



Yunus Emre's Grammar of the Self

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Abstract

In this paper, I would like to take into account some of the main elements that in my opinion 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* relates to his spiritual journey experiences. 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 journey toward the Ineffable Absolute (*Hakk*)? What is the relationship between his way of walking along the spiritual path and his conception of language?

Keywords: Yunus Emre, sufism, language, barzakh, love.

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Yunus Emre'nin Öz Grameri

Öz

Bu makalede, Yunus Emre'nin yaşam biçimini oluřturan ve XIII. ve XIV. yüzyıllarda yazılmıř en önemli Türk Őiri eserlerinden biri olan Divan'na dođrudan yansıyan bazı ana unsurları dikkate almak istiyorum. Yunus Emre'nin hayatı hakkında çok az bilgiye sahip olsak da onun bir derviş, tasavvuf yolunu takip eden bir kiři olduđunu kesin olarak biliyoruz. Yunus Emre'nin Divan'ının onun manevi yolculuđundaki deneyimleriyle ne ölçüde iliřkili olduđunu arařtıracalıđım. Őiirlerini okuyarak onun hayatı hakkında ne anlayabiliriz? En derin deneyimlerine tanıklık etmek için mi yazdı? Tarifsiz Öteki'ye (Hakk'a) dođru kendi yolculuđunu anlamak için mi yazdı? Manevi yolda yürüme biçimi ile dil anlayışı arasındaki iliřki nedir? Makalede bu soruların cevabı aranacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yunus Emre, tasavvuf, dil, berzah, aşk.

In my opinion, there is a direct correlation between Yunus Emre's discovery of himself and his artistic production. Life and poetry are intertwined in the sense that we can call the ensemble of these two dimensions of 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*¹.

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 salt water. As we can read in this quote from the Qur'an:

He mixed the two seas, such that they meet one another. Between them lies a barrier that they transgress not. So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? From them come forth pearls and coral stones.²

Barzakh can be considered as a space of union and differentiation at the same time, where opposite elements melt into each other as well as differentiate from one another. 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 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 intermediate plane 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 poetical work? Is his poetry a 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.

1 For the concept of Barzakh in the Islamicate Civilization see Bruce B. Lawrence, *Islamicate Cosmopolitan Spirit*, vol. 20, John Wiley & Sons, 2021; Bruce B. Lawrence, *Who is Allah?*, UNC Press Books, 2015, p. 40-45; Miriam Cooke, "Tribal Modern", *Tribal Modern*, University of California Press, 2014.

2 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, et al., "The Study Quran", *A new translation and commentary*, Harper One, 2015.

For Yunus Emre, poetry becomes a third plane 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 itself by giving to it a sort of order, a grammar. This third plane, 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 the Self is self.

I will investigate the main values that constitute Yunus Emre's *Weltanschauung*. I will analyze some poems which I translated to explain my interpretation of Yunus Emre's grammar of the self. I will start with the importance of contradictions in his poetry and analyze some poems where the difference between the *Şeriat* plane and the *Hakikat* and *Batın* and *Zahiri* planes are addressed. In my opinion, 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 of 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 Qur'anic 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 (*işk*) with the Ineffable Absolute (*Hakk*).

Yunus Emre's Contradictions

There are many poems in Yunus Emre's Divan that indicate the transformative value of opposition. 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 pain (*dert*) and a remedy (*derman*). 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 instance when 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 olur³*

In this poem, the *incipits* of all *bayts* (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. In my opinion, this poem expresses the contradictions that the poet experiences on his journey. His self, here represented by the word *gönül*, seems to be the victim of contrary forces that give the poet the feeling of bewilderment (*hayran*), a keyword of the poem which appears at the beginning and 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 *bayt*, 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 *bayt* previously quoted, which refers directly to the sphere of language. I would like to point out that here, the metaphor of the pearl (*dür*) recalls the Qur'anic which refers to the *barzakh* as a meeting

3 Yunus Emre - Mustafa Tatçı, *Yunus Emre divâni*, vol. 14, Kültür Bakanlığı, 1990, poem n. 49.

place between two seas that produce pearls (*looloo*) and corals (*marjan*)⁴. In Yunus Emre's verse, these pearls are a remedy (*derman*) for the seekers (*dertüleri*).

Who are they? And what kind of remedy do the poet's words offer to them? The seekers are all those who sincerely follow the path of Sufism. 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 (*derman*). 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 droplet, 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 in the ruins.

