

Manifestations of Sufism in Ahmed Al-Azari's Novel *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh*

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Abstract:

This article aims to explore the presence of Sufism in the novel *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh* ("The Last of the Dervishes") through an analytical approach that begins with an examination of the title. The title itself explicitly signifies the demise of the final Sufi figure, symbolizing the disappearance of spiritual values in an increasingly materialistic world. The article also investigates the concept of Sufi space, which, in the context of the novel, transcends being a mere geographical location and evolves into a spiritual realm marked by transcendence, purity, and detachment from material reality. Furthermore, Sufi time emerges in the narrative as a break from chronological, natural time, replacing it with temporality based on visions, dreams, and moments of ecstasy. The article additionally delves into the portrayal of Sufi characters, each of whom embodies traits of asceticism, contemplation, devotion, and a quest for knowledge and spiritual enlightenment. The novel's language—rich in symbolism, suggestion, and semantic density—is largely derived from the Sufi lexicon. Overall, Sufism is not portrayed as a peripheral element within the novel but rather serves as a foundational pillar upon which the entire narrative is constructed. It contributes significantly to revealing the core themes of the text: namely, the dangers posed by the growing dominance of materialism in society and the resulting alienation of individuals from the spiritual and religious values that underpin human existence. The central inquiry of the study is thus: in what ways does Sufism manifest in *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh* by Ahmed Al-Azari?

Keywords: Sufism, dervish, last, shaykh, matter, spirit, time, space, character, language.

1. Introduction:

Sufism represents one of the most profound intellectual traditions within the Arab-Islamic heritage. It is rooted in the refinement of the self and seeks to transcend the

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boundaries of the visible world in pursuit of inner and hidden dimensions. This spiritual facet has made its way into literature broadly, and into the novel in particular, as the novel is a literary form well-suited to capturing the Sufi experience—with all its symbolic richness, multilayered meanings, and the ability to blend imagination with reality. In this context, Ahmed Al-Azari's *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh* aligns with a corpus of literary works that engage Sufism both semantically and aesthetically to reflect the existential crises of contemporary humanity and its persistent search for spiritual peace.

The study investigates the various ways in which Sufism is employed to shape the narrative structure. The approach begins with defining Sufism and analyzing the title of the novel, before moving on to examine the Sufi character. This character is portrayed as an exemplar of purity, chastity, and transparency, serving the role of elevating the spirit and freeing it from the chains of materialism. The analysis then turns to the role of space and its impact on the characters—depicted as a space that mirrors the ideological vision of the novelist: a call to return to religion, to spiritual and moral values, and to ethical principles as a means of overcoming the crises of a modern era that sanctifies material concerns.

The study also explores the unique qualities of Sufi time, and the expressions of Sufi language within the text—characterized by ambiguity, symbolism, and semantic deviation. In the Sufi narrative tradition, Ahmed Al-Azari finds a vehicle through which to express his ideas. The inherent mystery, metaphysical underpinnings, and specialized terminology of Sufism serve as tools for articulating this vision, making Sufism a pathway toward the pursuit of absolute truth.

The research is guided by the following central question: how does Sufism manifest in *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh*, and to what degree does it shape the narrative and semantic fabric of the novel? In addressing this question, the study adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology that aims to uncover the manifestations of Sufism within the text, highlighting its aesthetic and intellectual dimensions and examining their relationship to the broader narrative framework.

2. Definition of Sufism:

Sufism is an intellectual and spiritual doctrine within Islam that is centered on the purification of the soul and the heart. Its practitioners aspire to detach from worldly engagements and renounce material pleasures in order to attain the station of spiritual excellence (iḥsān).

Ali Abu Shami defines Sufism as: “Renunciation of the world and all it contains through subduing the self and weakening the body so that the soul may gain mastery

over it. This process requires hunger, sleeplessness, deprivation, distancing oneself from people, and following a series of spiritual struggles or disciplines—what Sufis refer to as states, paths, and stations—so that the seeker may reach the knowledge of truth. Whoever attains this knowledge lives in a special spiritual state, progressing from one station to another until he reaches the station of union with God.”¹

Thus, Sufism is the struggle against the lower self until it transcends impulses and desires and becomes purified. Various interpretations have been proposed regarding the origin of the term “Sufi.” Some have asserted that:

“Wearing wool (*ṣūf*) was characteristic of the early Sufis, for it was associated with humility, modesty, and asceticism, and it aligns with the linguistic derivation, for one says ‘*taṣawwafa*’ when someone puts on wool, just as one says ‘*taqammaṣa*’ when he wears a shirt.”²

The reason many scholars associate Sufism with the wearing of wool lies in the fact that it was the predominant attire of ascetics and devout worshippers. Regardless of the exact etymology, scholars widely concur that Sufis were those who donned wool, renounced worldly pleasures, and followed the path of the Prophet—peace be upon him.

