

2. Semiotics of Love in Suhrawardi's Allegorical Philosophy

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Abstract:

In his allegorical fictions, Shaykh al-Ishraq Suhrawardi conveys multiple mystical issues one most important of which is love. Also included in his theory of love is the concept of rationality. Fairly surprisingly, for Suhrawardi love in the mystical dimension goes to the heart of rationality. The guiding idea is that the hero of Suhrawardi's allegorical treatises is a wayfarer who loves God, looking for the right way to the Divine. This love is to be some sort of spiritual emotion rather than a passionate love. Our claim would be proved by analyzing Suhrawardi's fictions, decoding the allegories. On his way to God, the wayfarer may become waylaid by his own perceptions, i.e., five internal and five external senses. The wayfarer, however, must overcome these senses, that is, he should not be overwhelmed by his perceptions. These ten senses are symbolized in "On the Reality of Love" by five chambers and five gates, in "Treatise on Towers" by ten towers, in "A Tale of Occidental Exile" by ten graves, in "The Simurgh's Shriek Cry" by ten flyers, and in "The Red Intellect" by ten wardens. And finally, the wayfarer conquers all of them.

Keywords:

Rationality, Mystical Love, Passionate Love, Suhrawardi, Allegory

VOL 6 NO 3 AND 4 (2018) ISSUE- SEPTEMBER AND DECEMBER

ISSN 2347-6869 (E) & ISSN 2347-2146 (P)

Semiotics of Love... By Dr Ghasemali Kouchnani and Nadia Maftouni, Page No. 27-36

DOI: 10.5958/2347-6869.2018.00013.4

DOS: 2018-10-27 DOA: 2018-12-27 DOP: 2019-04-28

Journal Section: Philosophy



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Introduction

Shahab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi otherwise known as Shaykh al-Ishraq, born in the twelfth century in the village of Suhraward of Iran, is reckoned as a deeply profound figure of Oriental philosophy and the founder of philosophical School of Illumination—that is, Hikmah al-Ishraq. The striking feature of the illuminationist view is that both of mystical experience and rationality are evenly credited in Suhrawardi's works. Together with intuition, rationality has an underlying role in human perfection. There is, however, another side of Suhrawardi on which I will focus. Suhrawardi as a philartist (Maftouni N, 2015) allegorizes his mystical versus philosophical views in ten visionary treatises: "A Tale of Occidental Exile", "On the Reality of Love", "The Red Intellect", "The Simurgh's Shrill Cry", "The Sound of Gabriel's Wing", "A Day with a Group of Sufis", "On the State of Childhood", "The Language of the Ants", "The Towers", "The Treatise of the Birds".¹ (Ibn Sina H, 1990).

The main idea of some of his treatises is some sort of mystical love and the hero of his stories is some kind of lover looking for the way to the Divine (Suhrawardi S, 2002). There are questions which must be answered in a certain way. What kind of love is that love? In his adventures, is Suhrawardi dealing with spiritual or passionate love? It deserves noting that some mystics like Ibn Farid manifestly believe in passionate love (Homerin T. E., 2011). At first glance, Suhrawardi's allegorical treatises suggest that mystical love would be a spiritual one. However, illustrating our claim, we proceed by analyzing all allegorical

¹. "The Treatise of the Birds" is a translation of Ibn Sina's work (1400H: 401-414), requiring us departed from.

treatises alluding to the issue.

Love in Suhrawardi's Allegories

The problem of love could be examined in a variety of fields, including at least mystical, philosophical, psychological, and hysterical ones. It hardly seems likely to draw a distinction between the first two aspects. However, the pure mystical love seems to be just a matter of mystics' experiences about which we cannot talk at all. That being the case, our discussion on the topic at issue might well constitute a philosophical treatment.

The lover of Suhrawardi's allegories is a wayfarer for whom is developed a spiritual itinerary comprised of three main parts: to override faculties of soul especially five outer and five inner senses², to establish the bonds with the souls of the nine spheres³, and afterwards to fuse the Active Intellect and the other ten intellects.⁴

Arguing on the nature of love, we focus on the first part that requires the wayfarer to overthrow ten perceptions. The wayfarer starts his mystical life departing from his own ten senses. That is, he tries to not become waylaid by what he see, hear, taste, touch, and smell as well as the imaginations and illusions, then *ipso facto* his love would be non-erotic and non-passionate.

2. On this part see "A Tale of Occidental Exile", "On the Reality of Love", "The Red Intellect", "The Simurgh's Shri! Cry", and "The Towers".

3. On this part see "A Tale of Occidental Exile", "The Red Intellect", "The Sound of Gabriel's Wing", "A Day with a Group of Sufis", "On the State of Childhood", "The Language of the Ants", and "The Towers".

4. On the third part see "A Tale of Occidental Exile", "On the Reality of Love", "The Red Intellect", "The Simurgh's Shri! Cry", "The Sound of Gabriel's Wing", "A Day with a Group of Sufis", "On the State of Childhood", and "The Towers".

