

THE FLUX OF A MYSTICAL-SURREALIST TREND THROUGH THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

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Since the end of the 1930s, surrealism has spread its principles throughout the Arab world. In each place, it has never remained isolated and completely anchored to its original historical dimension, but the association and interaction with the local forms of literary, cultural and even religious expression have transformed it. One of these forms is the Islamic mysticism, i.e. sufism, and it is surprising that the association with surrealism took place even in contexts that were not related to each other.

Critics have already detected the connection of surrealism with mysticism in the French context. This contribution aims to give an overview of the critical writings that display a similar attitude in drawing together surrealism and mysticism with reference to the Middle East and North Africa. It will try to present the different perspectives on the phenomenon and to offer some methodological guidelines for the study of a specific literary case.

At the end of the 1930s, the French born surrealism crossed the Mediterranean Sea and was introduced in Egypt. In the next decades, surrealist springs appeared spontaneously in Lebanon, Syria and, later, Iraq. North Africa was not immune either to the impact of surrealism and in each place intellectuals, poets and artists spread its principles¹. Throughout this journey

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¹ Since the end of the 1970s, a growing number of studies on surrealism in the Arab world have been published. To get an overall idea of the phenomenon, see Kamīl Qaysar Dāgīr, *Andrih Brītūn. Šā'ir al-ḥurriyyah wa 'l-ḥubb wa 'l-ḥulm ma'a mulḥaq 'an al-sūriyāliyyah al-'arabiyyah*, al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyyah li 'l-Dirāsāt wa 'l-Našr, Bayrūt 1979, pp. 111-169; Samīr Garīb, *al-Suryāliyyah fī Miṣr*, al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-'Ammah li 'l-Kitāb, al-Qāhirah 1986; 'Iṣām Maḥfūz, *al-Suryāliyyah wa tafā'ulātuhā al-'arabiyyah*, al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyyah li 'l-Dirāsāt wa 'l-Našr, Bayrūt 1987; Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, *Fugues de Barbarie: les Écrivains Maghrébins et le Surréalisme*, Editions Les Mains Secrètes, New York-Tunis 1998; S. Krainick, *Arabischer Surrealismus im Exil: Der irakische Dichter und Publizist Abd al-Qadir al-Ganabi*, Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, Wiesbaden 2001; O. Beránek, *The Surrealist Movement in Egypt in the 1930s and the 1940s*, in "Archiv Orientální", n. 73, 2005, pp. 203-222. Other works, PhD theses and journal articles are worth mentioning. For a more detailed list of sources, the reader might refer to the bibliography attached to my PhD dissertation. Cfr. A. Monaco, *Il surrealismo in letteratu-*

in the region, surrealism has never remained isolated and completely anchored to its historical original dimension, but it has been transformed by the association and interaction with the local forms of literary, cultural and even religious expression. One of these forms is the Islamic mysticism, i.e. sufism, and it is surprising that the association with surrealism took place even in contexts that were not related to each other.

Early in the history of Western surrealism, critics detected its connection with mysticism. Jean-François Chabrun (1920-1997) in a 1943 pamphlet, *La mystique et l'enthousiasme (surréalisme et religion)*, wrote, for instance, that the great mystics of the past, such as Saint Francis of Assis and Saint Teresa of Ávila, long before the surrealists used certain psychic states as methods for the supra-rational knowledge². In 1947, Anna Balakian (1915-1997) published *The Literary Origins of Surrealism: A New Mysticism in French Poetry* where she examined the poetry of the founders of surrealism and showed how their philosophical preoccupations and their poetic innovations grew out of a profoundly mystical vision of reality³. In 1950, Michel Carrouges (1910-1988) published *André Breton et les données fondamentales du surréalisme*, where he attributed the origin of the cornerstone notion of the surrealist cosmology, i.e. the *point suprême*, to esotericism, the latter also including the religious dimension⁴. Effectively, the leader of surrealism Breton showed his interest in magic more than once, occultism if not mysticism itself, as proved by a recent PhD thesis written by Tessel M. Bauduin⁵. A mystical trend has been detected from time to time, even in other surrealists or poets close to the movement, such as Paul Éluard, Raymond Queneau and Georges Bataille⁶.

ra araba tra gli anni Trenta e Sessanta: storia, teoria e pratica poetica, tesi di dottorato in Civiltà islamica: storia e filologia, Sapienza Università di Roma, Roma 2016.

² J.-F. Chabrun, *La mystique et l'enthousiasme (surréalisme et religion)*, La main à plume, Paris 1943.

³ A. Balakian, *The Literary Origins of Surrealism: A New Mysticism in French Poetry*, King's Crown Press, New York 1947. Balakian developed her thesis in later works, chiefly *André Breton: Magus of Surrealism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1971.

⁴ M. Carrouges, *André Breton et les données fondamentales du surréalisme*, Gallimard, Paris 1950.