3. The Significance of the Title (*Ākhir al-Darāwīsh*):

Novelists are invariably attentive to selecting titles that most aptly reflect their works, as the title condenses the content of the novel with precision and gathers its objectives and intended meanings into a succinct phrase at the outset. The title serves as a linguistic unit that provides a general conceptualization of the text’s meaning.

Bassam Musa Quttous observes:

“The title is the primary marker of the artistic or literary work, for it encompasses the extensive text in a state of condensation and latent potential. It contains within it the structure or meaning of the work—or both simultaneously. The title may also embody the purpose of the work itself, or even the ending of the story and the resolution of its conflict.”³

The title, therefore, offers valuable assistance in grasping the text and clarifying that which may initially seem obscure. It acts as a key that facilitates the reader’s access to the novel and enables the formation of a preliminary understanding of its content and events.

The title *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh* (“The Last of the Dervishes”) carries semantic weight that encapsulates the entire literary work. Dervishes are followers of the Sufi path, distinguished by their ascetic lifestyle and their quest for proximity to God, distancing

themselves from material existence. The term gained prominence during the Ottoman period, where:

“The Sufi, among the Turks, is known as a dervish—a term encompassing numerous philosophical notions and social functions. Some wandering Sufi figures were known as the ‘Poor of Antalya.’ However, most Sufis belonged to specific Sufi orders and participated in daily life within the *tekkes*, known variously as *tekkes*, *zawāyā*, or *khānqāhs* depending on the region. Each *tekke* had its own beliefs and practices, and in order for the shaykh of the *tekke* to remain its axis and symbolic center, he served as the primary teacher and spiritual source, the channel of divine connection, endowed with wisdom and blessing, guiding his followers toward God.”⁴

As for the word *ākhar* (last), it denotes an ending, as: “*al-ākhir*—when pronounced with two *ḍammas*—is the opposite of the ancient (...), and *al-ākhir* is the opposite of the first.”⁵

It is as though Al-Azari is declaring that the protagonist of his novel is the final Sufi, the last of the dervishes, and that no one after him will embody or carry forth those same ideas—ideas that sanctify spirituality and recoil from this pragmatic world.

The title, in its overall sense, indicates that the novel is not a mere chronological recounting of events, but rather a journey in search of the lost values of modern society—a society deeply entrenched in utilitarianism and sensual gratification. The dervishes may symbolize the spiritual and moral values that have begun to vanish in the contemporary age. Simultaneously, the term *last* evokes a feeling of sorrow and mourning for a world now ruled entirely by self-interest, a world in which noble values—those championed by Islam—have faded away.

4. The Sufi Character in the Novel:

The novel *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh* recounts the story of a journalist named Omar al-Rahmani, a forty-year-old man with a deep passion for writing and the media. He devoted his pen to exposing corruption and those who perpetuated it. He also sought to demonstrate that the root of all human misfortune lies in the detachment from spirituality and the preoccupation with materialism.

Omar resided in Boudouaou, a municipality in the Province of Boumerdes, and maintained a friendship with Said Barāqī, an administrator at Ru'ya—a company focused on production and distribution. Said consistently relied on Omar's articles, considering them essential for attracting readership to his magazine. Nevertheless, he often hesitated to publish Omar's more confrontational pieces, especially those directed at specific individuals, fearing for the magazine's reputation and his own professional position.

Omar's religious orientation inclined him toward Sufism; he denounced materialism and was indifferent to the pursuit of wealth or social status. He even rejected the idea of marriage, choosing instead to devote his life entirely to defending truth and confronting falsehood. His character is rich in symbolism—he is more than a social reformer; he embodies a self engaged in an internal journey toward spiritual peace.