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

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.

In one instance 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 Truth and becomes worthy of 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 hîç nesneyi bilmez olur
Bir dem talar hikmetlere Câlinûs u Lokmân olur*

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

*Bir dem görür olmış 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
Bir dem görür Hak rahmetin Uçmaklar'a Rıdvân olur.⁵*

Yunus Emre continues to use contradictory terms to express the journey of his 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 ascet (*zühd*), 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 to me 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 the apophatic language.⁶ 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 Wittgenstein⁷ 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 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,

5 Yunus Emre, *Divan*, poem n. 49.

6 Michael A. Sells, *Mystical languages of unsaying*, University of Chicago Press, 1994.

7 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, Routledge, 2013.

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 can see the concept of performance, as an evocative gesture in a linguistic form, so important both for Sells⁸ in his analysis of apophatic language in different authors of esotericism, influenced by different spiritual traditions, and in Keshavarz's reading of Rumi's poetry.⁹ 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 Self. 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 to the ground.

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

8 Michael A. Sells, *Mystical languages of unsaying*, University of Chicago Press, 1994.

9 Fatemeh Keshavarz, *Reading mystical lyric: The case of Jalal al-Din Rumi*, University of South Carolina Press, 1998.

At one moment he is Moses and has thousands of conversations with God.

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, and poor Yunus is left bewildered.

*Bir dem varur mescidlere yüzün sürer anda yire
Bir dem varur deyre girer İncîl okur ruhân olur*

*Bir dem gelür Mûsâ olur yüz bin münâcâtlar kılır
Bir dem girer kibr evine Firavn'la Hâmân olur*

*Bir dem gelür 'İsâ gibi ölmüşleri diri kılır
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 Yunus Hayrân olur¹⁰*

Here, Yunus Emre's sensibility regarding contradiction even comes to consider his engagement with the Islamic Revelation. In fact, at the end of the poem, Yunus Emre takes different approaches to Revelation as metaphors for his complex, ambiguous, and contradictory spiritual journey. Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and Polytheism all represent diverse territories through which his 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 source of different and complementary teachings.¹¹

Yunus Emre's Sufi mode of being Islamic differs from the legalistic discourse which tends to create a sharper identitarian distinction between the different

10 Yunus Emre, *Divan*, poem n. 49.

11 In my opinion, 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 Ibn Arabi. Chittick, starting from a famous poem of Ibn Arabi'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 Ibn Arabi, 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 William C. Chittick, *Imaginal worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the problem of religious diversity*, Suny Press, 1994.

traditions, with a historical categorization and hierarchy based on their levels of acquired Truth (*Hakk*). To me, the message of these verses points out the distinction between the planes of the textual (*Şeriat*) and Truth (*Hakikat*). The *Şeriat* approach, whether it be Islamic, Christian, or Jewish, promotes personal responsibility for 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 Truth (*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 to his achievement of that dimension of *Hakikat*. By claiming that he is lost (*güm-rah*) and in bewilderment (*hayran*), he wants to express his achievement of the plane of *Hakikat*. While the *Şeriat* plane generates dispersion in the self of the poetic voice, 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’ (*hayran*), 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 ontologically poor person, 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 (...)’¹². The adjective *hayran* 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 He.

Finally, we are exposed to the *barzakh* logic of the interconnection of two seas. On the one side, we find the *Şeriat* plane with its dispersion, dynamism, and

12 Qur’an, 28.88, 55/26-27.

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 merged yet kept separate through the spiritual journey that the poetic voice travels along the Ghazal. Moreover, *hayran 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.

The relationship between the textual level (*Şeriat*) and the ineffability (*Hakikat*), and Exoterism (*Zahir*) and Esoterism (*Batin*)

In the next poem that I will comment on, Yunus Emre continues to explore the 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 Qur'anic revelation by highlighting not only the ontological diversity of the two planes: concentration versus dispersion, unity versus duality, etc., but also the functional difference between 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 something of law and the truth:

The law is a ship, the truth 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 vasfını eydem sana
Şerî'at bir gemidür hakikat deryâsıdır*

*Niçe ki muhkemise tahtaları geminün
Mevc uricagaz deniz anı uşanasıdır¹³*

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 Muslims 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 relationship 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 truth (*Hakikat*) that transcends all limitations.