⁵ Bedouin's study displays an interesting review of both the sources of Breton's esotericism and the main studies concerned with it. Cfr. T.M. Bauduin, *The occultation of Surrealism: a study of the relationship between Bretonian Surrealism and western esotericism*, Elck Syn Waerom Publishing, Amsterdam 2012, pp. 17-60.

⁶ See for instance J. Perrot, *Rhétorique mystique et rhétorique révolutionnaire. Saint Jean de la Croix (1542-1591) et Paul Eluard (1895-1952)*, in "Littérature", No. 25, 1977, pp. 64-82; Ch. Andrews, *Surrealism and Pseudo-Initiation: Raymond Queneau's "Odile"*, in "The Modern Language Review", Vol. 94, No. 2, 1999,

This contribution aims to provide an overview of the critical writings that display a similar attitude in drawing together surrealism and mysticism with reference to the Middle East and North Africa. It will attempt to present the different perspectives on the phenomenon and to offer some preliminary, methodological guidelines for the study of a specific literary case, which is the object of an ongoing research project⁷.

1. A Survey of the Critical Studies on the Relation between Sufism and Surrealism

The first evidence of interest in the relationship between sufism and surrealism dates back to the 1960s and can be found in two essays published in the Lebanese magazine “Ši‘r” (1957-1970). The first one is a long note by the poet, critic and playwright ‘Iṣām Maḥfūz (1939-2006) on his translation of Paul Éluard’s poetry, which was published in the 27th issue of the magazine. The text gives an insight into the meaning of the surrealist revolution, and in particular into Éluard’s role in this adventure. It also suggests comparability between sufism and surrealism when Maḥfūz states that the latter resorts to the same key used by the former to enter the «other world»⁸, where exterior and interior, objective and subjective merge. For both the sufi and the surrealist, this world is to be reached through the tangible one and its knowledge leads to an intermediate condition between two individuals’ consciences.

The second essay, which bears the title *al-Ši‘r al-ḥadīṭ ḥarakah ṭawriyyah maḥtūmah* (Modern Poetry is an Inevitable Revolutionary Movement), was published in “Ši‘r”’s 37th issue and was written by the Lebanese critic Rose Ġurayyib (1909-2006). The author traces the evolution of modern poetry back to romanticism and to the origins of its revolutionary elements. She links romanticism with the later literary developments, chiefly symbolism and surrealism, and in all these cases she insists on the continuous process of the interaction with mysticism. Whether this mysticism arrived to the Westerners through Plotinus or the Persian, Indian or Arab mystics, the author adds, its roots were certainly in the East. Thanks to the flux of ideas from the East to the West and backwards, modern poetry developed through

pp. 377-394; A. Hussey, *The Inner Scar. The Mysticism of Georges Bataille*, Rodopi Editons, Amsterdam 2000.

⁷ The project is entitled *Sufismo e surrealismo nella poesia di ‘Iṣām Maḥfūz* and is part of a Post-Doc fellowship at the Dipartimento Istituto Italiano di Studi Orientali, Sapienza Università di Roma.

⁸ ‘Iṣām Maḥfūz, ‘*qasīdat*’ li-Būl Īluwār (Paul Eluard), in “Ši‘r”, Vol. 7, No. 27, Summer 1963, p. 74.

time and space along the huge wave generated by romanticism, at one time the conveyor of mysticism and the father of surrealism⁹.

In 1972, Adonis (Adūnīs, 1930) published in “Fikr wa Fann” the short article *al-Sūriyāliyyah qabla al-sūriyāliyyah*, which seems to be his first pronouncement on the subject. «I speak here of surrealism in its Arabic name. I mean sufism»¹⁰. These are the opening words which clearly reveal the author’s fundamental belief that is fostered in the remainder of the article, i.e. the antecedence, the ascendancy, and ultimately the pre-eminence of sufism *vis-à-vis* surrealism. By extension, this pre-eminence also involves the entire Arabic culture, which is more spontaneously apt to embrace surrealist principles because of its previous experience with sufism. The recent recovery of the latter would not only lead to an easy understanding of surrealism, but also to the overcoming of its limitations.

References to this association between surrealism and sufism are also found in more generic studies on modern Arabic poetry, among which it is worth considering two in particular. In 1978, the critic Iḥsān ‘Abbās (1920-2003) published *Ittiġāhāt al-šī’r al-‘arabī al-mu‘āšir* (Trends of Contemporary Arabic Poetry), which is an attempt to systematise modern Arabic poetic production, in light of the radical poetic revolution that occurred during the previous three decades. What concerns us here is the reference to sufism as one of the most pre-eminent trends in that poetry. Every poet elaborates on his personal form of mysticism, in coexistence with other possible trends, including surrealism, existentialism, and even Marxism. As the author asserts, those who chose surrealism may not avoid falling into sufism, since it is easily taken as a path in their search for the great, lost truth¹¹.