Ten inner and outer senses symbolized by ten towers, ten graves, ten flyers, ten wardens, five chambers and five gates in “Treatise on Towers” (Suhrawardi, S., 2002, pp. 3/462-471), “A Tale of Occidental Exile”, “The Simurgh’s Shrill Cry”, “The Red Intellect”, and “On the Reality of Love”, respectively. Some of these allegories are developed in details and some others are given only a glancing mention and suggestion. We lead off with suggestions and wind up with “On the Reality of Love” in which the issue is most developed.

“Treatise on Towers”

The allegory of ten towers is seen in “Treatise on Towers”, “The Risālat al-Abrāj”, otherwise known as al-Kalimāt al-Dhawqīya.⁵ The first five towers refer to the five external senses or five traditionally recognized methods of perception: sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste.

The second five towers refer to the five internal senses: the *sensus communis* or common sense⁶ that intermingles the what it receives from the five sensory perceptions; the imagination that keeps these forms deposited; the imaginative power or active imagination that mingles and separates forms kept in the imagination; the estimative faculty that figures out the individual meanings (e.g., the sheep that apprehends the perceived wolf as

⁵. It should be noticed that this treatise is in some way controversial. John Walbridge has said about this work: “Its authenticity has been questioned by some modern scholars. However, the manuscripts seem to consistently attribute it to Suhrawardi, so I see no justification for questioning its authenticity. At any rate, *Muṣannifak* thought it was Suhrawardi’s.” (Walbridge, J., 2011: 96)

⁶. It is worth observing that Algazel has an interesting treatment of the subject of senses: “The common sense is the sense from which all those five derive, to which each of their impressions is announced, and in which they all are joined, and thus they are all, as it were, filling it up. For if there was nothing in us in which white and sound were joined, we would not know that this white object is that whose sound we have heard. For neither the eye nor the ear grasps the conjunction of whiteness and sound.” (Algazel, A. H., 1343H: 26-27)

something it should flee from); the memory or memorizing power that keeps the individual meanings.

The ten towers, for Reichert, undertake these activities:

The towers are ten in number with the five exterior towers representing the five senses, and the interior towers the five parts of the brain reputed to be the seat of our mental capacities. In Suhrawardi's scheme, the first of the interior towers⁷ corresponds to the sensorium⁸, the second⁹ to the representative imagination, the third¹⁰ to the estimative capacity of the brain, the ninth¹¹ to the active imagination (in the *Ishrāqī* and Avicennian sense) and the tenth¹² to the function of memory (Reichert M., 2014).

The exemplification of five external senses as allegory seems a pervasive subject among seventeenth-century artists, especially Flemish and Dutch Baroque ones. A typical example is Gérard de Lairese's *Allegory of the Five Senses*¹³, in which each of the figures in the main group hints at a sense: sight is represented by the reclining boy with a curved outwards mirror, sound is illustrated by a boy holding the triangle and bar in his hands, smell is alluded by a girl with some flowers, taste is represented by a lady looking at the potato, and the sense of touch is illustrated by a lady with a bird.

In Hindu (Indian) literature, the traditional five senses are enumerated as the five material

7. the sixth of all

8. A Sensorium (plural: sensoria) is the sum of an organism's perception, the "seat of sensation" where it experiences and interprets the environments within which it lives. (See: "Sensorium." *Oxford English Dictionary*)

9. the seventh of all

10. the eighth of all

11. the fourth interior sense

12. the fifth interior sense

13. 1668.

faculties. They appear in allegorical representation as early as in the Katha Upanishad (roughly 6th century BC), as five horses budging the chariot of the body, guided by the mind as a chariot driver.

In the time of William Shakespeare, the words "sense" and "wit" were synonyms, so the senses were known as the five outward wits, the traditional concept of five senses that is prevailing now.¹⁴

"A Tale of Occidental Exile"

The allegory of ten graves is laconically used in "A Tale of Occidental Exile", where Suhrawardi utters: "And I cast the sphere of spheres onto the heavens until the sun and moon and stars were crushed, then I was rescued from fourteen coffins and ten graves" (Suhrawardi, S., 2002, pp. 2/117-118).

"The Simurgh's Shrill Cry"

"The Simurgh's Shrill Cry" features the allegory of ten flyers: "Those who wish to tear down the spider's web must expel nineteen pincers from themselves: of these, five are visible flyers and five are concealed" (Suhrawardi, S., 1999). Suhrawardi does not develop this case.

"The Red Intellect"

The allegory of ten wardens is amplified in "The Red Intellect". Some dear friend wonders if the birds apprehend each other's languages. 'Yes they do,' the wayfarer replied.

¹⁴. Furness, H. H., 1880: 187; "wit", *The Merriam-Webster new book of word histories*, 1991: 508; Lewis, 1990: 147.