13 Yunus Emre, *Divan*, poem n. 29.

In contrast to the *Şeriat*, which seems to include the effect of human activity, the 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 Truth (*Hakikat*) as compared to the Textual Truth (*Şeriat*), which is considered to comprise the legalistic aspects of 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 *Haqīqa* (Truth) and *Sharī‘a* (the Law), the attainment of the former being the ultimate objective of esotericists.”¹⁴

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 truth 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 [of the Truth]
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*¹⁵

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 ambiguous in-between space. 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 Qur’anic and revealed language only one of the possible receptacles of it, for Yunus Emre the revealed

14 Liana Saif, “What is Islamic Esotericism?”, *Correspondences*, 7.1, 2019.

15 Yunus Emre, *Divan*, poem n. 38.

led language is an indispensable tool to sink into that which is beyond language.¹⁶ 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 (*zahir*) engagement, to the esoteric (*batini*) of the Ineffable as one of the main characteristics of Yunus Emre's poetic message as closely related to his conception of language. A conception that clearly distinguishes his esoteric engagement with the Quranic revelation from the legalistic tendencies in Islam.

In the exoteric (*zahir*) approach Truth is conceived as inherent in the Quranic text, together with other corpus of textualities like the Hadith collections, under a technicist and utilitarian thought of language. These corpora of textualities, especially the Quran but also some of the Hadith, are conceived as the words of Allah. At the same time they are translated into the human language, Arabic language, becoming the main resource to save humanity, both individually and collectively, from chaos. Those textualities are considered 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 (*batini*) approach to language and its relationship with the ineffable Truth (*Hakk*). By reading of the previous verses, it seems clear to me how he relativizes 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 (*Şeriat*) and dive into ineffable Truth (*Hakikat*) points precisely to the insufficiency of a utilitaristic, technicist, and too-human perspective on language.

Again, if we have to speak of a fundamental difference between the Sufi and the legalist approach concerning textuality and thus concerning 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 (*zahir*), 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 the esotericist (*zahir*) is 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

16 Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*. Princeton University Press, 2015.

to whether or not they adhere to them. For Yunus Emre, the challenge is different. This challenge is linked to death which makes the traveler 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 Truth (*Hakk*). This experience of the ineffability of the ocean becomes a possibility open to the traveler who dares to dive into the sea by abandoning ship and in my opinion the metaphor refers to those who have an esoteric (*Batini*) 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 *batin* 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 which seeks to shape the practice of *vahdet el 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 *Zahir* that Yunus Emre shapes this contradiction.

Wherever your eyes look God is indeed 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 gözün baka Çalap hâzırdur mutlaka

Şol cân ki tapmadı Hak'a assısı yok ziyândadur

Eyle sûretüni vîrân cân sırrıdır ana iren

Bâtın gözidür dost gören zâhir gözi yabandadur¹⁷

The first two verses express precisely the idea of the pervasive presence of the divine, expressed here by the Turkish word *Çalap*.¹⁸ This presence is a lack for those who do not revere the truth (*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*.

17 Yunus Emre, *Divan*, poem n. 54.

18 *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/calap>, [Date of Access: 10.09.2022].

Another important element that fails as a form is the identification of the source of the words with the words of the poet. The anonymity of Yunus Emre's words, as in all prophetic cultures, 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 right cannot be identified with a form:

Yûnus did not pronounce these words, the voice of the friend filled his soulç
Blind is the eye of the hypocrite, how then shall I make him see itç

*Yûnus dimedi bu sözi câna toldı dost âvâzı
Kördür münâfikun gözi ya ben niçe göstereyin*

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 them. This attitude can relate back to the Quranic narrative concerning the curse of Iblis or Satan.

Specifically, in one of the many versions of this story narrated in the Qur'an, in surah al Araf 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.¹⁹ 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*

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.²⁰ 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.

19 *Qur'an*, 7,12, Sahih International.

20 *Qur'an*, 2.33, Sahih International.

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 bâtin of Adam.

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

Çalap Âdem cismini topraktan var eyledi

Şeytân geldi Âdem'e tapmaga 'âr eyledi

Eydür ben oddan nûrdan ol bir avuç topraktan

Bilmedi kim Âdem'ün için gevher eyledi

Zâhir gördi Âdem'ün bâtınuna bakmadı

Bilmedi kim Âdem'i halka server eyledi

In these verses, we hear the poetic voice's denunciation of the devil. Rightly, his inability 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*) which makes him different. The pearl 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 Şariat and *Hakikat* on the one hand and his relationship with the other pair of terms *Batin* and *Zahir*, 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 in my opinion 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.