Another generic study on modern poetry that must be mentioned is *al-Šī’r yaktubu ‘smahu* (1981) by the Syrian critic Muḥammad Ġamāl Bārūt. Specifically, it deals with the development of the prose poem (*al-qašīdah al-naṭriyyah*) in Syria, starting from the 1940s and the 1950s. It was in these decades that the first experiments on this poetic form were conducted and, significantly, the three pioneers of these attempts were a surrealist, Ūrḥān Muyassar (1912?-1965), a romantic-surrealist, ‘Alī al-Nāšir (1890-1970), and a sufi, Ḥayr al-Dīn al-Asadī (1900-1971). According to Bārūt, the prose poem is strongly connected to the discovery of the unconscious, which bears the name *al-ru’yā* (vision) in the poetic field. The three poets discovered this very same vision through specific viewpoints: Muyassar and al-Nāšir through a Freudian one, while al-Asadī through a mystical one. And yet, sur-

⁹ Rose Ġurayyib, *al-Šī’r al-ḥadīṯ ḥarakah ṭawriyyah maḥtūmah*, in “Šī’r”, Vol. 10, No. 37, Winter 1968, pp. 9-16.

¹⁰ Adūnīs, *al-Sūriyāliyyah qabla al-sūriyāliyyah*, in “Fikr wa Fann”, No. 20, June 1972, p. 17.

¹¹ Iḥsān ‘Abbās, *Ittiġāhāt al-šī’r al-‘arabī al-mu‘āšir*, al-Maġlis al-Waṭanī li ‘l-Ṭaqāfah wa ‘l-Funūn wa ‘l-Ādāb, al-Kuwayt 1978, pp. 164-167.

realism, epics¹², and sufism are not so divergent, since Muyassar's surrealism as well as al-Nāṣir's epics retain a clear sufi and romantic background, as much as al-Asadī's sufism shares common elements with that surrealism introduced by Muyassar and al-Nāṣir. Here, the author upholds Adonis' thesis according to which sufism is the Arabic name for surrealism¹³.

At the end of the 1980s, a renewed interest in surrealism led to the publication of the first studies specifically devoted to its Arabic versions. In 1987, 'Iṣām Maḥfūz published the first comprehensive study of this kind, *al-Sūriyāliyyah wa tafā'ulātuhā al-'arabiyyah* (Surrealism and its Arabic Interactions), which includes in the second part a survey of the surrealist experiences in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq¹⁴. The first part consists of seven chapters, each of which is devoted to the fundamental features of surrealism: its origins, its relationship with Marxism, the automatic writing, the black humour, the objective chance, its translation into art, and, of concern here, one chapter that bears the title *al-Taṭallu' al-ṣūfī* (A Look at Sufism) and that explores the links with mysticism. Maḥfūz shed light on the spiritism that considerably fascinated Breton and, taking from René Guénon and Michel Carrouges, he connected it to mysticism. In particular, he observed how the *point de l'esprit* looked for by the surrealists was not only the psychological equivalent of the point that Marx set as the goal for the society he envisaged, but it was also not far from that point where a sufi like al-Ḥallāğ tended to solve the contradictions of this world¹⁵.

In 1992, Adonis published his well-known *al-Şūfiyyah wa 'l-sūriyāliyyah*, which is to my knowledge the first articulated work that examined the relation between Islamic mysticism and Western surrealism. The fundamental hypothesis of this study is that sufism cannot be associated with the traditional religiosity. In its search for *al-ğayb al-ḥaḥfī* (the hidden absent), it refuses the rational way of thinking and resorts to a *ṭarīqah* that shares many aspects with surrealism. The methodology is the same, even if the goals are different. After explaining this point in the introduction, the book has two parts. The first one consists of six chapters, each one dealing with one shared feature in sufism and surrealism: 1) way and object of knowledge; 2) imagination; 3) love; 4) writing (*al-ṣaṭaḥ* and automatic writing); 5) aesthetics of

¹² Here the author addresses al-Nāṣir's production.

¹³ Muḥammad Ğamāl Bārūt, *al-Şi'r yaktubu 'smahu. Dirāsaḥ fī 'l-qaṣīdah al-naṭriyyah fī Sūriyyah*, Manşūrāt Ittiḥād al-Kuttāb al-'Arab, Dimaşq 1981, pp. 7-9.

¹⁴ This was not the very first study on Arabic surrealism, but it was the first one that was specifically concerned with it. In fact, in 1979 Kamīl Qaysar Dāğir published a book on André Breton, which included an appendix on the surrealist Arab poets of the "Şi'r" group and the Iraqi 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ğanābī. Cfr. Kamīl Qaysar Dāğir, *Andrih Brītūn. Şā'ir al-ḥurriyyah wa 'l-ḥubb wa 'l-ḥulm ma'a mulḥaq 'an al-sūriyāliyyah al-'arabiyyah*, cit., pp. 111-167.

