, existence and essence, where the former pole is understandable as akin to our common notion of life, and the former as close to our common notion of objecthood'.<sup>185</sup> The tension between ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) and language (*dil*), essence (*öz*)<sup>186</sup> and being (*varlık*), life (*hayat*) and objecthood (*eşya*) is central in Yunus Emre's works. Yunus Emre's self-referential poetical discourse reveals his contradictory outlook on language: on the one side, language (*dil*) constitutes a limit of the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*); on the

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<sup>183</sup> Campagna, F. (2018). *Technic and Magic: The Reconstruction of Reality*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing,

<sup>184</sup> Ibidem p.134

<sup>185</sup> Ibidem p.103

<sup>186</sup> I have decided to translate this term with the word essence although I will explain later on how more than essence in the Aristotelian sense we should refer to pure existence or lack of something.

other side, only the language of the servant (*kul*) enables a person to create a bridge towards the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*).

What is manifested in the tongue of the speaker is the manifestation of the ineffable Absolute the believer.

My being is entirely in that country; I came here as a foreigner.

*Ne var söylenen dilde varlık hakk'undur kulda  
Varlığum hep ol ilde ben bunda garîb geldüm*<sup>187</sup>

Here Yunus Emre speaks again about his own words and testifies how the being (*varlık*) in the linguistic dimension of his poetry reflects the being of the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). The poet points out the relationship between the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) and his poetical words in its emanatory and self manifested nature. The poetical space becomes the place where the contradiction between the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) and being (*varlık*) can coexist in a form of compresence and integration.

This compresence does not eliminate the 'estrangeness' (*garîblik*) of the being (*varlık*) in its integration with the language of the poem. For this reason, the second part of the *beyt* manifests the 'estrangeness' and extraneity of the being in the linguistic words of the poem (*ben bunda garîb geldüm*). In other words, the poetical space of the *ghazal* becomes a point of contact between two dimensions that are completely in opposition.

This estrangement (*garîblik*) that the poetic voice manifests speaks of a presence:absence. Here again, *barzakh* logic can help us understand this continuous transformation. To whom does this voice belong? These words testify to the presence of the poet's voice and the absence of the ineffable, but at the same time to the absence of the poet's voice and the presence of the ineffable. As indeed neither the presence or absence of the poet nor the presence or absence of the ineffable.

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<sup>187</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). Yunus Emre Divanı. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.191

On the one side there is the dimension of descriptive language (*dil*) where words are already loaded with meanings and try to point out to the abstract essence of things – the language of objecthood. On the other side stands the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) who refuses any kind of general connotations and manifests a unique existence, outside of any kind of linguistic determination. How could it be possible to understand this contradictory dimension of the poem? What should be the state of ‘being’ while listening to this miraculous language?

The utterings of the dumb can be heard by the deaf.

The soul can understand words without tongue and ears.

*Dilsüzler haberini kulaksız dinleyesi*

*Dilsüz kulaksuz sözün cân gerek anlayası*<sup>188</sup>

This is the first *beyt* of a poem where Yunus Emre makes mention of this peculiar language which rises above the dimension of ‘essence’ or ‘objecthood’. Following Campagna, this is a specific characterization of language in any magic cosmology<sup>189</sup>. Unexpectedly, folks who can talk this unusual language do not need any tongue (*dilsüz*). With this metaphor, Yunus Emre deals with a specific language which attempts to express what is ineffable and alludes to life in terms of absolute essence (*öz*).

I would argue that this is the main philosophical intensity of Yunus Emre’s conception of language forming one of the main features of his self-referential discourse on poetry. Who is able to understand the ones who speak without using their tongue? Only the person without ears (*kulaksız*) can acknowledge this symbolic language, owing to his or her soul (*cân*). In Turkish, the word soul (*cân*) can also refer to life, as part of that polarity which includes the ineffable dimension of reality, together with essence (*öz*). This type of language stays on the opposite side of the language of the ‘objecthood’, a language that wants to be reliable and has an inclination to point at the general essence of the real.

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<sup>188</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C.Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.382

<sup>189</sup> Campagna, F. (2018). *Technic and Magic: The Reconstruction of Reality*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, p.173

We understood without listening; we listened without understanding.

In this path the realized person's capital is nothingness.

*Dinlemedin anladuk anlamadin dinledük  
Girçek erün bu yolda yoklukdur ser-mâyesi<sup>190</sup>*

Here, Yunus Emre relates this miraculous language to the epistemological question of understanding (*anlamak*). With a contradictory verse, built upon a mirror structure with the pair of verbs 'understanding' and 'listening' (*anlamak/dinlemek*), the poem explains that the approach to this special language transcends the limit of the common understanding. In fact, it is a language which can be understood only by avoiding 'conventional listening'. What does it mean by 'conventional listening'? A sort of listening which uniquely trusts in the grasp of descriptive language and which does not consider the paradoxical dimensions of words.

To Yunus Emre, the relationship between the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) and words (*sözler*) reveals the false common opinion, what in ancient Greek philosophy was called *doxa*, that everything can be communicated. Paradoxically, words (*sözler*) are also materials used to testify the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) and they can remain as a trace of it. Who can utter these words? The noble (*er*) can speak this miraculous language because of his or her ontological and ethical position: poverty (*yokluk*). In this sense, the noble (*er*) represents a particular form of life which renounces the exterior dimension (*zâhir*) of social life, as for example conventional language, to achieve the interior meaning (*batın*) of what the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) can emanate. This longing for the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) is love (*aşk*):

We loved, we became lovers, we were loved, we became the beloved.

Who would have enough of you as he is given new life with every breath.

He chose seventy-two thousand languages, and the word fell among us.

We looked with that gaze, we did not malign the elite or the commoner.

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<sup>190</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.382

*Biz sevdük 'âşık olduk sevildük ma 'şûk olduk  
Her dem yini dirlikde sizden kim usanası*

*Yitmiş iki dil seçdi aramıza söz düşdi  
Ol bakışı biz bakduk yirmedik 'âm u hâsı<sup>191</sup>*

Poverty (*yokluk*) and love (*aşk*) are always entangled. Poverty (*yokluk*), as a form of life, brings the realized person (*er*) to an interior dimension (*bâtınî*) which has its own dynamic. The lover (*aşık*) and the beloved (*maşuk*) are the polarities of this eternal movement and they manifests how also the interior dimension (*bâtınî*) is not an exception in the perpetual journey (*yol*) of the soul (*can*). The ones who achieve this bare form of life (*yokluk*) will continue to dig in the depth of existence, in their relationship with the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) as an abyss in a continuing renewing dynamism (*her dem yini dirlikde sizden kim usanası*).

Later on, Yunus Emre considers again how the word (*söz*) and language (*dil*) are interrelated. Words (*söz*) maintain the quality of the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) which remains on a different ontological plane than the reality of the conventional language (*dil*). For this reason languages are plural and Yunus Emre refers to them with the number of seventy two (*yetmiş iki*). The poetic voice, who interestingly enough speaks with the first plural form, 'we saw' (*bakduk*), meets the point of view of the word (*söz*) and for this reason enters another form of life, which is harmless to any one (*yirmedik 'âm u hâsı*).

Oh Yûnus, at present the earth and the sky are saturated with saints.

Under every stone are a thousand Moses son of Imran.

*Ïy Yûnus imdi velî yirde gökde toptolı  
Her bir taşun altında bir İmrânoglı Mûsı<sup>192</sup>*

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<sup>191</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.382

<sup>192</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.382

The last *beyt* expresses how this word (*söz*) of the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) makes the saint (*veli*) ‘overflow on the ground and in the sky’. Under every stone the saint can find the source of revelation, which is here the main characteristic of the prophet Moses. I think that Yunus Emre inherited from the Qur'an a conception of prophethood which discloses an intimate liaison with the element of the word (*söz*). In fact, Moses, who has an extremely crucial presence in the koranic text, is called as the *كليم الله*, the 'One who conversed with God.'<sup>193</sup>

Yunus Emre makes explicit the verbal dimension of prophetic culture. A culture where the word becomes an element that shows humanity the journey to the ineffable. In the esoteric path, however, the word goes beyond the normative dimension of law, and becomes an intermediate space where the human and the ineffable meet and at the same time separate. The first human being to experience this divine word is Adam.

#### **4.4. 'By the Tongue of Power Your Thought Made My Tongue Speak': Adam and the Language of Power.**

Both in the Qur'an and in Yunus Emre's Divan one of the main features of prophet Adam is his capability to utter words. What was the first word uttered by Adam? What is the relationship between Adam's first words and Yunus Emre's poetic language? In the poem I will comment on below, we will see how Yunus Emre refers to Adam's first words to address his poetic art. The poem starts with a narrative on cosmogony:

Before the earth and the sky were created the true one made a jewel.  
He looked at the jewel and made it sweat and made it a pearl.

From the jewel he made steam emanate, he created the sky from its steam.  
He made many stars to adorn the sky.

*Yir gök yaradılmadın Hak bir gevher eyledi*

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<sup>193</sup> Renard, J. (2015). *Historical Dictionary of Sufism*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield., p. 206

*Nazar kıldı gevhere sızurdu dür eyledi*

*Gevherden bug çıkardı bugından gök yaratdı  
Gök yüzünün bizegin çok yıldızlar eyledi<sup>194</sup>*

Here we have a poem where Yunus Emre explains the origin of the universe in every aspect. The creation starts with a jewel (*gevher*) which the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) transforms into a pearl (*dür*). This is the substance from which everything is created, something that has value but lacks a defined form. The process of materialization of this valuable jewel (*gevher*) takes different stages, starting from a pearl (*dür*) and eventually becoming heaven (*gök*). After this primary creation of heaven, the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) also creates the stars (*yıldızlar*). The cosmological disclosure goes on in the following verses of the poem:

She spoke to the sky and said: 'Turn around and let the moon and the sun start moving'.

She put the water in suspension and placed the earth on it.

The earth was agitated, it did not stabilize, it did not find a moment of rest.

The true one made immense mountains as weight to stabilize it.

*Göge eytdi dön didi ay-gün yürisün didi  
Suyı mu'allak kodı üstinde yir eyledi*

*Yir çalkandı turmadı bir dem karâr kılmadı  
Yüce yüce tagları hak çöksüler eyledi<sup>195</sup>*

For the first time the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) gives an order to heaven with an imperative: turn (*dön*). In fact, the moon (*ay*) and the sun (*güneş*) also start their rotational movement. Here time starts to be an aspect of the creation, agitating the

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<sup>194</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n. 355

<sup>195</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n. 355

earth (*yir*) which the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) loaded onto the water (*su*). The earth (*yir*) seems not to have any repose (*karar kalmadı*) and so forth the big mountains (*yüce yüce taglar*) are created in order to stabilize its movement. Now the creation is prepared to receive the presence of the human being:

Azrael came down from heaven and took a handful of earth.

Four angels kneaded it and made a prophet out of it.

When the soul joined the body he sneezed and stood up.

Raising his hands at that moment he gave thanks to the ineffable Absolute.

*'Azrâil gökden indi bir avuç toprak aldı  
Dört ferişte yogurdu bir peygamber eyledi*

*Çün cân gevdeye irdi ahsurdı öri turdu  
El götürüp ol demde Hakk'a şükür eyledi<sup>196</sup>*

The angel Azrael, who in islamic texts also represents the angel of death, takes a handful of earth (*avuç toprak*) and, with the help of other angels, from the fermentation (*yogur*) of this earth gives life to a prophet (*peygamber*). The prophet Adam, the epigone of the prophetic culture, was born in this specific form of life which in the Qur'an is referred to as *rasulullah*, and in Yunus Emre's Divan as *peygamber*. Here we recognize a fundamental aspect of the islamic conception, and of the abrahamic traditions in general, about prophetic culture. As we will see later on, the prophet is the one who through language engages with the ineffable and therefore becomes its messenger.

In fact, after the body of Adam stands up, the soul (*can*) enters the body (*gevde*). Exactly at that moment, Adam raises his hands (*el götürdü*) and thanks the ineffable Absolute (*hakk'a şükür eyledi*). Here, we experience the first attribute Yunus Emre confers to prophethood: to be grateful towards the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). This indicates the recognition of human beings' debt and gratitude as the main aspect of

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<sup>196</sup> Ibidem.

the specific form of life which is prophethood. These elements are strictly interrelated with the question of language. The interesting point is that the prophet Adam raises his hands and gives thanks with his word without any divine command. Unlike the rest of creation the prophet Adam reacts spontaneously and through his tongue. At this point God questioned Adam:

God (said) to Adam: ‘When you came to this state,  
What did you say in this world, what did your tongue utter?’