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*, *Tarikat*, *Marifet*, and *Hakikat* are described as doors with distinct functions.²¹ In this case, I will not focus on the relationship between *Şeriat* and *Hakikat* but on the relationship between *Hakk* and *Hakikat*.

21 Abdullah Kahraman, "Yunus Emre Divan'ında Şeriat, Tarikat, Hakikat ve Marifet (Dört Kapı)", *Kocaeli İlahiyat Dergisi*, 1.1, 2017, p. 1-18.

Both terms *Hakikat* and *Hakk* refer to something which precedes both ontologically and chronologically the Qur'anic 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 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 Truth (*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 Quran washes away the 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 Truth. Do not look to the faults of the nobles;
Every day is a feast and every night is a night of destiny.

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

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

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

*Dördüncüsü hakikat ere eksük bakmaya
Bayram ola gündüzi Kadîr ola gicesi²²*

In this quotation, Yunus Emre uses the term *Hakikat* as the fourth door of access to 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 Truth (*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.

22 Yunus Emre, *Divan*, poem n. 351.

Yunus Emre emphasizes how the disciple (*mürîd*) has different options to reach proximity to the Truth (*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*.²³

Also, as we saw before, Yunus Emre clearly distances himself from this Legalistic perspective, but he never specifies whether these four doors are interconnected themselves. Does Yunus Emre think that it is necessary to open these four doors in a specific sequence? In my opinion, 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 exoteric Islam, especially toward the ritual prayer he refers to by the Persian name *Namaz*.²⁴ What is generally criticized, however, is the attitude of seeing in these worship practices (*ibadet*²⁵) 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 Truth (*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 Truth (*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 a 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 identifying this boat (*gemi*) as a Truth (*Hakk*) of the Text, Yunus Emre considers it as the Truth (*Hakk*) of the guide (*mürşîd*).

Here we see again how the difference between the esoteric (*Batin*) and exoteric (*Zahir*) dimensions refers to a different conception of language. For *Şariat*, Truth resides in the textual scriptures, the Qur’an and Hadith, which are regarded as the unique vessels of the Truth of the divine words. It is the experts in jurisprudence (*Faki*) who extrapolate truth from these textual entities. In the esoteric

23 See Ahmet Karamustafa, “God’s unruly friends”, *Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period*, 1200, 1994, p. 1550.

24 *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/namaz>, [Date of Access: 10.09.2022].

25 *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/ibadet>, [Date of Access: 10.09.2022].

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 Truth.

If Yunus Emre refers to *Hakikat* as a stage, a perspective, or a point of view (*makam*), how does he use the term *Hakk*? In my opinion, 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 *bayt*, 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 real Truth.

*Girçek 'âşık oldunsa gel 'ışk kitâbından okı
Cân gözini açdunsa hakikat bulasın Hak'i*²⁶

The first part of the *bayt* 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 Quranic 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 Truth (*Hak'i*). In the last part of the *bayt* (*hakikat bulasın Hak'i*), the terms *Hakikat* and *Hak'i* 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 Truth (*Hakk'i*). Here, Yunus Emre uses the term *Hakk* to indicate the ontological dimension of the Truth (*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 Truth using the term *Hakk*:

You who are looking for the Truth night and day, don't you know where it is?
Wherever I am, there it is present, and wherever I look, there it is.

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

*İy dün ü gün Hak isteyen bilmez misin Hak kandasın
Her kandasam anda hâzır kanda bakarsam andadır*

26 Yunus Emre - Mustafa Tatçı, *Yunus Emre divânî*, vol. 14, Kültür Bakanlığı, 1990, poem n. 410.

*İstemegil Hak'ı irak gönüldedir Hakk'a turak
Sen senligün elden bırak tenden içerü cândadır*²⁷

From these *bayts*, 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 *bayt*, Yunus Emre announces again the ontological paradox of the Truth (*Hakk*). This seems to be the ultimate 'being', which paradoxically remains hidden from most people.