¹⁵ 'Iṣām Maḥfūz, *al-Sūriyāliyyah wa tafā'ulātuhā al-'arabiyyah*, cit., pp. 21-24.

the text; 6) the solution of the opposites. The second part includes four essays, respectively on the sufi al-Niffarī¹⁶, the relation between image, word and vision, the issue of the poetic form, and Rimbaud's mysticism, and an annex with some surrealist excerpts¹⁷. As we shall see, this work generated much controversy, as testified by the vitriolic *Risālah maftūḥah ilā Adūnīs fī «al-šūfiyyah» wa 'l-sūriyāliyyah wa madāris adabiyyah uḥrā* (Open Letter to Adonis in «Sufism» and Surrealism and Other Literary Schools), published in response to Adonis by the Iraqi surrealist 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ġanābī (1944).

Finally, in 1998 Hédi Abdel-Jaouad published a relevant study on the role of surrealism in shaping the Maghrebi literature in French, under the title *Fugues de Barbarie: les Écrivains Maghrébins et le Surréalisme*. The book revolves around the contacts of Maghrebi writers with what the author calls «le surréalisme ontologique»¹⁸, in contrast with its historical dimension. These contacts involved intertextuality, common themes, and modes of expression, universals that transcend the restricted, historical surrealism. At the same time, the Maghrebi writer juxtaposed the re-actualisation of a subversive heritage to the fecund contribution of surrealism, «la part dissident, voire «maudite», de la littérature arabo-musulmane: le soufisme»¹⁹. Hence, Abdel-Jaouad coins the new concept of *soufialisme* to define this existing bond in the Maghrebi literature in French. The seventh chapter is fully concerned with this aspect. After a punctual review of the state of art on the matter, the author clarifies the meaning of the concept and provides examples of the three fundamentals on which it is based: love, poetry, and liberty²⁰.

¹⁶ al-Niffarī was an obscure figure in the history of Islamic mysticism, who lived in the first half of the fourth century of the *hiġrah*. *Kitāb al-Mawāqif* (The Book of the Stations) is the most notable work ascribed to him, a book on the science of the sufi stations. In consideration of Adonis' admiration for this figure, who seems the main source for the elaboration of his understanding of sufism, this work of al-Niffarī might have provided the inspiration for naming Adonis' magazine "al-Mawāqif" (1968-1994). Moreover, references to al-Niffarī are made in *Kitāb al-taḥawwulāt wa 'l-hiġrah fī aqālīm al-nahār wa 'l-layl* (The Book of the Metamorphoses and of the Migration to the Regions of Day and Night, 1965). Cf. Adonis, *Ecco il mio nome*, a cura di F. Corrao, Donzelli, Roma 2009, p. 182. For more detailed information about al-Niffarī, see the pioneering, commented edition of his works: A.J. Arberry, *The Mawāqif and Mukhāṭabāt of Muḥammad Ibn 'Abdi 'l-Jabbār al-Niffarī with other fragments*, Messrs Luzac & Co., London 1935; G. Scattolin, *Esperienze mistiche nell'Islam: al-Niffarī e al-Gazali*, vol. 3, Emi, Bologna 2000. Recently, Adonis edited a new translation in French: al-Niffarī, *Livre des extases*, traduit par Adonis et D. Grau, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2017.

¹⁷ Adūnīs, *al-Šūfiyyah wa 'l-sūriyāliyyah*, Dār al-Sāqī, Bayrūt 2010 (4th edition).

¹⁸ Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, *Fugues de Barbarie: les Écrivains Maghrébins et le Surréalisme*, cit., p. 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 217-241.

To sum up, surrealism and sufism have been frequently associated with each other in studies on modern Arabic literature or written by Arabic scholars. At first, the references to the possibilities of this interaction were hinted at in articles, as we saw in Maḥfūz's and Ġurayyib's articles in "Ši'r" and Adonis' one in "Fikr wa fann". Soon, the interaction of sufism and surrealism became an integral part of the general discourse around modern Arabic poetry, as was the case for 'Abbās' and Bārūt's monographies, as well as part of the discourse on Arabic surrealism, as evident in Maḥfūz's study. Finally, with Adonis' major work on the subject and Abdel-Jaouad's one, the phenomenon acquired its independence.

Other studies might be added, but this diversified spectrum of sources sufficiently demonstrates the actual relevance of the debate on the subject. At the same time, this gives us the chance to observe the different perspectives of their authors and how each one of them managed to establish a connection between the surrealist and sufi experiences. In the following pages, we will consider the two points of view that tend not only to summarise all the other positions, but also provide some methodological guidelines for studying a particular case where this phenomenon occurs. Borrowing both Adonis' and Abdel-Jaouad's terminology, we shall describe the first perspective as static and dogmatic, while the second one is dynamic and ontological. The holder of the first perspective is Adonis in *al-Šūfiyyah wa 'l-sūriyāliyyah*, while *Fugues de Barbarie: les Écrivains Maghrébins et le Surréalisme* by Abdel-Jaouad conveys the second one.