‘You made me be when I was not, you gave me the soul when I was earth.  
By the tongue of power, your thought made my tongue speak.’

*Allah eydür Âdem'e çün kim irdün bu deme  
Bu dünyâda ne didün dilün neyi söyledi*

*Yogiken var eyledün topragiken cân virdün  
Kudret diliyle andun dilüm söyler eyledi<sup>197</sup>*

In these two beyt we read the dialogue between God and Adam that summarizes Yunus Emre's affiliation with prophetic culture from his conception of language. First of all, in the first beyt, the name of God (*Allah*) takes the place of the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) to show how the name, in order to indicate a transcendence which enters in dialogue with the human being, has a different connotation in the poetic structure. God (*Allah*) praises the words of gratitude of Adam (*ne didün dilün neyi söyledi*) and recognizes the words of God (*Allah*) in Adam's language (*dilüm söyler eyledi*).

Between the last part of the second beyt and the last part of the second verse of the second beyt there is a mirror effect that presents the main philosophical intensity of Yunus Emre's conception of language. Allah speaks to Adam and claims: your language (*dilün*) is my language (*dilüm*) at the moment that your words are the result of your gratitude towards Me. In this sense, Yunus Emre sheds light on the existence of a special language, which in these specific poems qualifies with the adjective of

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<sup>197</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n. 355

‘powerful language’ (*kudret dili*), able to merge the level of the creator with the level of the creation. It seems that this powerful language (*kudret dili*) could be considered as a common space which can be cohabited by Allah and Adam. Yunus Emre makes explicit in this poem how the liminal space of the prophetic language unites Allah with the prophet Adam after their separation. Again the logic of the *barzakh* helps us to see this paradoxical relationship of union and separation, convergence and divergence or unity and duality.

These words delighted the ineffable Absolute, she cherished her servant.  
She gave him everything that crossed his mind.

Where do these words come from in Yûnus that speak of the soul?  
Without doubt, he who possesses grace gave him a glance.

*Bu söz Hakk'a hoş geldi kulın 'azîz eyledi  
Ne geçdise gönünden viridi hâzır eyledi*

*Bu söz Yûnus'a kandan kim vire haber cândan  
Meger kim ol lutf ıssı ana nazar eyledi*<sup>198</sup>

This is the end of the poem and from the dialogue between Allah and Adam, Yunus Emre attempts to explain the consequences and the meaning of his own words (*söz*). In the first verse of the quoted *beyt*, the transcendent dimension loses its personal element present in the previous verses when it was in dialogue with the prophethood of Adam. The ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) shows a general satisfaction with regards to the words (*söz*) of the servant (*kul*). In this sense, from the first interaction between the prophet Adam, who is able to cohabit the language (*dil*) with Allah, we experience a general possibility of using words (*söz*) which please the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*).

These are words (*söz*) which compose Yunus Emre’s poetry, manifesting again a self-referential element in his poetry. In fact, the last *beyt* of the poem poses a rhetorical question about Yunus Emre’s words (*söz*) and their origin. It is quite evident

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<sup>198</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n. 355

that Yunus Emre is claiming to participate throughout his poetical words (*söz*) in that powerful language (*kudret dili*) which the relationship between Allah and Adam has established as a possibility. Finally, in the last verse Yunus Emre again distances himself from his words, just like the prophet Adam, and says that through the gaze of the ineffable his words take a form.

#### **4.5. 'I Have Tailored the Robe of Blame and Come to Whoever Is Wise Enough and Is Clothed with It': Destroying Formalities, Melâmiyye Spirit and Language.**

An analysis of Yunus Emre's conception of language by a close reading of his poems brings us to another important element which constitutes a particular spiritual intensity in his work. I am referring to the *melâmiyye* influences: a form of living the sufi mode of being islamic at the border of the more institutionalized brotherhood conventions. In his short introduction to sufism, Halil Barcena speaks about the *melâmiyye* not merely as a movement born in the IX century with its origin in the city of Nishapur in the region of Khorasan, but as many other brotherhoods (*turuq*) in other regions of the Islamicate. On the contrary, the *melâmiyye* is not a sufi order as the others, but a spiritual attitude, a spiritual intensity, a way of conceiving the spiritual path and even a psychological category.<sup>199</sup>

The etymology of the term *melâmiyye* comes from the word ملامیّه which means guiltiness. Different scholars identify *melâmiyyes* as the sufi which invite openly to sin or even incite to blame without any form of shame or regret. However, by showing or speaking about their sin they want to denounce a certain human tendency which mimics the achievement of sainthood, despite the self pride. To sufi with a *melâmiyye* intensity, the worst sin consists of showing off 'pretended' spiritual achievements. This element is parallel to their conception of language<sup>200</sup>.

In fact, on the one side, they criticize the legalistic mode of being islamic which uses language as a mere technical tool to achieve order and morality among the

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<sup>199</sup> Barcena, H. (2012). *Sufismo*. Barcelona: Fragmenta Editorial., p.12

<sup>200</sup> For a study on the *melâmiyye* in the Ottoman Empire see Ballanfat, P. (2013). *Unité et spiritualité: le Courant Melâmî-Hamzevî dans l'Empire Ottoman*. Paris: Editions l'Harmattan.

community. On the other side, they also denounce the use of language in some sufi modes of being islamic which together with other 'cosmetic' aspects of exterior formality wants to achieve respect and honor from the outer world. This is an evident criticism that we can read in the following poem by Yunus Emre:

I am a Sufi in the midst of people, the rosary does not leave my hand.  
My tongue proclaims knowledge but my heart does not accept it.

My diploma hangs around my neck, my devotion is hypocrisy.  
My thoughts are elsewhere, my eyes are not fixed on the path.

*Sûfiyem halk içinde tesbîh elümden gitmez  
Dilüm ma'rifet söyler gönlüm hiç kabûl itmez*

*Boynumda 'icâzetüm riyâyıla tâ'atüm  
Endişem ayruk yirde gözüm yolu gözetmez<sup>201</sup>*

I would argue that this poem maintains a form of suspense right until the last *beyt*. In fact, we do not understand until the last verses that all this description of a pious devotion is ultimately ironic and sarcastic. The poetic voice claims to be a sufi (*sûfiyem*) but interestingly enough circumscribes its sufism to the context of the people (*halk içinde*). From this first verse we understand that the one who is claiming to be a sufi, a general poetic 'I', wants to demonstrate to exterior people his or her spiritual achievements.

What are the signs of this exterior preoccupation? First of all, Yunus Emre makes a joke of the exterior elements that some of the sufis of his period used to exhibit in order to show off their spiritual achievements. Among these elements, the poet picks the rosary (*tesbih*) and the language which proclaims the ultimate wisdom (*marifet*). Yunus Emre also mentions the diploma (*icazet*), that in the sufi mode of being part of the brotherhood, proclaims the highest spiritual achievements in the path, as an exterior sign used to emphasize the authority of a master.

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<sup>201</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C.Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.117

The poet gives a picture of a person totally immersed in the spiritual affair and who is not able to look at other dimensions of life. The *melâmiyye* spirit is very present in these lines, with its criticism toward the exterior elements of the spiritual path and the risk that all these aspects can be an obstacle in the way of the spiritual journey. To Yunus Emre, influenced by the *melâmiyye* intensity, the spiritual journey should be a form of life which tends to the disidentification from the external contingencies of the social life.

I profess knowledge I perform hypocrisy well.

The pride in my heart does not allow me to return to being a destitute.

I am a good *dervish*. I have no patience; condemnation swarms on my tongue.

Never does my inner self hear what enters my ear.

*Söylerem ma'rifeti sâlûslanuram katı  
Miskînlige dönmege gönlümden kibir gitmez*

*Hoş dervîşem sabrum yok dilümde inkârım çok  
Kulagumdan gireni hergiz içüm işitmez<sup>202</sup>*

The poem goes on with the characteristics of this spiritual master who professes to have achieved wisdom (*marifet*) and spiritual poverty (*miskinlik*). Another sarcastic element of the poem deals with the lack of patience (*sabir*) and the attitude of condemning (*inkar*) people. Here, Yunus Emre enacts another important aspect of the *melâmiyye* intensity that consists of a radical tolerance toward humanity and of a refusal of any spiritual form of life policy which puts itself at a superior level, because of pretentious spiritual achievements. The life of this spiritual master seems to be characterized by superficial, consuetudinary and empty formulas which do not really have any inner effects on his or her daily behavior.

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<sup>202</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.117

The world is a candle. My chest, my heart watch over it.  
What can I do? The fear of God never leaves my inside.

Those who see me kiss my hand, they respect my turban and my cloak.  
They think I don't commit a single atom of sin.

*'Âlem çırâkdur sadır gönlüm bunu gözedür  
N'ideyüm Hak korkusu hergiz içümden gitmez*

*Görenler elüm öper tâc u hırkama bakar  
Şöyle sanurlar beni zerrece günâh itmez<sup>203</sup>*

The poetic voice continues to condemn whatever is not itself. The world is on fire and the only way to be saved is through the fear of God (*hak korkusu*), which is the only feeling which this sufi master can experience. Also in these verses there is a criticism towards the appearances and the exterior symbols of spiritual achievements: the hand kissing (*el öper*), the turban (*taç*) and the cloak (*hırka*). These are all signs of the absence of any sin in the sufi master's life. As we will see in the last *beyt* of the poem, one of the main denouncements of the *melâmiyye* esoteric mode of being islamic involves the hiding of human sins based on a precise conception of the relationship between the human being (*insan*) and the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*).

Outside, my devotion, my conversation, my obedience are pleasing.  
As for my inner mess, a villain would not make so much in a thousand years.

Those who see me take me for a saint, they greet me impressed.  
I would act the same (as a saint) but my strength is not enough when I try.

*Taşumda 'ibâdetüm sohbetüm hoş tâ'atüm  
İç bâzâra gelicek bin yıllık 'ayyâr itmez*

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<sup>203</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C.Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.117

*Görenler velî sanur selâm virür utanur  
Anca iş koyarıdum el irüben güç yitmez*<sup>204</sup>

The poetic voice expresses the distance between the outer world perception and the inner world dimension. People appreciate the discourse of the sufi master (*sohbet*) but inside he or she lives in a state of insanity. To the eyes of people he or she appears as a saint, but the poetic voice admits to not having the strength to behave as a saint. There is an admission of his or her own limitations, an element that at the end makes the image of the sufi master more realistic and less hypocritical.

Outside I am *dervish*; inside I am empty. My tongue is all sugar, my words are pleasant.

But even he who changes his religion would not do what I do.

Yûnus, present your defects to your God.

He is full of generosity. What you do, She does not do.

*Taşum dervîş içüm boş dilüm tatlu sözüm hoş  
İllâ ben itdügümi dînin degşüren itmez*

*Yûnus eksükligüni Allah'una 'arz eyle  
Anun keremi çokdur sen itdügün ol itmez*<sup>205</sup>

As stated previously, the last *beyt* reveals the sarcastic tone of the poem and makes an important reference to the domain of language. Again the couple of terms outside (*tasum*) and inside (*içüm*) are in contraposition: from the outside perspective (*tasum*) the poetic voice claims to be a dervish but from the inner perspective (*içüm*) it is empty (*boş*). An emptiness that is different from the spiritual poverty (*fakirlik*) and contrasts with all the appearances and formalities listed in the previous verses.

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<sup>204</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C.Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.117

<sup>205</sup> Ibidem, poem n.117

Interestingly, the poetic voice describes its language as sweet (*dilüm tatlu*) and its words as pleasant (*sözüm hoş*) after emphasizing his or her inner emptiness. Yunus Emre wants to express that language (*dil*) and words (*söz*) are not meant for pleasing or reassuring someone. Here the *melâmiyye* intensity takes the language (*dil*) and words (*söz*) as dimensions to criticize; only the one who changes their religion (*dînin degşüren*) can understand the meaning of this aspect related to language.