In the poem, Yunus Emre describes these common persons as the people who are looking day and night for the Truth (*İy dün ü gün Hak isteyen bilmez misin Hak kandadır*). By speaking in the name of the Truth (*Hakk*), the poetic voice gives a clear message to those seekers. It claims that its own presence and perspective open the possibility of meeting with the Truth (*Hakk*). Is this poetic voice speaking in the name of Yunus Emre?

In my opinion, 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 Truth (*Hakk*)? The poem indicates the heart (*gönül*) as the territory where the Truth (*Hakk*) takes refuge (*Hakk'a turak*). The poetic voice urges the listener to renounce the self (*senligün*), in this case, called 'your-selves'. By distancing from the circumstances of the outer self, the poetical voice traces the path to the encounter with the Truth (*Hakk*) at the deepest level of the soul (*can*).

In a contradictory way, in another poem, Yunus Emre recognizes the Truth (*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 Muslims can be engaged with this Truth (*Hakk*). Yunus Emre's proposal about the necessary relation with this dimension of Revelation can be inscribed again in the sphere of a *Batini* engagement with the revelation of the Qur'an. In fact, Yunus Emre contemplates a possible connection with the Truth (*Hakk*) via experiential and personal knowledge. In this important extract from the *Divan*, he sheds light on this aspect:

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

27 Yunus Emre - Mustafa Tatçı, *Yunus Emre divâni*, vol. 14, Kültür Bakanlığı, 1990, poem n. 54.

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 dirsın
Niçün yalan söylersın çün hiç didüğün olmaz²⁸*

The first *bayt* enunciates the contradictory side of this engagement with the Truth (*Hakk*). On the one hand, the Truth (*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 the heart (*gönul*).²⁹ The poetic voice explicitly indicates that the territory in which the exploration of the Truth (*Hakk*) should take place is an existential area.

In this sense, the Truth (*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 Truth is not separated. However, not every person can be aware of his/her unity with the Truth (*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 Truth (*Hakk*); and when they do, they become the door of access for the realization of others.

Thanks be to the Truth 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 truth with the Truth I became intimate.
Wherever I look, what is manifested is the Truth.

Open is the door of prayer for the friends of the Truth;
If you want to be a friend, learn a lesson from your friends.

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

*Çünkü gördüm ben Hakk'umu Hakk'ıla olmuşam biliş
Her kancaru bakdumusa hep görinendür cümle Hak*

28 Yunus Emre, Divan poem n.103

29 Liana Saif, "What is Islamic Esotericism?." *Correspondences* 7.1 (2019).

*Açuk duvacuk kapusu dostları için ol Hakk'un
Dostı olmak dilerisen dostlardan okı bir sebak³⁰*

In the second *bayt* of this poem, the poet explains the process which has enabled him to connect with the Truth (*Hakk*). The poetic voice uses the word '*Hakk*' twice, with two different suffixes. First, with the suffix 'ım' (my Truth), indicating a relation of possession and personal engagement with it. The second time, it is used with *Hakk 'ila'* (with the Truth), highlighting the close connection with the Truth. The poetic voice indicates that the encounter with one's own Truth (*hakkım*) becomes an indispensable step towards attaining proximity to the Truth (*Hakk'ila*).

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

Only a few of those among the disciples (*mürîd*) 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 *mürîds* as doors of access to the Truth (*Hakk*). Yunus Emre points to this process as the condition for any 'personal revelatory engagement' with the Truth; it is the real goal of the spiritual process of the esoteric mode of being Islamic.

Yunus Emre on experiential knowledge (*ilm*) and its language expression

But if the encounter with the figure of the guide (*mürşîd*) is for Yunus Emre a key step in gaining the Truth (*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 knowledge³¹.

30 Yunus Emre, *Divan*, poem n. 128.

31 See William C. Chittick, *The Sufi path of knowledge: Ibn al-Arabi's metaphysics of imagination*, Suny Press, 2010.

You recite not to associate with God as 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-şerikden okursın sonra şerik katarsın
Bire iki dimegi kimden fetvâ dutarsın*

*Dîn ü îmân bünyâdı togrulukla gerçeklik
Ol tamâm olmayacak neyile dîn çatarsın³²*

From the beginning of the poem, one can glimpse Yunus Emre's denunciation of a particular conception of knowledge attached to the exterior (*zahir*) 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-şerik*), 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 *zahir* reading of the Quranic text. What the poetic voice indicates as the foundational principles of Islam, here in my opinion the word *Din* is used as a synonym for Islam, is something that surpasses the dual nature of the word.³³ 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 passing from one point to another.³⁴ *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 *batin* and *zahir* that we analyzed earlier with the metaphor of the ship (*gemi*) and the ocean (*deniz*).