2. How Can we Understand the Association of Sufism with Surrealism?

a. The Static and Dogmatic Perspective: Adonis

As mentioned above, *al-Šūfiyyah wa 'l-sūriyāliyyah* is probably the first articulated work that tried to relate two experiences in apparent contradiction with each other, as Adonis himself writes in the introduction. Its first value lies exactly in this attempt, despite the many drawbacks. Abdel-Jaouad expresses his disappointment both with the content and due to the many deficiencies in the analysis and the methodology²¹. 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ġanābī is even harsher than him, and in his rigorous criticism of Adonis' work he lists all the inaccuracies and manipulations the author committed in order to support his thesis more convincingly.

He blames Adonis for the mistakes in the translation of terms and concepts (e.g. prose poem, *initiatique*, *occultation*, *la beauté convulsive*); for the superficial use of some sources (like the book upon which al-Ġanābī asserts that Adonis built his, *Le surréalisme*, by Henri Béhar and Michel Carassou²²); and for the misunderstanding of others (this is the case for the passage writ-

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

ten by Breton on the *hasard objectif*, or the objective chance, badly translated and interpreted by Adonis, according to al-Ġanābī). Moreover, he says, Adonis is inexcusably guilty of plagiarism, in the two meanings that al-Ġanābī attributes to the word: the borrowing of others' ideas or expressions without quoting the source, and the manipulation of the original texts to serve the author's discourse. Words from that poet or that sufi are combined in order to support the idea behind Adonis' book, which aims, as al-Ġanābī states, to demonstrate that nothing new was introduced by the West that did not already exist in the Arabic and Islamic heritage²³.

In these and other considerations in the text, we cannot but notice al-Ġanābī's acrimony in dealing with Adonis' work. As a matter of fact, he goes beyond the criticism of *al-Ṣūfiyyah wa 'l-sūriyāliyyah* and reproves Adonis for his whole activity as a poet and a critic. Almost the entire second part of the letter he wrote is a sequence of accusations concerning his salafist way of thinking, his acting out of political expediency and his attempt to emerge as the one and only modern Arab poet who is innovating Arabic poetry. Whether these charges are founded on proof or not is not our concern here. What seems clear is that they originate from the friction that exists between the two poets, they are the result of an emotional reaction and therefore we would leave them aside in our discourse.

Taking a closer look, other more important limits emerge from al-Ġanābī's work. However precise and significant, we can say with Abdel-Jaouad that al-Ġanābī's essay is no less dogmatic than Adonis' one. His definition of surrealism strongly adheres to the one Breton elaborated and it seems that he leaves no room for any possible variations, which were numerous in fact. The concepts of surrealism, al-Ġanābī writes, were shaped in the social tumultuousness of the 1930s in France. According to him, any discourse that does not consider the manifestoes, the provocations, the protests against co-

²² According to Abdel-Jaouad, Adonis mainly relies on V. Bartoli-Anglard's book *Le Surréalisme* (1989). Cf. Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, *Fugues de Barbarie: les Écrivains Maghrébins et le Surréalisme*, cit., p. 219.

²³ This opinion of al-Ġanābī is reasonable considering Adonis' article *al-Sūriyāliyyah qabla al-sūriyāliyyah*, where he expressed this same view in a very explicit way. Abdel-Jaouad shares this point, with reference to another article of his, *Mysticisme et surréalisme*, included in *La Prière et l'épée: Essai sur la culture arabe*. In addition, it is worth noting that the article is written in French and addressed to a French and Western public. As Abdel-Jaouad believes, the many critiques that he received after publishing *al-Ṣūfiyyah wa 'l-sūriyāliyyah* are likely to be the reason for his caution in using the word *mysticisme* instead of *soufisme* in the title. Cf. Adūnīs, *al-Sūriyāliyyah qabla al-sūriyāliyyah*, cit.; Adonis, *Mysticisme et surréalisme*, in Id., *La Prière et l'épée: Essai sur la culture arabe*, Mercure de France, Paris 1993, pp. 249-261; Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, *Fugues de Barbarie: les Écrivains Maghrébins et le Surréalisme*, cit., pp. 219-220.

lonialism and what is proper in the context of the “historical” surrealism, is no more than «an empty talk that deserves the closest dump»²⁴.