'How do you know?' the friend asked. 'In the beginning,' the wayfarer said, 'When the Former wanted to bring me into actuality, He created me in the form of a falcon. In the realm where I was were other falcons, and we spoke together and understood each other's words.' 'How did you get to be the way you are now?' the friend asked. The wayfarer replied that one day the hunters, Fate and Destiny, laid the trap of Fore-ordination and filled it with the grain of Will, and in this manner they caught him. Then they took him from the realm where their nest was into another realm, where they stitched their eyes shut, put four different bonds on him and appointed ten wardens to watch over him. Five of them faced him with their backs towards the outside, while the other five faced him kept him in the world of perplexity so that he forgot their nest, their realm and everything he had known (Suhrawardi, S., 1999).

"On the Reality of Love"

Suhrawardi uses the last allegory of senses, five chambers and five gates, elaborating on details in "On the Reality of Love". The wayfarer seeks, in their way, the inhabited quarter and reaches the city, catching sight of a three-storied pavilion. "The first story is fitted with two chambers. In the first is a divan placed over water, and on it reclines someone whose nature is inclined to humidity. He is extremely clever but his dominant trait is forgetfulness. He can solve any problem in a flash, but he never remembers anything" (Suhrawardi, S., 1999, pp. 64-65). This first chamber alludes to *sensus communis*. The faculty of imagination is epitomized by the next chamber: "Next to him in the second chamber is a divan placed over the fire, on which reclines someone whose nature is inclined to dryness. He is very nimble and quick but unclean. It takes him a long time to discover allusions, but once he understands he never forgets" (Suhrawardi, S., 1999, pp. 65). Then the seeker goes to the second story. There are two chambers as the imagery of the imaginative power v.s.

estimative faculty. Existing in the third story is the memorizing faculty that stores individual concepts:

When he reaches the third story he will see a delightful chamber ... He is absorbed in thought. The many things left to him in the trust are piled around him, and he never betrays anyone's faith in him. Whatever profit is made from these things is entrusted to him so that they may be put to use again (Suhrawardi, S., 1999, pp. 65).

Thereafter Suhrawardi alludes to the five exterior senses, sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell by the five gates. "When [the seeker] leaves there he will be confronted with five gates" (Suhrawardi, S., 1999, pp. 65). First and foremost is visualized the faculty of vision: The first has two doorways, in each of which is an oblong, almond-shaped. Throne with two curtains, one black and the other white, hung before. There are many ropes fastened to the gate. On both of the thrones reclines someone who serves as a look-out (Suhrawardi, S., 1999, pp. 65-66).

The faculty of perceiving sounds:

Going to the second gate, he will find two doorways, beyond each of which is a corridor, long and twisted and talismanically sealed. At the end of each corridor is a round throne, and over the two reclines someone who is a master of news and information. He has messengers who are continually on the go seizing every sound that comes to be and delivering it to the master, who comprehends it (Suhrawardi, S., 1999, pp. 65).

The faculty of smell is depicted by the third gate with two doorways from each one the wayfarer will go through a long corridor until he surfaces in a chamber, in which someone lives to have "a servant called Air who goes around the world every day and brings a bit of every good and foul thing he sees" (Suhrawardi, S., 1999, pp. 66).

The fourth gate illustrates the power of tasting. "This one is wider than the other three. Inside is a pleasant spring surrounded by a wall of pearl. In the middle of the spring is a

divan that moves and on it sits someone who is called the Taster" (Suhrawardi, S., 1999, pp. 66-67).

And the last gate is the sense of touch

Then he will come to the fifth gate, which surrounds the city. Everything that is in the city is within the scope of this gate, around about which a carpet is spread, and on the carpet sits someone so that the carpet is filled by him. He rules over eight different things and distinguishes among the eight. Not for one instant is he negligent in his labour. He is called the Distinguisher (Suhrawardi, S., 1999, pp. 67).

Conclusion

The theme of Suhrawardi's stories is mystical love and the wayfarer loves God. This love is to be spiritual emotion rather than passionate love simply because, on his way, the seeker must overcome his own inner and outer senses. These perceptions are symbolized by ten towers, ten graves, ten flyers, ten wardens, five chambers and five gates. These are the allegories of perceptions, i.e., the five internal and the five external senses could be seen in "Treatise on Towers", "A Tale of Occidental Exile", "The Simurgh's Shrill Cry", "The Red Intellect", and "On the Reality of Love".

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VOL 6 NO 3 AND 4 (2018) ISSUE- SEPTEMBER AND DECEMBER

ISSN 2347-6869 (E) & ISSN 2347-2146 (P)

Semiotics of Love... By Dr Ghasemali Kouchnani and Nadia Maftouni, Page No. 27-36

DOI: 10.5958/2347-6869.2018.00013.4

DOS: 2018-10-27 DOA: 2018-12-27 DOP: 2019-04-28

Journal Section: Philosophy

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Cite this article:

Semiotics of Love in Suhrawardi's Allegorical Philosophy

Citation Format: APA

Ghasemali, K., & Maftouni, N. (2019). Semiotics of Love in Suhrawardi's Allegorical Philosophy. *SOCRATES*, 6(3 and 4), 27-36. Retrieved from <https://www.socratesjournal.com/index.php/SOCRATES/article/view/362>

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