Who is this person? Who does not use language (*dil*) and words (*söz*) to receive rewards for his or her spiritual achievements? Here comes the idea of the *melâmiyye* who for the outside world is the apostate, the one who has changed religion, because of his or her criticism towards the formal aspect of both the legalistic and the sufi mode of being islamic. On the contrary, for Yunus Emre to present our limitations to God (*Allah*) and not to hide our own faults represents the highest form of spiritual achievements. Again with an evident *melâmiyye* intensity Yunus Emre wants to point out that the self idolatry is not only the worst of sins, but it is also an obstacle hindering the understanding of the transcendence of God (*Allah*).

In this poem Yunus Emre brings into evidence one of the ethical aspects of his grammar of the self. Moreover, self idolatry can be considered as another consequence of a false conception of language. On the one hand, language, as any other dimension of human life, can only veil the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). In fact, language can be used as a means to idolize the self, as the sufi master of the poem shows, and to hide the depth of the soul (*can*).

On the other hand, language as the space of connection between the human being (*insan*) and the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) can be a way to make possible the communication of the incommunicable. But again, in this case there is another level in which both the poet and the receiver have to enter. Below is another poem illustrating this specific dimension and its relationship with the *melâmiyye* intensity:

Today intimate companionship was ours, let him come forward who can [also] say  
“ours”.

Love made us drink its honey, let him come forward who tastes the honey and  
swallows it.

I pulled the head of salvation under the coat of contentment.

I have tailored the robe of blame, let him come forward who is wise enough to wear it .

*Bugün sohbet bizüm oldu bize bizüm diyen gelsün  
İçürdi 'ışk bize şehdin nûş eyleyüp yudan gelsün*

*Kanâ 'at hırkası içre selâmet başını çekdüm  
Melâmet gönlegin biçdüm 'ârif olup geyen gelsün<sup>206</sup>*

In these first verses of the poem, the poetical voice witnesses the experience of this communicability of the incommunicable with the word *sohbet* (communication), a word which comes from the Arabic root of the verb *صَجِبَ* which means to associate with<sup>207</sup>. In the sufi mode of being Islam, the word *sohbet* covers a crucial function: it opens a space for the transmission of the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) through a particular social context. Previously we analyzed the vertical interconnection of the communication between the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) and human language, here Yunus Emre explains how this other language can be shared in the horizontal space of the community.

This is why Yunus Emre plays with the word *biz* (we) in the first verse, a way to empathize with the common identity of a community. But what kind of community? It is the community of 'lovers' (*aşık*) who drank and enjoyed the honey of love (*şehidin nûş eyleyüp*). However, another important element appears in these verses. In fact, Yunus Emre declares his own *melâmiyye* intensity by saying that the person who can participate in this '*sohbet*' wears the *melâmiyye* robe (*melâmet gönlegi*) after ripping off all the other appearances.

In this field of love, I sang a tune.

The office of the *muezzin* is ours. I have become *imâm*, let him come forward who is ready to follow [me] .

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<sup>206</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.230

<sup>207</sup> See *Britannica Concise Encyclopedia*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. p. 441.

In this ocean abound all kinds of jewels that cannot be reached.

There is no pearl without value, let him come forward who is ready to give himself up.

*Bu 'ışk meydâni içinde çağurdum bir âvâz itdüm  
Müezzinlik bizüm oldı îmâm oldum uyan gelsün*

*Bu 'ummânda delim dürlü güher vardur ele girmez  
Bahâsuz inci bulunmaz câna başa kıyan gelsün*<sup>208</sup>

From the communitarian experience of the communicability of the first verses, we pass to the possible individual experience of language without leaving the context of conviviality (*bu 'ışk meydâni*). The poetic voice presents this primordial experience of language as a call to the interiority (*içinde çağurdum*) by shouting (*âvâz*). It seems that this experience of language is described as an experience of transformation of the voice of the poet. A sort of experience that transmutes the poetical voice into something different: the voice of the Muezzin who calls people to the prayer.

Here the message is quite clear, the love experience of the poet which is transmitted by its own poetical experience of language, by a possible connection with the source (*asıl*), becomes a call to the reader to participate in the transmission of what is not transmittable: the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). However, only the worthy person (*uyan*) is invited to this experience. Who is this person? Is a person able to go into the depth of the meaninglessness (*'ummânda*) where there are pearls without material values (*dürlü güher vardur ele girmez*); a person who takes the risk of losing his or her own soul (*can*) and intellect (*câna başa kıyan*)? As we can read, the communicability of the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) requires the courage of losing oneself and again, in a *melâmiyye* intensity, to renounce any certitude of formalism and intellectualism.

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<sup>208</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C.Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.230

The kingdom of the heart will not be pure without the imprint of appearance leaving it.

The water of mercy cascades and roars, let him come forward who has washed his heart clean of its stains .

Listen to my words, friends, I have made my day into night.

I lost the essence of my being. Let him come forward who is ready to enter this true way.

*Sûret nakşın gidermekle gönül mülki temiz olmaz  
Akar rahmet suyu çağlar gönül kirin yuyan gelsün*

*İ dostlar işidün sözüm dün itmişem bu gündüzüm  
Ben yavı kıldum kendözüm bu hak yola giren gelsün<sup>209</sup>*

The invitation of the poetic voice is to abandon the appearances (*sûret nakşın gidermekle*) to purify the territory of heart (*gönül mülki*). Moreover, there is an invocation to listen for the friends who want to participate in this experience – an experience of language that is possible in the present day or moment (*bu gündüzüm*). The poetic voice reveals the loss of humor itself (*ben yavı kıldum kendözüm*) and only those who enter in this path of the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) can participate in this event. To get to participate with communication with the ineffable Yunus Emre proposes the path of emptying oneself of all formality. This emptying is the process that enacts his poetic gesture that becomes a call, an invitation, a reminder of that which transcends form.

Poor Yûnus saw it. He holds in his hand the collection of his poems.

The learned could not read, let him come forward who who understands its meaning.

*Yûnus miskîn anı görmüş eline hem Divan almış  
'Âlimler okıyamamış bu ma'nîden tuyan gelsün*

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<sup>209</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.230

In this last *beyt*, the poetic voice refers to the author and takes his experience of the language of love as a demonstration throughout his poetry collection or Divan. This is a crucial point in which Yunus Emre uses a self referential aspect to explain to the reader that his own poetry is the result of his experience of 'Love'. The experience of 'Love' and the experience of language are two forces of the same experience of the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). This is an experience of love by a poet who cannot be understood by the legalistic mode of being islamic (*'âlimler okıyamamış*).

In this last verse, Yunus Emre seems to offer his interlocutors the product of his experience with language. Beginning with the emptying of all form, his poetic work seems to be like the ashes that remain after the setting fire to all forms. It is certainly not an appreciable or readable product for those who cling to the formalities of knowledge. Only those who know its meaning can make use of it. Here again we see how the poetic and existential planes interrelate to give rise an horizon of tension, the *barzakh*, that unites and separates these two dimensions an neither does none of this.

#### **4.6. 'I Am the One Who Presently Helps Those Who Remain to Wander on the Path': Yunus Emre and the Language of the Qur'an.**

I would like to conclude this chapter by discussing the relationship between the status of the revealed language of the Qur'an and Yunus Emre's poetry. We know that one of the key elements of Yunus Emre's grammar of the self is his engagement with the koranic text. But let us take a deeper look at this intrinsic reciprocity reading Kermani's contribution on the aesthetical experience of the Qur'an and the system of relations between Muslim and the aesthetical reception of the revealed text<sup>210</sup>.

To Kermani, aesthetical reception consists of its relation with the koranic language, which focuses not on abstract concepts but its sensible quality, in terms of visual or auditory perception<sup>211</sup>. This kind of reception makes koranic language close to a work of art. Starting from this premise, what is the relation between koranic language and poetry? Kermani's conception of poetry looks like Agamben's concept of

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<sup>210</sup> Kermani, N. (2015) *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*. London: Polity.

<sup>211</sup> Ibidem, p. VII

intensity. To Kermani, poetry does not exist as a fixed entity, remaining unchanged with time. On the contrary, with his affiliation to structuralist literary theory, Kermani claims that there are no more possible standards by which to decide the poetic feature of a text in a given time or culture<sup>212</sup>.

The conception of poetry depends on the moment and place in which people are in relation with specific texts and, in any case, Kermani specifies that his goal does not consist of determining if the Qur'an is a poetical text or not. Far from it, he wishes to analyze the aesthetical reception of the Qur'an that includes the poetical intensity of the text. However, Kermani claims that any text opens a repertoire of possible receptions. In other words, this means that if the Qur'an has been read under aesthetical parameters it is because the Qur'an in itself guides this kind of possible fruition. Furthermore, Kermani claims that: 'In addition, the Qur'an in particular is a highly self-referential text, a text that, more than any other scripture in the history of world religions, reflects, comments on, and discusses its own linguistic form in numerous passages'<sup>213</sup>.

These characteristics can also easily be recognised in Yunus Emre's Divan. I would claim that this form of self referentiality constitutes one of the main aspects of the philosophical intensity of Yunus Emre's poetical thought. In Yunus Emre's Divan there are several passages where the poet reflects, giving comments and insight on his own words. For example:

The poor Yûnus does not pronounce this word himself.

The just God entrusted her lesson to our tongues.

*Miskîn Yûnus bu sözi kendözinden eyitmez*

*Hak çalâp viribidi sebağın dilümüze*<sup>214</sup>

Here, Yunus Emre claims that his words are not his own words (*bu sözi kendözinden eyitmez*) but the result of a lesson (*sebak*) that the rightful God (*hak çalâp*) gave to

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<sup>212</sup> Kermani, N. (2015) *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*. London: Polity. p.91

<sup>213</sup> Ibidem, p.70

<sup>214</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C.Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.311

him. This characteristic of self-referential text and revelatory language gives a crucial connection between the language of the Qur'an and Yunus Emre's poetical production. This element can be considered another specific feature of Yunus Emre's prophetic culture.

For this reason, I am convinced that exploring the Divan in terms of linguistic self-referentiality will enable us to better understand Yunus Emre's esoteric engagement with the revelation. However, before going into detail regarding this question, I would like to understand the relation between Qur'an and poetry. Is the Qur'an a poetical text? In order to answer this question, Kermani refers to Jakobson and the Russian formalism to analyze the different functions of language in general and the poetic function in particular<sup>215</sup>.

Kermani points out the complexity of koranic language and claims that 'all four functions of language are clearly discernible in the Qur'an'.<sup>216</sup> However, it is extremely difficult to isolate the different functions because of a constant shifting between voices which intervene in different passages. Sometimes the Qur'an quotes the words of the divine authority, sometimes of the prophet and sometimes of various classes of people. In the Qur'an, this plurality of voices creates a complex structure where the functions of language are entangled together. Yunus Emre's poetical production also presents the use of plural voices which can shift depending on the poem.

As in the Qur'an, the use of the first person can sometimes indicate God's voice. In fact, sometimes the poetical voice speaks in the name of the divine authority, sometimes in the name of the poet or even in the name of the poetical text itself. This is another important element of Yunus Emre's philosophy of language that we will analyse later to explain how poetry can be in itself the event of primordial language's disclosure and inclosure. In the following *beyts* we can read clear examples where the poetical voice speaks in the name of God:

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<sup>215</sup> Kermani, N. (2015) *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*. London: Polity, p.71

<sup>216</sup> Ibidem, p.72

I am the first, I am the last, I am the soul for souls.

I am the one who is at hand to help those who lose the path and get stuck.

*Evvel benem âhir benem cânlara cân olan benem  
Azup yolda kalanlara hâzır meded iden benem*<sup>217</sup>

This is the *incipit* of a poem where the first person (*benem*) refers to God's voice. All the poem makes reference to the third ayah of the Iron surah (الحديد) where the Qur'an presents some attributes of Allah (*esma ul-hüsna*) and defines it as the first (*evvel*) and the last (*âhir*): He is the first and the last, the ascendant and the intimate, and He is, of all things, knowing <sup>218</sup>هُوَ الْأَوَّلُ وَالْآخِرُ وَالظَّاهِرُ وَالْبَاطِنُ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ. Again, regarding the question of self-referentiality, at the end of the poem, the poetical voice, which speaks in the name of the divine authority, claims that the poem's words does not belong to Yunus Emre:

It is not Yûnus who says this. It is the self who speaks.