32 Yunus Emre, *Divan*, poem n. 248.

33 Ahmet T. Karamustafa, "16. Islamic Dîn as an Alternative to Western Models of "Religion"", *Religion, Theory, Critique*, Columbia University Press, 2017, p. 163-172.

34 Kubbealti Lugatim, <http://www.lugatim.com/s/DO%C4%9ERU>, [Date of Access: 10.09.2022].

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

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 buyurdi
Andan haber virsene hâ kitâbdan ötersin*

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

*'İlm okımak bilmeklik kendözini bilmekdür
Pes kendözün bilmezsen bir hayvândan betersin³⁵*

The poetic voice proceeds by acknowledging the Revelatory character of the Qur'anic 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 Qur'anic word as created or uncreated has given rise to many debates in the history of Islamic thought. Above all, the Mutazilites defended the idea of the created nature of the Qur'an.³⁶ However, Yunus Emre is not interested in approaching the controversy in theological terms.

In the poem, we find a profound criticism of 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*³⁷ and *i'rab*³⁸ are parts of the classical treatises of the Arabic language that have always had a didactic purpose in creating an understanding of the Qur'anic 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

35 Yunus Emre, *Divan*, poem n. 248.

36 *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mutazilah>, [Date of Access: 09.10.2022].

37 *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/bina>, [Date of Access: 09.10.2022].

38 *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/irabul-kuran> last access, [Date of Access: 09.10.2022].

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 Qur'anic word. A word that is more than human.

The last *bayt* of the quote seems to point out that 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 sense of profound humanity.

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 'ibreten degülsin görmedin taş atarsın*

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

*Kılursın ri'yâ namâz yazugun çok hayrun az
Dinle neye varur söz Cehennem'de yatarsın³⁹*

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.

39 Yunus Emre, *Divan*, poem n. 248.

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

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 from yourself.

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

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

*Bu düzilen tertîbi ayruksıdı mı dırsın
Başaramazsın hâce endişeden yitersin*

*Yûnus miskîn bu sözi 'ışk 'âleminde söyler
Dime bilmedin ana kendözünden katarsın⁴⁰*

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

40 Yunus Emre, *Divan*, poem n. 248.

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.⁴¹ 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).

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 (*madhahib*). What tone does Yunus Emre use to refer to the *fakih* in this *beyt*? In my opinion, this *beyt* demonstrates the irony of the poet.⁴² 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.

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 Truth (*Hakk*). The *fakir* (indigent person) remains the ontological and ethical model of the Sufi 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 Rumi's poetry.⁴³ One of the most powerful metaphors which poetically expresses this is the moth.⁴⁴ 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 about the *fakih* (jurist). Contrasting with the idea that the jurist tended to feel superior to the others, the poetic voice here

41 Talal Asad, "The idea of an anthropology of Islam", *Qui parle*, 17.2, 2009, p. 1-30.

42 As Ahmed notices, jokes and irony tend to be marginalized in the mainstream scholarly approach to the Islamicate civilization see Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*, Princeton University Press, 2015, p. 321.

43 Fatemeh Keshavarz, *Reading mystical lyric: The case of Jalal al-Din Rumi*, University of South Carolina Press, 1998.

44 Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, "Waxing Eloquent: The Masterful Variations on Candle Metaphors in the Poetry of Ḥāfīz and his Predecessors", *Metaphor and Imagery in Persian Poetry*, Brill, 2012, p. 81-123.

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 Truth (*hakk*).

In this negotiation regarding the status of the 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 (*aşk*). 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 superficially repeating formulas.

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*⁴⁵, 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 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 Qur’anic text is, for Yunus Emre, a vehicle to reach this Truth (*Hakk*) rather than the end of the quest.

Love (*Işk*) and the Heart (*Gönul*)

I would like to conclude this paper 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 Muhammad:

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
Cânum içinde bulmuşam cânlara dahı cânımış*

45 See Jaques Derrida, “Plato’s pharmacy”, *Tragedy*, Routledge, 2014, p. 338-360.

*Sevdük yâridür Mustafâ andan ola meyl ü vefâ
Sıdkı bütün gönli safâ hem bize ol îmânımı⁴⁶*

In the first beyt, the poetical voice claims that the source of Love (ışk) 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 the source of faith (*îmânımış*).