An equivalent, static image also dominates al-Ġanābī’s understanding of sufism. This is why he rejects the fundamental thesis upon which Adonis built his entire work, that is the possibility of a link between sufism, which is a religious experience, despite any attempt to deny it by Adonis, and surrealism, which condemns through his leader Breton any form of religion, including mysticism. Abdel-Jaouad’s attentive eye notices that al-Ġanābī aligns himself in this regard with the commonly accepted, but not verified thesis by Philippe Van Tieghem, according to which «le surréalisme est foncièrement anti-mystique»²⁵. Resorting to Ridha Kéfi and his description of sufism as a philosophy of the immanence («Bien avant Nietzsche – Ridha Kéfi writes – les poètes soufis (tuèrent) Dieu!»²⁶), Abdel-Jaouad in fact accepts the core idea in Adonis’ book: the hypothesis of a sufism without God, an atheist sufism.

In my view, this is the most important contribution Adonis made to the debate. Only by eliminating the idea of a transcending God in a world which is different from the one we live in, the association of sufism with surrealism is made possible. This position requires a new understanding of both sufism and surrealism, and this is exactly what Adonis tries to do with his book. Despite all the limits that are justly emphasised by both al-Ġanābī and Abdel-Jaouad, Adonis is successful at least in drawing a new picture of sufism, probably with the words and the spirit of the poet, more than those of the critic. This emerges in the sayings that the author selected and inserted at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Šūfiyyah wa 'l-sūriyāliyyah* on love:

Love is pleasure and truth is astonishing. المحبة لذة، والحقيقة دهشة.

الدقاق al-Daqqāq

Love between two people is not valid until one says to the other: oh me. لا تصلح المحبة بين اثنين حتى يقول الواحد للآخر: يا أنا.

السري السقطي²⁷ al-Sirrī al-Saqāṭī

²⁴ ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ġanābī, *Risālah maftūḥah ilà Adūnīs fī ‘al-šūfiyyah» wa 'l-sūriyāliyyah wa madāris adabiyah uḥrā*, Dār al-Ġadīd, Bayrūt, s.d., pp. 17-18.

²⁵ Ph. Van Tieghem, *Petit Histoire des grandes doctrines littéraires en France*, Presses universitaires de France, Paris 1946, p. 295, quoted in Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, *Fugues de Barbarie: les Écrivains Maghrébins et le Surréalisme*, cit., p. 220.

²⁶ Mohamed Ridha Kefi, *Repères nomades suivi de Genèse du mouvement*, La Nef, Tunis 1989, p. 23, quoted in Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, *Fugues de Barbarie: les Écrivains Maghrébins et le Surréalisme*, cit., pp. 220-221.

²⁷ Adūnīs, *al-Šūfiyyah wa 'l-sūriyāliyyah*, cit., p. 95.

By separating these mystics from their historical context, Adonis invites us to think of these lines of theirs in the light of the surrealist attitude towards love and its principle of the solution of the opposites; likewise, this famous saying of al-Niffarī – quoted by Adonis at the beginning of the chapter on writing – recalls the visionarism of the prophet of surrealism Rimbaud:

Whenever vision broadens, expression narrows.

كَلِّمًا اتَّسَعَتْ الرُّؤْيَا ضَاغَتْ العِبَارَةُ.

al-Niffarī ²⁸ النَّفْرِي

Conversely, he fails to provide new horizons on the understanding of surrealism, if this was ever in his plan. Unfortunately, the image of surrealism as it emerges from his writing is fixed and anchored to its historical dimension, to what has been expressed by its leaders in a specific context, and, the malicious critics would say, to the few sources he relied on. This choice is revealed to be detrimental because it denies the complexity and the diversity of the surrealist experience, which can hardly be reduced to a handful of definitions. «The greater experiences in the knowledge of the hidden side of existence – Adonis writes – meet, in a way or another, beyond the languages, beyond the epochs, and beyond the cultures»²⁹. This is absolutely true, but the encounter would occur in the «*oeuvres vives du surréalisme*»³⁰, not through a comparison between two experiences far in time and space. Eventually, Adonis' work lacks a study case, successive to both of the experiences and therefore able to absorb and re-write them³¹. Hédi Abdel-Jaouad compensates for this deficiency by considering the Maghrebi writer in French as a «*réécrivain*»³² of both sufism and surrealism.

b. The Dynamic and Ontological Perspective: Hédi Abdel-Jaouad

As partly anticipated, the approach adopted by Abdel-Jaouad consists of looking at sufism and surrealism not only according to their historical dimensions, but chiefly at their ontological ones. The latter can explain «*l'éternelle jeunesse du soufisme et du surréalisme*»³³. In their respective on-

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³⁰ Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, *Fugues de Barbarie: les Écrivains Maghrébins et le Surréalisme*, cit., p. 219.

³¹ In addition to this, the very few samples from sufi poetry reported in *al-Šūfiyyah wa 'l-sūriyālīyyah* are hardly enough to support Adonis' thesis, which is mostly founded on references from sufi and surrealist theoretical writings.

³² Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, *Fugues de Barbarie: les Écrivains Maghrébins et le Surréalisme*, cit., pp. 6, 13-15.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

tologies, which go beyond the limits of the historical experiences, Abdel-Jaouad finds the possibility for contact and interaction. Similarities do exist between them, as Adonis pointed out, in the search for a superior reality, in the fight for the reason, in the use of intuition to discover the world, in the resort to imagination, in spontaneous and surprising writing and in the coincidence of the opposites. Yet, these encounters do not take place in the historical models but in the modern ones. Hence, the need to elect a case study, which Abdel-Jaouad finds in the Maghrebi literature in French.

In the aftermath of the independences, Maghrebi writers found in surrealism a natural ally for their aspirations for revolt and freedom, soon in association with the subversive power of sufism. «Le texte maghrébin est, aujourd'hui, – Abdel-Jaouad writes – lieu de synthèse et de convergence de l'avant-garde dans «sa partie la plus exposée au soleil comme au danger»³⁴, le surréalisme, et de l'archaïque arabo-musulman dans sa trace la plus hétérogène et la plus radicalement hérétique, le soufisme»³⁵. Ḥabīb Tanqūr (Habib Tengour, 1947) was the first one to notice this phenomenon in Yāsīn Kātīb's (Yacine Kateb, 1929-1989) and Muḥammad Ḥayr al-Dīn's (Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, 1941-1995) writings. Abdel-Jaouad adds to the list Muḥammad Dīb (Mohammed Dib, 1920-2003), 'Abd al-Kabīr al-Ḥaṭībī (Abdelkébir Khatibi, 1938-2009), 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Mu'addab (Abdelwahab Meddeb, 1946-2014), 'Abd al-Mağīd al-Šurfī (Abdelmajid Chorfi, 1952), Šams Nadīr (Chems Nadir) alias Muḥammad 'Azīzah (Mohammed Aziza, 1940); and he also establishes a neologism to define this convergence, or «mudéjarisme moderne»³⁶: *soufialisme*. The latter means the re-reading and re-writing of the sufi inheritance through the poets and the language of surrealism. It is the triumph of the heterogeneity: sufism is connected to surrealism, defined by Breton as *la queue préhensile* of romanticism, which in turn is *la queue préhensile* of mysticism, chiefly oriental mysticism. The consonance with Rose Ġurayyib's conclusions is remarkable here.

A dynamic perspective such as the one adopted by Abdel-Jaouad prevents us from falling into the dogmatic definitions that trapped both Adonis and al-Ġanābī, and allows us to see the result of the interaction of the two experiences, sufism and surrealism, taken in their variations. We shall observe a brief example of Abdel-Jaouad's methodology in the way he deals with love, chiefly the mad love, which is one of the three elements of the triptych on which the Maghrebi *soufialisme* is based³⁷.

³⁴ B. Lecherbonnier, *La chair du verbe: histoire et poétique des surréalismes de langue Française*, Publisud, Paris 1992, p. 15.

³⁵ Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, *Fugues de Barbarie: les Écrivains Maghrébins et le Surréalisme*, cit., p. 223.

³⁶ Here the author refers to the terminology used by the Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo (1931-2017). *Ibid.*, p. 219.

As he maintains in his work, the theme of the mad love is common both to the sufi poetry, Ibn ‘Arabī for instance, and the surrealist one, like *Le Fou d’Elsa* by Aragon, who is according to Abdel-Jaouad the first and most important re-writer of the theme Mağnūn in French, as well as the *soufialiste* ancestor of many Maghrebi writers. The lover who is consumed by the object of his love, the impossibility to know it, the loss of identity, the confusion between the divine and the woman and the idolatry of the latter, are the main features of the mad love, both in sufism and surrealism. These very same elements also animate the writings of the Maghrebi *soufialistes*, chiefly Kateb, Dib, Meddeb and Khatibi. Through their female characters, not only do these writers celebrate the mad love, but they are also fascinated by its capacity for subversion against the taboos, the language of rationality and reality, in favour of the language of dreams. In addition to this, they re-write and adapt the sufi heritage to their epoch and aesthetics. For instance, Kateb resorts to delirious writing to celebrate mad love, while Khatibi is fascinated by the game of love and aims to explore what he calls *aimance*, fusion of *aimantation* and *aimant*³⁸.

Conclusion

The association of mysticism, and chiefly Islamic mysticism, with surrealism is well documented in a wide range of texts. The issue is how to study the dynamics of this interaction. The mere comparison of the two experiences taken in their historical, static dimension is void of significance. While resorting to a pattern of established and reassuring definitions, it might in fact mislead the reader and could suggest the idea that sufism and surrealism can be almost two interchangeable words to describe a similar experience. This would inevitably lead to the conclusion that, given the coincidence of sufism and surrealism in many respects, the anteriority in time of the former also attributes to it the pre-eminence over the latter. This is what almost explicitly emerges from Adonis’ writing.