Who does not believe in it is an unbeliever, I am even the first and the last.

*Yûnus degül bunı diyen kendüligidür söyleyen  
Kâfir olur inanmayan evvel-âhir hemen benem*

In an explicit form, the poetical voice takes a distance from the poet and even accuses the receivers who do not believe in the divine dimension of these words to be impious (*kâfir olur inanmayan*). As we previously saw, the spiritual place (*makam*) from which the poetical voice pronounces his words can change the meaning and the function of Yunus Emre's poetical language. Are these connections between koranic language and Yunus Emre's poetry enough to make us believe in the predominance of the poetical function of the Qur'an?

I agree with Kermani when he argues that what makes the poetical function

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<sup>217</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C.Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.193

<sup>218</sup> The Qur'an (*Sahih international*), 57,3

predominant or marginal depends on the relation between the text and the receiver. However, undoubtedly, even in the more informative passages, the Qur'an presents a linguistic structure based on rhyme, assonance and other rhetorical devices which creates a potential aesthetic reception. In other words, if the poetical function of the Qur'an cannot be determined 'objectively' we can be sure that to someone the Qur'an can be a poetical text. For example Kermani writes:

This is why Nizar Qabbani can call the Qur'an poetry in spite of his awareness that it is not poetry in the sense of the classical Arabic genre. When he reads it as poetry, the text is a qasida – not ontologically, but in its manifestation in the moment of communication between some sender and the receiver Nizar Qabbani.<sup>219</sup>

So forth, is the Qur'an poetry? Kermani argues that the Qur'an cannot be considered poetry because the intention of the sender consists primarily of sending an ethical message that refers to something that is outside the text<sup>220</sup>. Kermani quotes an ayet from the Qur'an to demonstrate the main intention of the text and its own separation from poetry:

We did not teach him poetry,  
Nor does this benefit him,  
It is nothing but a Remembrance,  
and a Manifest Qur'an,  
Therewith to warn him who is living  
And to fulfill the Word against the unbelievers

وَمَا عَلَّمْنَاهُ الشُّعْرَ وَمَا يَنْبَغِي لَهُ<sup>221</sup> إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ وَقُرْءَانٌ مُّبِينٌ  
لِيُنذِرَ مَن كَانَ حَيًّا وَيَحِقَّ الْقَوْلُ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ<sup>221</sup>

Here the Qur'an refers openly to the prophet Muhammed and his function. He is not a poet, not even an author, but the bearer of a divine message. Why does the Qur'an specify this function? Kermani notices that, on the one hand, the relation between prophecy and poetry is common to all traditions. In fact, all the prophetic languages

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<sup>219</sup> Kermani, N.(2015) *God Is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*. London: Polity, p.75

<sup>220</sup> Ibidem, p.129

<sup>221</sup> The Qur'an (*Sahih international*), 36:69-70

include an aesthetic dimension that relates them to poetry. On the other hand, differently from Judaism, where poetry was not an autonomous genre, the prophet Muhammed had to take a distance from the poetic tradition of pre-islamic Arab poetry (*shi'r*) to claim his prophetic function (*nabiy*). In this sense, to Kermani, the prophet Muhammed 'necessarily had to struggle to avoid being mistaken for a poet<sup>222</sup>.

This is why also in the muslim discourse the Qur'an should be not considered poetry, but something that is more than poetry. However, in order to exceed poetry (*shi'r*), the Qur'an must participate in the realm of poetic texts. In this sense, the Qur'an evokes the poetic structures of previous poetic texts and uses the topoi of *shi'r* or *kahana*,<sup>223</sup> but it modifies them and it produces a break from important previous aesthetic norms.

If we want to think in contradictory terms, the koranic language appears at first to listeners to be both familiar and unfamiliar. Regarding the unfamiliar, Kermani reports that some authorities claim that 'the Qur'an owed its uniqueness to its *garaba*, its 'estrangeness' or 'peculiarity' and praised that as its actual literary quality'. Interestingly enough, Yunus Emre used the word *garīb* to express his exile, which as we saw in the previous chapter, constitutes one of his main ethical principles.

In fact, the word exile (*gurbet*) shares the etymology with the word estrangeness (*garīb*). So forth, it is interesting to put in relation this linguistic aspect of koranic language, its estrangeness and unicity (*gariba*), with one of the most important ethical horizons of the sufi mode of being islamic. In the following poem, the poetical voice claims the 'estrangeness', 'peculiarity' and 'unicity' (*garīb*) as the main attribute of its own self.

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<sup>222</sup> Kermani, N. (2015). *God Is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*. London: Polity., p.278

<sup>223</sup> Kermani, N. (2015). *God Is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur'an*. London: Polity., p.266

Is there someone in this place  
As estranged as me?  
With a wounded heart and tearful eyes  
Someone as estranged as me?

I have visited Rome and Damascus,  
All the lands of Iran.  
I've searched and searched and I haven't found  
Someone as estranged as me.

Let no one be estranged.  
Let no one burn in the fire of separation.  
Oh my master, let no one be  
as estranged as me.

*'Aceb řu yirde var m'ola  
řöyle garib bencileyin  
Bagrı bařlu gözi yařlu  
řöyle garib bencileyin*

*Gezdüm Urum'ıla řam'ı  
Yukaru illeri kamu  
Çok istedüm bulımadum  
řöyle garib bencileyin*

*Kimseler garib olmasın  
Hasret odına yanmasun  
Hocam kimseler olmasun  
řöyle garib bencileyin<sup>224</sup>*

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<sup>224</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.277

At the end of every *beyt*, the poetical composition is concluded with the consideration that there is no one as 'estranged' (*garîb*) as itself (*şöyle garîb bencileyin*). In this case we can easily connect the poetic voice with Yunus Emre's presence. In this sense, it seems that the characteristics of 'estrangeness' that have been used with reference to the koranic language becomes, in Yunus Emre's poetry, his own self representation.

Again, a self who represents himself as *garîb* shows a peculiar sensibility towards ambiguities and contradictions. Yunus Emre claims that this condition makes him full of sorrow and pain (*bağrı başlu gözi yaşlu*) and he hopes that no one has to experience his condition (*kimseler garîb olmasın*). He finds himself so different that even for a guide (*hoca*) it would be hard work to make him progress on the spiritual journey (*hocam kimseler olmasun*).

It seems that the destruction of external forms makes the poetic voice aware of its estrangeness. A unique and lonely estrangeness that is not wished on anyone. Yunus Emre describes the loss of duality and the attainment of the presence of the one in a painful, dramatic and consuming way. However, a person as *garîb* as him cannot find any rest without looking for others like him:

My tongue speaks and my eyes cry.  
My essence burns for the estranged.  
Perhaps the stars in the sky are  
as estranged as me.

I burn with such distress.  
The end will come and I will die one day.  
I will then find in my grave  
Someone as estranged as me.

They will say that an stranger died.  
After three days they will realize it.  
They will wash with ice water  
Someone as estranged as me.

*Söyler dilüm aglar gözüm  
Garîblere göynür özüm  
Meger ki gökde yılduzum  
Şöyle garîb bencileyin*

*Niçe bu derdile yanam  
Ecel ire birgün ölem  
Meger ki sinümde bulam  
Şöyle garîb bencileyin*

*Bir garîb ölmüş diyeler  
Üç gündən sonra tuyalar  
Sovuk suyula yuyalar  
Şöyle garîb bencileyin<sup>225</sup>*

The poetic voice uses the word *öz* to express the deepest element of itself – it's foundational element. This foundational element (*öz*) experiences the pain of the fire to find other *garîb* persons like him (*garîblere göynür özüm*). There is a contradictory and ambiguous relationship between identity and difference here. To what extent is it possible to build an identity starting from a common 'estrangeness' (*garîb*)? It is an identity which refuses any common ground except for being *garîb*, an element that beyond creating identity promotes diversity. Again, it is an aspect which gives coherence to contradictions.

Yunus Emre claims that he will be recognized as a stranger (*bir garîb ölmüş diyeler*) after his death and that someone, estrange as him, will take care of his corpse. This estrange (*garîb*) community seems to blur the border between life and death – another contradictory element widespread in the sufi mode of being islamic. Starting from a source attributed by someone to prophet Muhammed and which invites human beings to die before their death, sufis have given a particular importance to

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<sup>225</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C.Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.277

the promotion of metaphoric death as an indispensable element of spiritual education.

If on the one side with metaphoric death sufis have intended, and still intend, the education of the lower elements of the self (*terbiye*) which implies the transformation of the lower instincts into long-term spiritual goals, on the other side for Yunus Emre poetical production and experience of love have a soteriological dimension in relation to death. As we will see later, the poetic event and the encounter with the words of the ineffable Absolute (*hakk sözleri*) will put an end to the perishable levels of life.

However, to come back to our poem, here we do not know if Yunus Emre is referring to metaphoric death. It seems that death, metaphoric or not, constitutes a necessary step to enter in this community of *garîb* persons. How does Yunus Emre depict himself?

Alas my helpless Emre Yûnus.  
There is no antidote to your distress.  
Go now and wander from city to city  
Someone as estranged as me.

*Hey Emrem Yûnus bî-çâre  
Bulunmaz derdüne çâre  
Var imdi gez şârdan şâra  
Şöyle garîb bencileyin*<sup>226</sup>

Yunus Emre gives a pessimistic perspective of his own life. He claims he is himself harmless and without hope of finding any remedy to his own sadness (*bulunmaz derdüne çâre*). Paradoxically, in the last part of the *beyt*, he encourages himself to travel to find someone as *garîb* as himself (*şöyle garîb bencileyin*). This pessimistic end of the poem demonstrates Yunus Emre's spiritual maturity.

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<sup>226</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, poem n.277

In fact, the poet's situation of being *garîb* is related to his foundational element (*öz*), a term that many scholars translate as 'essence'. However, the term 'essence' in English and in many European languages refers to the characteristic that constitutes the 'being' of something or someone. This idea of something that is present and abundant, and that goes beyond the accidents of the entity, which, in contrast, western languages define as *existencia*, differs from the foundational element of Yunus Emre and the Turkish sufi mode of being islamic: *öz*.

This foundational element (*öz*), more than 'being' an essence would be a lack of 'being', or pure existence. Here, Yunus Emre's ontological perspective seems closer to Molla Sadrâ's conception of 'gradation of existence' (*tashkik al-vujud*). As Federerico Campagna explains in his *Technic and magic: The reconstruction of reality*, Molla Sadrâ thought the reality as a continuous gradient between ineffable existences on the one side and linguistically approachable existences on the other side. Differently from Aristotle, who influenced the ontological perspective in most of the western philosophical tradition, Molla Sadrâ did not see essence and substance as permanent and solid categories. On the contrary, he considered the existence as ontologically superior to essence, the latter being unstable and temporal. To Molla Sadrâ the varying intensity of existence, considering pure existence as God, transforms both the accidental qualities and the very substance of a thing<sup>227</sup>.

Interestingly enough, in Turkish, the verb that indicates something being missed is *özlemek*, a verbal form which derives from (*öz*). In this sense, there is a semantic connection between the pure existence of something as *öz* and the lack of something. We can claim that this particular ontological perspective takes into consideration the transformation and participation of everything with the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*), which on the one hand manifests itself in the world of the essences while on the other hand being veiled by its own disclosure.

At the end of this poem, Yunus Emre openly claims his 'harmlessness' (*bî-çâre*) and

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<sup>227</sup> Campagna, F. (2018). *Technic and Magic: The Reconstruction of Reality*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, p.132

acknowledges himself and the receiver of the poem the endless character of his spiritual journey. The pessimistic perspective is combined with an optimistic and implicit dimension which recognizes the eternal character of the path and the possibility of immortality by the poetical event. In fact, the poetical event becomes an opening to the source (*asil*) as primordial language, the language of the bird.

The poet has to be able to die, or make the conventional language, the language of the essences, disappear. Only in this way another language, which is the gap between the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) and the conventional words (*keleci*) can find a place in the space of the poem. In conclusion, Yunus Emre takes some aspects from the language of the Qur'an to explain his own poetical experience and to reproduce some of its specificity as the autoreferential dimension of language in itself.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

In this chapter we analyzed the philosophical intensity of the discourse on language in Yunus Emre's Divan. We spoke of philosophical intensity because it is evident that throughout the poetic work there is a self-reflexive discourse of the poetic voice on the origin of its own words. This constant search for the origin of the poetic word paradoxically results in the realm of anonymity. In fact, Yunus Emre the Divan often takes a radical distance from his words.