Moreover, this first two beyt serve as a preamble to go deep into Yunus Emre's personal experience of language in his poetic production. In my view, 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 (tongue) are 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 Quran.

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 içindür bu dil sözi gönüldedür dostun râzi
Gönül dostu söyledügi ne dir ise Kur'ân'ımı⁴⁷*

*Bir dem gönüle kayıkdum ol gizlü varaka bakdum
Uş sırrımı halka çakdum bir pâyânsuz 'ummânımı⁴⁷*

To begin with, we can argue that Yunus Emre's thoughts on language, in other words, his philosophical intensity, recognizes language as a complex and ambiguous phenomenon. The dimension of language can change about 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 (*zahir*) and accessible to the general people (*halk*).

46 Yunus Emre, *Divan*, poem n. 121.

47 Ibidem.

This is why Yunus Emre, referring to his poetical production, claims that to the general people (*halk*) his poetical language is nothing more than words (*halk içindür bu dil sözi*). However, this is only the external (*zahir*) and limited dimension of his poetical production. The inner (*batini*) dimension has another function that does not arrive at 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 râzi*). In this example, Yunus Emre follows the same metaphysical conception of Ibn Arabi, with a coexistence of two dimensions of reality which are in a continuous process of reciprocal «constriction» (*taskhir*).

These two dimensions can 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 Ibn Arabi, 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 (*zahir*) and interiority (*batin*), the self-manifestation of God passes by both *tanzih* and *tashbih*. The extent to which a person can approach 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.⁴⁸

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 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 Qur'anic language cannot be compared with other forms of language and it is in itself the unique self-manifestation of the Ineffable Truth (*Hakk*). On the contrary, to Yunus Emre, whatever

48 See William C. Chittick, *The Sufi path of knowledge: Ibn al-Arabi's metaphysics of imagination*, Suny Press, 2010; Ian Almond, *Sufism and deconstruction: A comparative study of Derrida and Ibn 'Arabi*, Routledge, 2004.

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'ımız*). Once again, Yunus Emre's thought about language deconstructs the idea that the absolute Ineffable (*Hakk*) resides exclusively in the Text. Here Yunus Emre considers every kind of text, if uttered from the truthful heart (*gönül*), as a revealed text and, in this sense, under a regime of Truth (*Hakk*) comparable to the Qur'an.

To me, it is interesting to notice how this truthful heart (*gönül*) does not belong to a single person. I hypothesize that this inner dimension excludes the identification with someone and for this reason, in all the poems, 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 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 Qur'anic 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 whom everything is written and from which the Qur'an is created.⁴⁹

What did Yunus Emre learn from his poetical-inspired language? From a language that comes from the profound heart (*gönül*) and can be compared with Qur'anic Revelation? However, the masses (*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 'ummânımız*) 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.

Conclusion

In this article we have tried to highlight how Yunus Emre's form of life is reflected in his poetic work and, 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

49 *Qur'an*, 85, 21-22, Sahih International.

such as Miriam Cooke and Bruce Lawrence,⁵⁰ 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 *Şeriat:Hakikat* or *Batin Zahir*. 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 Hadiths. 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 sort⁵¹. In Yunus, we find elements of the more intellectualistic esotericism of an Ibn Arabian 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.

This metaphor of love is accompanied by another key term which is *Hayran*. This term refers to a kind of amazement that assails the poet. Astonishment encompasses the experience of poetic inspiration, the inability to grasp the Inef-

50 Bruce B. Lawrence, *Islamicate Cosmopolitan Spirit*, vol. 20, John Wiley & Sons, 2021; Bruce B. Lawrence, *Who is Allah?*. UNC Press Books, 2015 p. 40-45; Miriam Cooke, "Tribal Modern", *Tribal Modern*, University of California Press, 2014.

51 Liana Saif, "What is Islamic Esotericism?", *Correspondences*, 7.1, 2019, p. 47.

fable, 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 Rumi'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 inadequacy⁵². The transformation of a funeral, the life of human beings, into a celebration where the beauty of the poetic word or dance, particularly in Rumi's case, can still connect a person with the Ineffable.

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Arařtırmanın her aşamasından yazar sorumludur.

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