Conversely, the perspective adopted by Abdel-Jaouad is revealed to be more fruitful in the study of such an interaction. Instead of comparing sufism and surrealism in the forms and contents that they acquired in their respective historical context, Abdel-Jaouad chooses to consider the process of re-writing of these experiences in living works and writers of the Maghrebi literature in French. Sufism and surrealism are taken in their capacity of evolution, while maintaining their bonds with their origins. As he writes, taking

³⁷ The two other components of the triptych (explicitly inspired by Breton) are poetry and liberty.

³⁸ I refer to Abdel-Jaouad’s work for the textual samples supporting his thesis. See Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, *Fugues de Barbarie: les Écrivains Maghrébins et le Surréalisme*, cit., pp. 226-232.

partly from Robert Bréchon, «c'est dans cette double exigence, apparemment contradictoire, c'est-à-dire dans ce désir de dépassement et cet absolu de continuité, que réside, nous semble-t-il, le secret même de l'éternelle jeunesse du soufisme et du surréalisme et dont l'écrivain maghrébin se veut l'héritier et le continuateur»³⁹.

Thanks to both the historical, cultural and linguistic links with Islamic mysticism and French surrealism, the Maghrebi literature in French is probably the most suitable and richest field for the study of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, it is not the only one. Contemporary Arabic literature can provide relevant cases that display a similar interaction and I would suggest that Abdel-Jaouad's approach might be fruitful for their study.

Iva Lišková has already accomplished an attempt in this sense in an article on the Tunisian Faḍīlah al-Šābbī's (1946) poetry. The author observes the surrealist and sufi motifs in her poetry, like the concept of the surrealist object, the tendency to mix dream and reality, the desire to melt herself with the microcosm and the close relation with the divine. Even if timidly and only towards the end of the article, the association between sufism and surrealism is made there. The stress is more on the common elements between sufism and surrealism which al-Šābbī used in her poetry than on her way of re-writing them. However, it is remarkable that, while confirming the possibility of dialogue between the two experiences in the field of love and in the relation of man with the universe, she opens up another channel of communication in the pattern surrealism-occultism-mysticism. Faḍīlah al-Šābbī's use of numbers in her poetry seems to prove this⁴⁰.

Adonis' writings might represent another rich field to study this interaction between sufism and surrealism. It is true that his critical contribution to the debate revealed deficiencies in many respects. However, if we listed his writings in the primary corpus of our study, and not among the methodological sources, we would attribute a new value to them and find another field to demonstrate how the interaction occurs. The same is true, when we come to his poetry, a huge material that still needs further study – chiefly in languages other than Arabic –, not exclusively with regard to the theme of this contribution⁴¹.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁴⁰ I. Lišková, *From Surrealism to Mysticism in Fadhila Chabbi's Poetry*, in "Archív Orientální", Vol. 76, No. 3 (2008), pp. 317–336.

⁴¹ Francesca Corrao provides a bibliography of the main existing studies concerning Adonis in the books she edited *Nella pietra e nel vento* and *Ecco il mio nome*, which include the translation of a selection of poems and of the collection *Anā huwa 'smī* respectively, with an introduction and an afterword on his poetics. Cf. Adonis, *Nella pietra e nel vento*, traduzione e cura di F.M. Corrao, Mesogea, Messina 1999, pp. 219-225; Id., *Ecco il mio nome*, cit., pp. 202-203. In the field of the sufi-surrealist interaction, the analysis of the poem *Hāḍā huwa 'smī* by Ḥālīdah

Finally, I would include another outstanding example in the *soufialistes* who wrote in Arabic, the Lebanese ‘Iṣām Maḥfūz. Widely recognised as one of the pioneers of the contemporary Lebanese theatre, he is unjustly understudied for his poetic contribution. In the frame of our discourse on *soufialisme*, he combines – as Adonis does – the relevant role of the critic with that of the poet. On the one hand, as we saw at the beginning of this article, he was probably the first to introduce the possibility of an interaction between sufism and surrealism on the pages of the magazine “Ši‘r”. On the other hand, he is the author of four collections of poetry that stand as a clear product of the «interfécondation culturelle» described by Abdel-Jaouad, or of «al-tafā‘ul al-ḥaḍārī» (the cultural interaction), to use Maḥfūz’s same expression⁴². A detailed study of his contribution will reveal the significance of this interaction, of which sufism and surrealism are but two of many factors.

Sa‘īd may be a good starting point. Cf. Ḥālidah Sa‘īd, *Ḥarakiyyat al-ibdā‘*, Dār al-‘Awdah, Bayrūt 1979, pp. 87-119.

⁴² Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, *Fugues de Barbarie: les Écrivains Maghrébins et le Surréalisme*, cit., p. 10; ‘Iṣām Maḥfūz, *al-Suriyāliyyah wa tafā‘ulātuhā al-‘arabiyyah*, cit., p. 8.