This gesture fits perfectly into what I have called prophetic culture. The epigone of this experience of language is the prophet Adam who is the one who first speaks. As we saw earlier Yunus Emre takes the koranic mythologema and sets the stage for the prophet Adam's first word, which is a word of gratitude. When asked by the creator about his words, prophet Adam indicates the anonymity of his words by acknowledging in the language of power a divine source.

At this point we can say that we find ourselves through language in a liminal space, *barzakh*, where human beings lose their identity to give voice to what is impossible to communicate. This paradox of prophetic culture refers to a conception of revealed language that while from a strictly human point of view is language, from a metaphysical point of view it is no longer. We are still faced with something that

*barzakh* logic can help us cope with, a level of complexity that is impossible to analyze from the reductionism of any binary approach.

All this relates to what we have called the *melâmiyye* spirit in Divan, a spirit that rightly seeks to go beyond forms. This *melâmiyye* element in Yunus Emre's work was already highlighted by Golpinarli but in a somewhat blurry way. In fact, Golpinarli had mainly seen an antinomian spirit in Yunus Emre. What the *melâmiyye* spirit brings to Yunus Emre's work instead is an attempt to go beyond forms and for that rather than anti-*şeriat* and beyond *şeriat*.

I finished this analysis of Divan by relating Yunus Emre's language to the Qur'an. Even the Qur'an enacts a self-referential discourse on its language and the origin of the revealed word. That is why it is important to note the correspondences we find especially regarding the concept of *garîb*, something estrange, unique and eccentric. The revealed word of the koranic text, like that of Yunus Emre's poem, must take a distance from any kind of linguistic form and thus locates its specificity in its foreignness.

## CHAPTER 5

# TOWARDS AN ITALIANATE APPROACH TO PROPHETIC CULTURE: DANTE ALIGHIERI AND YUNUS EMRE

### 5.1. Introduction

In this work I sought to analyze the work of Yunus Emre in order to understand its reception, or rather lack of reception, and muted acclaim, in many circles. His poetry needs to be better known in an English-speaking academic context where, unfortunately, interest in the esoteric dimension of Islam, especially in languages which are not Arabic or Persian, is still very limited. On the contrary, what is too often highlighted is the more exoteric aspects that are usually linked to the legal dimension and more closely related to the Arabic language.

I have discovered that in general esotericism is a dimension that remains on the fringes of academic inquiry. This is true whether it is Islamic, Christian or Jewish esotericism, or even other traditions less studied in academia. Unfortunately, the post-enlightenment rationalist approach to the construction of knowledge has generally marginalized these types of knowledge.

Yet the international academic context of the last two decades has changed enormously and study of the religious, cultural and social phenomena of Islam has become increasingly diversified. This does not diminish the fact that there is still a need to shed light on other ways of engaging with the koranic revelation, and in the words of Bruce Lawrence, we have to develop a counter canon that can complexify such an important historical phenomenon as Islam within world history<sup>228</sup>.

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<sup>228</sup> Lawrence, B.B., (1993). Enough Said, Trying to Build Cultural Bridge Instead of Shoring Up Ideological Walls, in *Cross Cultural Studies: Arab World / United States of America*. Marrakech: Revue de la Faculté des Lettres et des Science Humanes. p.243

Yunus Emre, with his poetry in vernacular Turkish and his esoteric perspective, in my opinion can and should play a key role in the creation of this counter canon. Moreover, my work would like to be a modest contribution to connecting the Turkish-language academic world with the international academic world. Indeed, while Yunus Emre still has a marginal position in the international Islamic studies community, the works written in Turkish on Yunus Emre, especially in recent years, are becoming more and more numerous.

Furthermore, as I came to the end of this work, I realized that I referred to many sources from Italian authors. Apart from analyzing the works of Anna Masala, which are closely related to Yunus Emre's poetry and Turkish culture in general, I also found it very stimulating to explore a strand of contemporary Italian philosophy that has an interest in exploring the metaphysical dimension of language in a particular way. My immersion of Yunus Emre's Divan was accompanied by authors such as Giorgio Agamben, Franco Bifo Berardi, Federico Campagna, and Stefania Consigliere whom I will continue to mention in this conclusion.

This is why I hope that my contribution is not only on a poetic work, Yunus Emre's Divan, which is not within the traditional canon of Islamic studies. I consider this work unique do also to a series of insights that we might call "Italianate", still too marginal in contemporary academic discourse and practically nonexistent when put in relation to Islamicate. But it is precisely from the term Italianate that Marshall Hodgson has created a new word, 'Islamicate'. 'Italianate' refers to something that is associated with the Italian style or manner, rather than specifically related to Italy<sup>229</sup>. Similarly, 'Islamicate' refers to the social and cultural aspects historically associated with Islam and Muslims, regardless of whether they are found among Muslims or non-Muslims.

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229 See Hodgson, M. G. S. (1974). *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*. Volume One. The Classical Age of Islam. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p. 59

In my case, Italianate refers to an Italianate style that unites a number of scholars regardless of their disciplinary area (philosophy, anthropology, cultural studies) and the languages they use in their work. For example, Federico Campagna, despite being Italian, is a scholar who lives in London and writes in English. Italianate thus also refers to a syncretic perspective that seeks to interpollinate what "Italian" with something else. Italianate in this case is a hybrid style, also related to its Mediterraneanness as a space of syncretism between cultures, languages, and metaphysical traditions.

This approach can complexify the main disciplinary boundaries of the contemporary Turkish academia context. In the Turkish cultural scene, especially from secularist backgrounds, scholars refer to Yunus Emre as *tekke edebiyat*, which we could translate as the literature of sufi lodges. *Tekke* is the Turkish name for the buildings of Anatolian region where sufi communities lived before the founding of the Turkish Republic. Due to their political influence, for some also their decadence from a moral point of view, the *tekkes* were closed in 1925, and this nation-wide action had big impact on sufism and sufi literature from a political and cultural point of view<sup>230</sup>.

Here, I cannot go into detail about the political consequences of this political decision, but at the same time, I must note the importance of a culture linked to this type of spatiality, the *tekke*, where the language of cultural transmission was predominantly Turkish and values were always linked to the primarily esoteric dimension of Islam. The *tekke* as a spatiality was always different from the koranic school where instead the exoteric aspects of Islam had priority and Arabic was the main vehicle of cultural and spiritual transmission.

These spaces, the *tekke* and the koranic schools, have always related different types of engagement with revelation, in some cases cooperating, in other cases negotiating meaning and sometimes opposing each other. In my view, one of the aspects that has created a substantial differentiation between these two spaces of knowledge

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<sup>230</sup> Kudsî Ergüner, one of the foremost virtuoso of the Ney, the flute so closely associated with the Mevlevî tradition, has written an autobiography that also deals with the transition from the Sufi culture of the *tekke* to the Sufi culture in the secular-minded Turkish Republic. See Ergüner, K.(2000). *La Fontaine de la Séparation: Voyages d'un Musicien Soufi*. Sorgues: Le bois d'Orion.

transmission is definitely the conception of language. The transmission of esoteric *tekke* knowledge has very often opened up the possibility for a more dynamic and less crystallized conception of language.

What I tried to highlight with my work was precisely this living conception of language in Yunus Emre's Divan. A poetry where language expresses contradictions that allow the opening of new worlds. Language is not for Yunus Emre mere tool of expressing something, but, on the contrary, creation of meanings that open the possibility to other worlds. It is a language that transforms both those who participate in it, as much as the source as the addressee. The poet and his interlocutor are transformed.

This specific conception of language resides in a specific ontology that does not reduce reality to a single dimension. As we have seen in the previous pages, the metaphysical perspective we can extrapolate from Yunus Emre's poetry highlights the complexity, ambiguity and paradoxes present. And this complexity is expressed through poetic language and its contradictions.

All the Italianate authors who accompanied me in this work start from the same premise and propose an ontological shift within cultural studies. They propose in different ways a critique of a certain strand of modern thought that tends to reduce the real to a single dimension that can be described through a linear and absolute language. What lies at the foundation of this critique is a technical conception of language that serves to create a clear distinction between subject and object, cultural and natural, technical and magical.

Through this work, I discovered a possible emancipatory dimension in the poetry of Yunus Emre. Emancipatory in the sense of a possible ally in overcoming this modern ontology of separability. Of a decisive critique of an absolute technical language that can serve a linear and neutral representation of what is real. To the overcoming of binary categories that exclude other possibilities of complexity, interconnection and contamination. A language that is intertwined with its own impossibility, with what cannot be said but emerges from the poetic gesture. A language that also sets in motion the shadow, the unknown and the unspeakable.

It is therefore a language linked to death. Indeed, as Italian anthropologist Stefania Consigliere well notes, in human collectives that remain connected with the relational networks that form their worlds, death is transformation<sup>231</sup>. The end of biological life is not seen as annihilation, but transition. In these contexts, a good life is nothing more than the ability to navigate this transition. Yunus Emre's language is nothing but an invitation that proceeds in this direction. A language that stages the death present in our lives. A language that reminds the poet and his interlocutor of the famous Sufi adage to learn to die before dying. Here too, the power of Yunus Emre's poetry has an emancipatory value. It succeeds in reminding us of the importance of death as a metaphysical element that complexifies reality by making it paradoxical. The overcoming of the superficial binary between life and death remains one of the main backgrounds of our poet's entire poetic work.

In other words, the experience of language in *Divan* seems precisely an experience of death. A death that renders language anonymous, because, in the first place, the one who dies in the event of language is the poet himself. In this sense, poetry builds something from its destruction. In Yunus Emre's case it is a destruction that lays bare (*uryân*) his own existence in order to create another world. We have seen several times along the various chapters of my thesis how this gesture remains understandable when related to the logic of the *barzakh*.

This is a logic that is not afraid to consider contradictions, but on the contrary foregrounds them to open up new meanings. As we have seen, this logic approaches a conception of apophatic language, which simultaneously attests and denies in order to rightly give birth to something else. It is an other space that takes shape in the poetic gesture, which becomes a vessel for death and life, but at the same time denies both polarities. In this sense we are faced with a conception that creates a tension between the phenomenological and metaphysical dimensions of the poetic act.

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<sup>231</sup> See Consigliere, S. (2021). *Favole del Reincanto: Molteplicità, Immaginario, Rivoluzione*. Roma: Derive Approdi p. 48

The event of language, in the phenomenological sense, is experienced by Yunus Emre as a death that opens to the metaphysical dimension of pure existence, indicated by the Turkish word *öz*. This pure existence eludes any kind of categorization; it remains a manifest and occult dimension in the poetic work that only the tension between the poet's voice and the anonymous voice can express. This manifesting and concealing of pure existence (*öz*) opens an interstitial space that transforms and prepares those who are able to integrate it for the transformation of death.

## 5.2. A Cartography of Prophetic Culture

I would like to create a bridge between Yunus Emre's conception of language and what Italian philosopher Federico Campagna calls prophetic culture<sup>232</sup>. In his book titled 'Prophetic Culture, Recreation for Adolescents', the Italian philosopher proposes approaching prophecy as one of many possible styles of cultural production. His reading emphasises the emancipatory aspect of this particular creation of worlds. Emancipatory, however, not in the sense of the creation of a new order but of a way of freedom from any kind of pre-established and closed system of meaning. In this sense, prophetic culture offers a kind of stamina capable of freeing the subject from the anguish that paralyses the individual due to social conformism.

Campagna gives the term prophecy a totally different meaning from the predominant discourse of Westernised Modernity. This liberating dimension of prophecy, in fact, contrasts both with the more rationalist values of the modern mainstream inherited from the values of the Enlightenment. Within this cultural spectrum, prophecy has been seen as an anti-emancipatory force that instead obstructs the one and only impulse towards humanity's progress: the power of reason. But Campagna's proposal also criticises the conservative conception of prophetic culture. In this case, in fact, its values are used to aspire to a possible new order that is idealised with ahistorical and romanticised values. A desire for a new politico-religious order that wants to

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<sup>232</sup> Campagna, F. (2021). *Prophetic Culture. Recreation For Adolescents* London: Bloomsbury Publishing., p.131

restore an idealised type of past in a linear manner that is very similar to that proposed by the rationalist progressive idea.

On the contrary, prophetic culture has for Campagna the value of opening up a pre-political position that can help change the material conditions of our lives. This is without directly aspiring to an immediate effect of transforming the social structures of our political communities. It is more an ontological shift, in the sense of a space of possibility for being and seeing the world differently, than an ethical proposal that offers simple recipes on how to live together. For Campagna, ethical discourse has the danger of placing the subject on a pedestal from which to propose universal solutions from his or her privileged vantage point. Instead, the ontological turn is a response that prophetic culture can facilitate from the concrete and contextualized suffering that every social system sets in motion from its inevitable closure and normativity.

Hence, in Campagna's thinking, prophetic culture is potentially an insurrectional force that seeks on the one hand to unlock the absolutist constraints of a certain way of world-building that enclose life forms in a single grammar. On the other, it seeks to combat the terrifying abyss of meaninglessness that underlies all possible world-building<sup>233</sup>. To do this, prophetic culture needs a particular language that Campagna connects to the grotesque.

The grotesque, a concept that the Italian philosopher takes from Italian Renaissance art, is a syncretic combination of elements of a different nature that emphasises the irrelevance of the temporal plane. Through the combination of historical and ahistorical elements, in an often very confused and arbitrary sequence, prophetic culture wants to create a space that remains outside history, a dimension in which the sequence of past-present-future loses all relevance<sup>234</sup>.

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<sup>233</sup> Campagna, F. (2021). *Prophetic Culture. Recreation For Adolescents* London: Bloomsbury Publishing., p.186

<sup>234</sup> Campagna, F. (2021). *Prophetic Culture. Recreation For Adolescents* London: Bloomsbury Publishing., p.105

Prophecy according to Campagna when it speaks of future events does not so much consider it chronologically but rather spatially. History becomes a kind of physical object in which we can call its different parts past-present-future in the same way as we can call the parts of our arm wrist, forearm and elbow. The cultural production that the prophetic impulse generates starts from the awareness of the impossibility of speaking of the ineffable in a merely chronological context. That is why it takes a different position and speaks of history as if from a point of view of eternity.

In this sense, the language of prophetic culture lacks authorship. Its exceeding the temporal and contextual horizon does not allow it to speak from someone's point of view. The one who conveys the prophetic message is not its author but its primary receptacle and interlocutor. It is therefore a position that goes beyond the individual dimension and connects the historical dimension with that of eternity. Both the prophet and their audience are confronted with a similar obstacle: they must remove themselves from the equation as the author and reader, respectively, and strive to attain a comprehensive understanding of the irreducible complexity of reality. This level of understanding is a divine attribute, and both the prophet and their audience must attempt to approach it as closely as possible.

Campagna notices how the process of prophetic culture involves two steps that are similar to the concepts of *fana* and *baqa* in Sufism. Just as a Sufi must first eliminate their sense of self as an independent entity in their quest for God (*fana*), the prophet must extinguish their existing position and then re-establish a new perspective in alignment with the Divinity (*baqa*). In both cases, the ultimate goal is to remain mindful of the omnipresence of the Divine throughout reality where even non-factual and indescribable aspects become perceptible<sup>235</sup>.

But Campagna's references to Islam are not only related to Sufism; instead, they also concern his personal reading of Islam's prophetic event. For him, the story of a young orphan, rebel and revolutionary exemplifies the spirit of prophetic culture. Indeed, the story of the prophet Muhammed highlights for Campagna the combination of an

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<sup>235</sup> Ibidem, p.137

existential detachment from himself and a new metaphysical orientation regarding the possibility of creating worlds<sup>236</sup>.

Campagna insists that prophecy is a position that is achieved through metaphysical work. It is not so much an ethical or behavioural positioning but an ability to order on different planes of reality the continuous flow of perceptions by which we are constantly invested. In this sense, the prophet Muhammed, as a model of *Insan al Kamil*, was able to construct within himself a space from which to hear the voice of Allah. This prerogative of his as a complete or perfect human being makes him not just a mere man, but a possibility to imagine and create worlds regardless of the historical context in which he finds himself immersed<sup>237</sup>.

In this sense, we still see the prophetic position proposed by Campagna as a sort of crossroads between different planes of the real that intersect contradictorily on temporal and atemporal, biographical and abiographical, historical and imaginary planes. All of this becomes a kind of palimpsest that integrates temporal and atemporal planes. In the end, in fact, prophecy as a position is an inevitable exit from the world, but not so much as an escape but as repositioning. Not being contemporary or becoming other than oneself is according to Campagna a condition for creating prophetic culture. Indeed, the prophet cannot be totally 'of the world' and cannot be contemporary with its world. This position derives from his ability to integrate the different planes of the real that the dominant cultures of each era instead fail to embrace.

The prophetic culture described by Campagna can be taken as a new methodological tool that has the function of relating different works of different prophetic cultures. He not only assumes that we can recognise these characteristics in different cultural contexts, but that these works have a destabilising potential vis-à-vis Westernised Modernity. The latter in fact tends to limit language to its technical-instrumental dimension in a linear historical context without taking into account the different layers that compose reality. What seems instead to characterise the works of

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<sup>236</sup> Campagna, F. (2021). *Prophetic Culture. Recreation For Adolescents* London: Bloomsbury Publishing., p.131

<sup>237</sup> Ivi.

prophetic culture is this ability to use a language that sets in motion the plurality of the real by including the echo of what transcends the linguistic dimension itself.

### **5.3. Dante Alighieri and Yunus Emre within Their Prophetic Cultures**

I would like to conclude my work precisely by opening a dialogue between two important voices of this prophetic culture: Yunus Emre and Dante Alighieri. As explained in the introduction, I tried to place my thesis within a methodological framework that takes into account the centrality of the esoteric dimension of Yunus Emre's poetry. So far I have tried to highlight the specificity of the historical and geographical context of Yunus Emre's esotericism. Here I would like to explore how Dante Alighieri is a literary and conceptual contemporary of Yunus Emre, albeit in a very different geographical and spiritual context.

Dante lives in a historical and geographical context, the Italian peninsula at the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries, linked to the internal struggle between the Empire and the Papacy. He himself is an active figure within this conflict, and his political views in favor of the Empire force him to live part of his life in exile in Ravenna. From a cultural point of view there is a great ferment that comes from the new philosophical ideas that arrived to the Latin-speaking cultural elites thanks to the translation of the texts of the classics of ancient thought made in Andalusia. Dante himself manages to construct a synthesis between the values of Christianity and those of classical antiquity by proposing part of his thought in the vernacular.

I am connecting Yunus Emre with the figure of Dante for many reasons. The two poets share a symbolic importance in the construction of the national-literary canon of both Republican Italy and Republican Turkey, political experiences that date back to a relatively short past in relation to the period in which the two poets lived. What was most emphasized, however, in their canonization as national poets was their importance as epigones of their respective national languages. They were assumed to be fathers of the Italian and Turkish languages, taking as good the philosophical aspects compatible with republican ideologies, one of the main political values of Westernized Modernity, and discarding many other elements less relevant to that historical and political moment.

In my opinion, we should go beyond this reductionist perspective and highlight how, although in different forms, the two poets represent an expression of prophetic culture that takes the metaphor of love as an encounter with the divine within a particular conception of language. In my opinion, we cannot make this comparison unless we first place both of these two figures within a movement of engagement with the revealed word that comes from an esoteric perspective strictly related to what Campagna proposes as prophetic culture.

My close reading of Yunus Emre's poetry has demonstrated how there is an intimate correlation between the experience of the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) and the experience of a particular language: the truthful word (*hak söz*). Another conclusion about our analysis of Yunus Emre's poems can be that Yunus Emre points out how words (*söz*) can be a space in which the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*) is revealed, and at the same time concealed.

This space is a contradictory dimension which can be described as a forcefield where different polarities take place, a liminal space or *barzakh*. Here, poetic language with its own rhythm can communicate something that is not communicable in prose. To what extent do these general aspects share common ground with Dante's reflection on language? What are the intersections of the philosophy of language of these two important authors? I will try to answer these questions by taking into consideration some suggestions regarding Dante's philosophy of language in a work, the end of the poem, in which Agamben states:

It is therefore time to reveal what every intelligent scholar has always known, explicitly or implicitly: Beatrice is the name of the amorous experience of the event of language at play in the poetic text itself. She is thus the name and the love of language, but of language understood not in its grammaticality but, rather, in its radical primordially, as the emergence of verse from the pure Nothing (according to the incipit of Guilhem IX's verse). It is because of its absolute originality that speech is the supreme cause and object of love and, at the same time, necessarily transient and perishable<sup>238</sup>.

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<sup>238</sup> Agamben, G., & Heller-Roazen, D. (1999). *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*. Palo Alto, CA.: Stanford University Press., p.58

Agamben, in this quote, sheds light on the fact that love's experience for Dante, as well as for the rest of poets of *De dolce stil novo*, represents an extraordinary event of language, which can be considered as a primordial language personified in the name of Beatrice. Before being the name of a person, Beatrice is the name and the love of language which the poet experiences in the same poetic gesture. It is something which has origin from nothing, which is unlearned, as the forms of languages that are constituted by grammar.

Here, Agamben claims that Dante's philosophy of language manifests a bilingual dimension. On the one side, there is the vernacular dimension of language which is also called the 'mother tongue'. This dimension of language is intuitive and not mediated by any sort of knowledge. It is the language of love. On the other side, there is the language of grammar, that for Dante was Latin. A language which is learned and concerns the spectrum of knowledge. One of the main differences between these two dimensions is that the vernacular or mother tongue continues to be circumscribed in the circle of death and regeneration, while Latin, the language of grammar, does not perish.

How can we relate Dante's philosophy of language to Yunus Emre's conception? In my opinion, from Agamben's claim we can state that both in Dante, and as we read in Yunus Emre, one of the primary elements of their poetic production seems to be self referential reflection on the poetic gesture. For both authors, we could argue that the experience of love, thought on language and poetical production are all different forces present in their works. In my opinion, what Dante identifies as a *volgare*, in Yunus Emre corresponds to the language of birds (*kuş dil*) or the language of Suleyman. This image of the language of the birds is a crucial trope of the *aşk mezhebi* and it makes reference to the language of the prophet Suleyman, as reported by a surah of the Qur'an:

And Solomon inherited David. He said, 'O people, we have been taught the language of birds, and we have been given from all things. Indeed, this is evident bounty.

وَوَرِثَ سُلَيْمَانُ دَاوُودَ وَقَالَ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ عُلِّمْنَا مَنْطِقَ الطَّيْرِ وَأَوْتِينَا مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ الْفَضْلُ الْمُبِينُ<sup>239</sup>

This surah influenced many authors of the Islamic esoterism and in particular the *aşk mezhebi*. For example, the masterpieces ‘The conference of the birds’ ( مَنْطِقَ الطَّيْرِ ) by Ferîdüddin Attâr takes its title from this surah of the Qur'an. In my opinion, this special speech about which the Qur'an and many sufis speak is a language of love which is not mediated by any form of knowledge. It is a language which has escaped from the rules of grammar, but contrary to what Dante thought, exactly for this reason is not perishable. I would like to take a poem in which Yunus Emre evokes the language of birds to understand better what he means:

I came with something strange, no one knows my condition.

I speak, I listen, no one knows my language.

My language is the language of the birds, my country the country of the friend.

I am the nightingale, the friend is my rose. Know that my rose never fades for me.

*Ben bir ‘aceb ile geldüm kimse hâlüm bilmez benim*

*Ben söylerem ben dinlerem kimse dilüm bilmez*

*Benüm dilüm kuş dilidür benim ilüm dost ilidür*

*Ben bülbülem dost gülümdür bilün gülüm solmaz benim*

The poetic voice introduces the theme of the language of birds (*kuş dilidür*) in a very enigmatic manner. In my opinion already from the first verse of the *beyt* we can identify the esoteric tone of the whole poem. Esoteric tone that emphasizes the exceptionality of the poetic event as opposed to an engagement with language of an esoteric nature that is made to bear a generally understandable and valid experience for all. Also here, one of the possible interpretations of this poem could be to understand the first personal pronoun 'I' (*ben*) as the poetical voice which speaks

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<sup>239</sup> Qur'an, (27,16) *Sahih International*

about its own event. The disclosure of the 'I' (*ben*) corresponds to the process of inspiration experienced by both the poet and the addressee who cannot understand the poetic event in itself (*kimse hâlüm bilmez*).

The 'I' (*ben*) attests his status by claiming to be the language of the bird (*benüm dilüm kuş dilidür*) and to belong to the reign of the friend (*ilüm dost ilidür*). This event of language takes place in another country, which is one of the liminal spaces where language becomes something else. In this way, the relation between the nightingale and the rose can actually be interpreted in terms of a love event which produces the condition of possibility for the event of the language of the birds. In other words, the language of the birds is the linguistic event which the poet experiences in his or her poetical speech.

This friend said: 'let him come to me, I offered him a cup, let him take it'.  
I took the cup, I drank the wine and my heart does not die anymore.

I have neither attitude nor place. I have nowhere to stand.  
For the intimate heart conversation with the ineffable Absolute, I have no determined place.

*Ol dost bana gelsün dimiş sundum kadeh alsun dimiş  
Aldum kadeh içdüm şarâb ayruk gönlüm ölmez benüm*

*Ne turum var ne turagum hîç yirde yokdur karârum  
hakk'a münâcât itmege bellü yirüm olmaz benüm*

Here there is a change of perspective. The poetic voice is now explaining the point of view of the poet, who experiences the poetic event as the experience of drinking wine offered by the friend (*ol dost bana gelsün dimiş sundum kadeh alsun dimiş*). My reading of the wine metaphor therefore refers to the offering of the primordial language. This primordial language makes the poet drunk in the sense that it makes them lose any kind of identity. Drunkenness then could represent the state of the loss of lucidity and individual limits to get to another dimension.

Interestingly enough, this experience of drinking, i.e., the poetic event, provokes an existential transformation in his deepest identity (*gönül*). We have seen before how the heart (*gönül*) represents the poet's inner identity. The state of intoxication leads to the loss of identity, which in a sense is a death. But paradoxically it is a death that leads to life, since the poetic voice evokes an event that transforms the heart into something else that can no longer die (*ayruk ölmez*).

This is the interesting discrepancy between Dante and Yunus Emre's philosophy on language. While Dante claims that the *volgare*, his own 'mother tongue' is perishable as Beatrice's death makes evident, for Yunus Emre the event of a primordial language, which originated, ontologically speaking, before the learned language of the legalistic mode of being Islamic, seems to confer on the poet a kind of immortality. This is why in all the Divan there is a constant reminder about the fact that the lovers will not die (*aşıklar ölmez*). The lovers (*aşıklar*) are those who, through their experience of the language of birds, are able to enter into another level of being, which is different from the language of knowledge.

On the other hand, the dantesque view is linked to the adamic tradition, as we have also seen earlier in Yunus Emre, but in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* it gives Latin the status as an immutable language<sup>240</sup>. Here in my view is the influence of classical culture on the one hand, and Dante's political ideas on the other, which identify Latin as the only post-Babelian language capable of unifying peoples under a single earthly authority, the Empire. This political dimension is conspicuously absent in Yunus Emre's poetry, and in a sense it is overcome in the Dante of the *Commedia*.

In fact, in the last verse of Yunus Emre's *beyt* quoted above, the poetic voice speaks of another spatiality in which language can have an intimate heart conversation with the ineffable Absolute (*hakk'a münâcât*). The characteristic of this spatiality still remains its indefiniteness (*bellü yirüm olmaz*), a place that poetic space evokes as imprecise. A place of exile, as we shall see below, is another crucial point in both Yunus Emre's poetics and Dante Alighieri's *Commedia*.

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<sup>240</sup> Dante Alighieri, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*.

This other spatiality, this positioning that Yunus Emre makes explicit, is very reminiscent of one of the fundamental aspects that Campagna finds in the works of prophetic culture. What Yunus Emre affirms in his poetic gesture is an existential repositioning. The poetic gesture becomes a witness to this movement that springs from love. The metaphor of love, and the drunkenness that results from it, is one of the forms in which Yunus Emre conveys his experience of an ontological paradigm shift. The drunkenness that comes from the wine of love, in fact, could be read as a multiple, complex and confused perception of the different planes of reality. In this way he contrasts the more linear and reductionist dimension of engagement with the revelation characteristic of a perspective more oriented towards the normative dimension of Islam.

Ask me where I stand, if you come I'll show you.

My eye sees nothing but the ineffable Absolute, not even an atom.

See all that a manifestation did to Moses on the mount Tûr.

Yûnus says: 'In the dimension of the ineffable Absolute, my words are not left behind'.

*Sor turdugum yiri bana gelürsen gösterem sana  
Bir zerrece hak'dan ayru gözüm nesne görmez benüm*

*Tûr Tagı'nda bir tecellî gör Mûsâ'ya neler kıldı  
Yûnus eydür hak katında sözüm girü kalmaz benüm*

Here again there is a reference to the source of these words. The claim that there is no other object (*nesne*) which interests the poet except the ineffable Absolute (*hakk*). We can see one of the fundamental aspects of esoteric engagement with revelation come into play. What remains the main aspect in the spiritual quest of the poetic voice is the direct encounter with the divine. The unity of being remains the main engine for spiritual realization; everything else, the ethical, aesthetic and political dimensions, become but an effect of this encounter.

In the last *beyt*, however, Yunus Emre again affirms explicitly his poem's participation in prophetic culture. If in the third chapter we had seen an identification with the words of Adam, in this poem Yunus Emre draws on the experience of the prophet Moses on Mount Sinai. As we saw earlier, the prophet Moses represents the archetypal figure of one who is able to enter into dialogue with the ineffable Absolute. There is a very interesting parallelism in the poem between prophet Moses' Mount Sinai (*Tûr tagı*) and Yunus Emre's abode of the ineffable Absolute (*hak katında*). If for the prophet Moses the position of interlocution with the ineffable is well defined, for Yunus Emre, on the other hand, it is a non-place absorbed by another dimension. But still it remains a prophetic word that transforms the poet's words into something else.

#### **5.4. Vernaculars and the Eternity**

The prophetic culture that Dante proposes through his poetry culminates in his masterwork, *La Commedia*<sup>241</sup>. This poem can be considered the poet-ego's personal journey through the three realms of the other world (*Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso*) to the climax of the encounter with the ineffable Absolute. Here again we are faced with a poetic gesture that enacts the limits of language, enacting a complex and self-referential discourse on language. What Dante's standpoint has in common, in my view, with the position of Yunus Emre is a conception of poetic language that derives from their influences in their prophetic cultures.

One of the key features of this parallelism between poetic language and prophetic language is established at the level of the origin of words. In both cases we are dealing with a poetic gesture that is dictated by a divine inspiration that exceeds the merely human capacities of the poetic act. It is an event of language that connects the poet with the ineffable Absolute. As we will see later, the ways Dante uses to talk about it are related to his relationship with his beloved Beatrice.

What seems extremely interesting is how both poets have to enact a double movement: on the one hand they are among the first to dare to use their mother

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<sup>241</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia*.

tongue, Turkish in the case of Yunus Emre and Italian in the case of Dante, to speak about spiritual themes. We are at a time when political and religious systems are intimately linked, and the languages of the religious elite are being joined by vernacular languages of the political and cultural elites<sup>242</sup>. On the other hand, both refer to prophetic culture by projecting distance from their poetry, words inspired from Beyond and so anonymous.

As we wrote earlier, the cartography of prophetic culture that Campagna offers us an interesting tool to understand the importance of the 'death of the author' in this cultural context. In both our poets we find ourselves exposed to this dissolution of authorship and the intervention of the ineffable Absolute in the poetic gesture. Certainly this dynamic takes different forms. In *The Comedy*, the presence of the pilgrim Dante, the main character of the work, within the spatiality of the other world certainly has a more linear and biographical narrative connotation. In Yunus Emre's *Divan*, we find no such narrative strand. In Yunus Emre, however, we consistently find his name in the last beyt of his poems. To what extent can we speak of a trace that refers to the poet's authorship? Is it not, instead, a threshold that connects the different levels of reality through a name that is not so much an author as a position, exactly as in the case of the prophecy described by Campagna?

In Yunus Emre we witness a kind of balance in which on the one hand the poet's individual voice needs to manifest itself, yet on the other hand it needs to be depersonalized through the medium of divine inspiration. In the case of the *Commedia*, the narrative process involves a path of the poet-narrator toward depersonalization that ends in the encounter with the divine during the last part of the work. In the case of Yunus Emre's poems, it is as if Yunus Emre's name acts as a gateway between the inspiration that comes to the poet from the ineffable Absolute and the message that is conveyed.

This certainly can connect to an esoteric conception of revealed language that allows them to take a distance from exoteric positions that, instead, crystallize the revealed

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<sup>242</sup> On this phenomenon in the context of South Asia, see Pollock, S. (2018). *India in the Vernacular Millennium: Literary Culture and Polity, 1000-1500. Public Spheres & Collective Identities*. London & New York: Routledge

word into immutable and unmalleable forms. In this case, divine inspiration may also be a form of defense against the religious authorities of their time who would probably have viewed the contents of their works with disfavor.

On the esoteric dimension of Yunus Emre we spoke earlier, while regarding Dante, we observed that this aspect has not been much studied within Dante studies. This is another proof that esotericism in general has long been a taboo subject even with regard to poetry arising in European lands. I am convinced that more interest on this front and, above all, a comparative analysis of esoteric movements could help us overcome some of the stereotypes that a certain sort of post-enlightenment epistemology has created in the past about esotericism.

One of the seminal texts highlighting Dante's esoteric dimension is Luigi Valli's *The Secret Language of Dante and the fedeli d'amore*<sup>243</sup>, also cited by Henry Corbin<sup>244</sup>. The author not only tries to expose the membership of Dante and other important poets of the Italian *stil novo* in the esoteric brotherhood of the *fedeli d'amore* but also relates them directly to islamic esotericism by saying that 'there's nothing in the world that resembles a mystic as much as another mystic even of another religion'<sup>245</sup>. In an undoubtedly ahistorical manner, Luigi Valli argues that he recognizes a tendency in any mystical expression of distancing itself from the profane vernacular. This esoteric tendency enters into divergence with exoteric religious elites who remain generally rigid in formulas that eliminate the spirit of the language detected<sup>246</sup>.

Although Valli's theses, not unlike Corbin's, remain somewhat decontextualized from a historical and geographical point of view, no one can question the centrality of love in the poetry of Dante or Yunus Emre. This aspect can even be extended to *trait*

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<sup>243</sup> Valli, L. (2022). *Il Linguaggio Segreto di Dante e dei Fedeli d'Amore*. Firenze: Harmakis Edizioni.

<sup>244</sup> Corbin, H. (1975). 'En Islam Iranien. Aspects Spirituels et Philosophiques; t. III: Les Fidèles d'Amour. Shī'isme et Soufisme. *Revue Philosophique de la France Et de l. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France* 165.1

<sup>245</sup> Valli, L. (2022). *Il Linguaggio Segreto di Dante e dei Fedeli d'Amore*. Firenze: Harmakis Edizioni., p.96 (My translation).

<sup>246</sup> Valli, L. (2022). *Il Linguaggio Segreto di Dante e dei Fedeli d'Amore*. Firenze: Harmakis Edizioni., p.96 (My translation).

*d'union* between the *aşk mezhebi* of Islamic esotericism and the *fedeli d'amore* of its Christian counterpart.

With a concept taken from Raimon Panikkar we could speak of a kind of homeomorphic equivalent, in the sense of deep correspondences between word-concepts that although belonging to different wisdom traditions go beyond simple analogy. This conceptual equivalence is meant to respect the specificity of each form of knowledge but at the same time to build bridges connecting the different networks of the respective systems<sup>247</sup>.

But if we return to the question of divine inspiration, we can agree with Raoul Bruni when he says that before Dante no one had raised poetry in the vernacular to a status of prophetic speech<sup>248</sup>. The same, in my opinion, can be said of Yunus Emre in his geo-historical milieu. In the context of the *Commedia*, love is explicitly used as a metaphor for divine inspiration in a passage in Purgatory:

But tell me if I see here him  
that brought forth the new rhymes, beginning with  
Ladies that have intelligence of love'

And I said to him: 'I am one who, when  
love breathes in me, take note, and in that manner  
which he dictates within go on to set it forth.

Ma di s' i' veggio qui colui che fore  
trasse le nove rime, cominciando  
'Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore.'

E io a lui: 'T mi son un che, quando  
Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo

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<sup>247</sup> See <https://www.raimon-panikkar.org/english/gloss-homeomorphic.html> last access 11/08/22

<sup>248</sup> Bruni, R. (2010). *Il Divino Entusiasmo dei Poeti: Storia di un Topos*. Torino: Aragno., p. 40

ch'e' ditta dentro vo significando.<sup>249</sup>

These two tercets refer to Dante's encounter with the poet Bonagiunta Orbicciani, who rhetorically asks if the person in front of him was indeed the author of the poem entitled 'Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore.' This is a famous poem in the *Vita Nuova*<sup>250</sup> in which Dante speaks of the symbol of woman as a saving figure to get to the ineffable Absolute. Dante distances himself from his words, just as Yunus Emre often does in his *Divan*, arguing that it is Love that inspires him and he simply takes note by making sense of what he receives.

In these tercets of Dante we find all the main features that Campagna recognizes as peculiar to the works of prophetic culture. Dante explicitly denies the authorship of his words. Moreover, we find a complexity of narrative planes that are combined in a grotesque way. On the one hand, there are historical characters and elements, the poet Buonagiunta Orbicciani or Dante's poem 'Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore.', which intersect with the fictional dimension of *The Comedy* relate to a timeless dimension such as that of the love event and its inspiration.

But in *Paradise*, and specifically in Canto V, Beatrice's role as a source of inspiration directly takes the place of Love. Indeed, in a passage where prophetic sources are discussed as fundamental elements of Dante's soteriology, the poet says, 'Così Beatrice a me com'io scrivo' in English translation 'Thus Beatrice to me, even as I write;' As Michelangelo Picone notes, 'Dante presents himself here to his reader in the guise of *Scriba Beatricis*: but since Beatrice is the mirror of divine truth, Dante himself becomes *scriba dei*.<sup>251</sup>' Thus divine inspiration passes through the figure of Beatrice, who acts as mediator between Dante's poetic words and the ineffable.

Now, I find it crucial to try to answer two questions. The first is in what sense does this mediation reflect Dante's grammar of self, linked to the christian theological structure? The second, however, to what extent is it possible to find a homeomorphic

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<sup>249</sup> <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/purgatorio/purgatorio-24/> last access 11/08/22

<sup>250</sup> Dante Alighieri, (2011). 'Vita nuova.' *Vita nuova*

<sup>251</sup> Picone, M. (2002) *Paradiso V: il Voto di Dante*, in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis*, vol. 3, *Paradiso*, a cura di G. Güntert e M. Picone, Firenze, F. Cesati. p. 184 (my translation)

equivalent to Beatrice in Yunus Emre's poetic system and grammar of the self ? The first question, in my view, is important to answer by emphasizing the Christ figure as an embodiment of divinity and as a key element in reconnecting with the ineffable. In this sense, the Christian esotericism of Dante and the *Dolce Stil Novo* poets takes woman as the Christic element that puts the poet in communication with the ineffable. Christ as person embodied in the poetic gesture becomes the beloved woman, for this is personalized through her proper name, in Dante's case the name is Beatrice.

But if in Christian theological discourse Christ, as the figure of the son, sacrifices himself to enable humanity to reach God the Father, what is the element in Islam that has this function ? One of the biggest mistakes, especially in the most superficial interpretation of Islam, locates this role in the prophet Muhammed. In my view, however, the answer is the koranic word. Among the foundations of christianity is certainly the idea that the *λόγος* (logos) is embodied in the figure of Christ, whereas in Islam the *λόγος* (logos) is manifested through the Qur'an. For this reason the koranic word has such a centrality in Yunus Emre, as we saw earlier, and in all Islam.

If, however, we go back to Yunus Emre's poetic universe and ask whether we can find a homeomorphic equivalent with respect to the figure of Beatrice perhaps we can come to an interesting conclusion. In my opinion, the figure of Beatrice in Yunus Emre's poetic gesture could be equivalent to the figure of Tapduk Emre as the embodiment of spiritual guidance. At the end of a Divan poem we can read these words:

Such is the word of my Yûnus Emre, he says it in the depth of his soul.  
The harmless Yûnus who pronounces it is the secret of my Tapduk Emre.

*Yûnus Emrem iş bu sözi cân içinde söyledi  
Söyleyen bî-çâre Yûnus Tapduk Emrem sırırdur*<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı. poem n.81

In this *beyt* are we in a dimension very similar to Dante writing his words dictated by Beatrice's voice? In a sense yes, because there is a reference to the guide who acts as a kind of mediator. On the other hand, however, it is not so much Tapduk Emre but his secret that serves as inspiration for a word that comes from the depths of the soul. A word that given its origin no longer even belongs to the poet who is therefore identified as harmless (*bî-çâre*). If in both poetic universes therefore we find a relationship with the inspired word, the form in which this inspiration takes place is in my opinion different.

In Dante's universe we find ourselves in a more personal and direct relationship with the beloved woman, Beatrice. In the case of Yunus Emre, however, the dimension of inspiration passes through less concrete, perhaps more subtle channels. Let us look at how this personal relationship to Beatrice, the symbol of Wisdom or the linguistic event, is concluded at the end of Dante's journey:

O Highest Light, You, raised so far above  
the minds of mortals, to my memory  
give back something of Your epiphany,

and make my tongue so powerful that I  
may leave to people of the future one  
gleam of the glory that is Yours, for by

returning somewhat to my memory  
and echoing awhile within these lines,  
Your victory will be more understood.

O somma luce che tanto ti levi  
da' concetti mortali, a la mia mente  
ripresta un poco di quel che parevi,

e fa la lingua mia tanto possente,  
ch'una favilla sol de la tua gloria  
possa lasciare a la futura gente;

ché, per tornare alquanto a mia memoria

e per sonare un poco in questi versi,  
più si concepirà di tua vittoria<sup>253</sup>.

We are in the last Canto of Paradise and here, with the intercession not of Beatrice this time but of the Virgin Mary, whom let us remember is the one who conceived Christ, the λόγος incarnate and made man, Dante is able to have the experience of the unity of the universe. These three triplets are a prayer that the experience of unity can be conveyed through poetic language. Interesting to note the analogy between the mighty language (*possente*) in Dante and the language of strength (*kudret dil*) in Yunus Emre. We return here to prophetic culture and the possibility that poetry could convey through another existential position and a consequent language which only works of prophetic culture are able to convey.

But in Dante the mediation of the beloved woman, Beatrice, and later the intercession of the Virgin Mary bring him to an encounter with the ineffable Absolute in a kind of dematerialization of the poetic character and his language. At the end of the last Canto the poetic imagination fails and the journey ends with divine love ending Dante's desire and willingness to continue recounting his mystical experience.

With this conclusion it is as if Dante accepts the limits of his poetic gestures in the vernacular. Thus, if exile is crucial for Dante from a biographical point of view, it is also crucial from the point of view of his conception of language. Eventually Dante seems to accept the transient value of his words that cannot survive as a mother tongue, which unlike Latin, can only be limited in time.

Let me conclude my work by returning to the question of language as a place of interconnection and contradictions where the encounter with the ineffable Absolute makes the poetic gesture immortal. In my opinion these are the two opposite positions in the conceptions of our two poets. In fact, Dante's poetic gesture remains embedded within a plane of worldly reality. Certainly it has a prophetic function, because it is inspired. But it fails to reach the heights of the language of Latin, which for Dante is the only immortal language. Dante's vernacular poetry must die, like the

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<sup>253</sup> <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/paradiso/paradiso-33/> last access 11/08/22

body of the historical Christ, to allow space for the immortality of the church represented by the immortal Latin.

Yunus Emre, on the other hand, seems to reach another dimension through his poetic gesture. It seems that **the language of love, in Yunus Emre, becomes eternal because it manages to give hospitality to the prophetic language.** As we shall see in the next quotation, the prophetic language manifests itself in the language of Divan, does it rise to a status of a revealed language?

The Qur'an says: 'Fear' it says: 'Humble yourselves'  
Do not sit idle, you must quickly come to your resolution.

The word of Yûnus is poetry, but it has its source in the Scripture  
Know that you must be loyal to those who remain with the prophetic word.

*Kur'ân eydür ki vattakû gine eydür ki tezra'û  
Kâhil olup oturmağıl tîz tevbeye gelmek gerek*

*Yûnus'un sözi şî 'irden ammâ aslı(dur) kitâbdan  
Hadîsile dinene key (bilgil) sâdık olmak gerek<sup>254</sup>*

We are at the end of a poem where Yunus Emre takes some words from the Qur'an such as *وَاتَّقُوا*, in Turkish characters *vuattaku* which means 'fear' and which we find in many surahs, including 2:103, 2:212, 3:172, 3:198. In the same verse of the poem we find the word *تَضَرَّعُوا*, in Turkish characters *tezra'û*, which means 'humble yourself' and, instead, appears in surah *الأنعام* in 43th ayah. In my opinion it is interesting how the koranic language is absorbed into Yunus Emre's poem by enacting a practice of hospitality toward the revealed word. This practice of hospitality, present in various parts of Divan, makes Yunus Emre's language a participant of revelation.

Moreover, what I would like to note is that in the second *beyt* quoted above, the poetic voice acknowledges its words as poetry but emphasizes that their origin is the

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<sup>254</sup> Tatçı, M. (1991). *Yunus Emre Divanı*. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı. poem n. 137

word of the Qur'an (*kitâbdan*). So we can say that even the word of the Divan is a word a liminal space, because Yunus Emre acknowledges a divine 'origin' (*ashl*) but still considers it a poetic word. Perhaps here, too, the logic of the *barzakh* can help us see how the poetic:prophetic words of the verse are amalgamated with the prophetic:poetic words of the Qur'an. Those words are in an intimate relationship of inclusion and exclusion.

## 5.5. Conclusion

Campagna's methodological proposal through the concept of prophetic culture is a good alternative to the concept of tradition for relating texts that fall under this type of cultural production. It can relate them in a less reductionist and more historicized spirit than, for example, the concept of 'Tradition' proposed by René Guenon or Henri Corbin-style esotericism. Prophetic culture might in fact be a kind of cultural context in which different esoteric expressions in different languages and historical geographic contexts have come to the fore but which the post-enlightenment categories of contemporary academic culture have difficulty integrating into their discourses.

What I have learned through this work is the effort that academic language has in talking about these cultural products of prophetic culture. In fact, their ambiguities, contradictions and paradoxes always remain unruly to an intellectual approach that seeks coherence, clarity and linearity. Certainly this is one of the great limitations of my research. If seen from the other side of the coin, however, a careful study of authors of prophetic culture such as Yunus Emre and Dante Alighieri can be an opening toward overcoming a rigid rationality that creates separation between different dimensions of knowledge.

Of course, one must be very careful of the temptation of solutionism. To think that a greater prominence of the works on prophetic culture in academia is a solution to the cultural, ecological, economic, spiritual and sanitarian crisis would be a huge mistake. Instead, my modest contribution aimed to highlight the opportunities that the poetry of Yunus Emre and Dante Alighieri can give us to think deeply about language. This thinking on language could be a tool for unmasking the assumptions

of the metaphysic of Westernized Modernity that instead tends to translate the real into an absolute and linear language with very little room for ambiguity, contradictions and paradoxes.

The Italianate perspective of Agamben, Berardi, Campagna and Consigliere helped me to understand the fundamental structures of the metaphysical framework in which we are trapped in our contemporary world. I understand metaphysics as an existential way of approaching our relationship with God, the world and other human beings. All these authors agree towards a critique of the metaphysical system hegemonic in our late capitalist era.

Anchored on an ontology of separation, built on the walls of the nation state and a unique form of epistemology, the metaphysical system is closed through an absolute structure of neoliberal capitalism. My personal reading of the world comes very close to this cartography. With this work, I have tried to find possible alternatives, new territories to explore. I am convinced that the prophetic culture of Yunus Emre can still have a subversive force against this way of building worlds. With the awareness, however, not to romanticise it. Because like any cultural product, Yunus Emre's poetry has already been used and will be used in the future to reproduce the dynamics of exclusivity that disqualify any other kind of form of knowledge.

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