Every aspect of Omar al-Rahmani's demeanor suggested a natural affinity with the Sufi path. He directed strong criticism at those who only pretended to be religious—hypocrites who performed religious rituals for show, engaging in pilgrimage and 'umrah, distributing zakat and alms, yet immersing themselves in desire and material gain. Their religiosity, he believed, was merely a disguise concealing their true nature:

“Many of the economic institutions integrated into this system are run and owned by ‘religious’ individuals who build mosques, go on pilgrimage every year, and donate millions. But their religiosity is a folkloric, material religiosity that confines religion to certain rituals, stripping it of its pure spiritual dimension. It is a secularized religiosity from which everything that opposes the existing consumerist order has been removed. It is a ‘light’ religiosity—reduced, like the food products those companies manufacture for diabetics.”⁶

Omar could no longer endure this corrupt, materialistic world—a world in which the powerful consume the weak. He chose to remove himself from it, embracing seclusion instead. He returned to his native village, Dīrah, and took refuge in its *zawiya* after restoring it. Eventually, he resolved to compose a dramatic work entitled *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh*, recounting his own spiritual journey and articulating his views and life principles—particularly his critique of materialism and the prevailing culture of consumption.

“An idea suddenly crossed his mind, prompting him to strike one palm against the other in astonishment, wondering how he had failed to notice it earlier. Then he shouted aloud: ‘I am the last of the dervishes! Why should I not write what happened to me during this journey in the form of a dramatic work—one that becomes the life story of the last dervish?’ He contacted Owais and sent him a message asking him to inform Sa‘id Barāqī that he had not forgotten the matter and that he would forward it to him as soon as it was completed. He then returned to the *zawiya* and began recording all that had happened to him, drawing upon the themes of his articles in which he criticized materialism and the theology of the marketplace.”⁷

Omar's Sufi character is grounded in a spiritual discipline that consistently pushes him toward perfection. He lives in a constant state of inner struggle between the physical self and its desires, and the soul and its elevation—until the latter ultimately triumphs. For Sufis in general:

“they disregarded the external phenomena surrounding the human being, which are perceived through the five senses, and held instead that the true path to perception lies in the heart. For the heart is what overflows with true knowledge, whereas what the senses convey is nothing but error and deception.”⁸

Omar al-Rahmani's character is thus formed more from within than from external factors. In the novel, he is portrayed as undergoing a long spiritual journey filled with anxiety and doubt, ultimately culminating in the discovery of truth. He stands as a representation of the human being in pursuit of his own essence.

The novel also shows that Al-Azari invokes a historical, religious, and authentically Sufi figure—‘Abd al-Rahman al-Akhdarī. It is said: “‘Abd al-Rahman al-Akhdarī was born in the village of Bantiyūs in western al-Zāb, and lived between the years 920 and 953. He thus died at a very young age, for his life did not exceed thirty-three years. From this, one may grasp the extraordinary genius of this man, who, in just a few short years, contributed to his age what others—whose lives were far longer—failed to accomplish in that era of decline, stagnation, and intellectual drought, a time lacking both abundant knowledge and distinguished scholars.”⁹

He is mentioned in the novel during a conversation between a female student and Omar al-Rahmani, who provides her with information about him: “Studies—few as they are—agree that the shaykh died young and that no grave has been authenticated for him to this day. But I once heard from one of the shaykhs something closer to imagination and myth: that al-Akhdarī was none other than al-Khidr, peace be upon him, who appeared in Biskra and then disappeared.”¹⁰

‘Abd al-Rahman al-Akhdarī is regarded as one of the Sufis who distanced themselves from worldly matters, demonstrating deep devotion, sincerity in their religiosity, and unwavering commitment to the Book of God and the Sunnah of His Messenger, peace be upon him.

When Omar returned to his home in Dīrah, he discovered a Qur’anic manuscript associated with this Sufi figure. Upon inquiring about it, one of his father’s friends informed him that it had belonged to al-Akhdarī and had been passed down through the family:

“Omar approached him and told him about the chest, the Qur’an manuscript, and the papers. The shaykh laughed: ‘I knew you would find them. As for the Qur’an manuscript, it is said to be that of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Akhdarī—written by his own hand and bound by himself. Your family has inherited it, father to son, until it reached your father—and now destiny has brought it to you.’”¹¹

The Sufi character also appears through the figure of the shaykh who typically manifests in Omar al-Rahmani's dreams to guide him onto the right path:

“The shaykh replied: ‘Do not apologize. I am the one who came to you, not you who came to me. It is the right time; everything is measured. You must understand, O al-Rahmani, that nothing in life is arbitrary. Everything is decreed.’

– Omar asked him: ‘What is decreed, O shaykh?’

– ‘Awakening you from your heedlessness.’

– ‘And in what does my heedlessness lie?’

– ‘You clung to things and forgot their essence. Whoever believes he is capable in and of himself is in the utmost state of weakness, for he is ignorant of the true nature of power. Hold fast to the essences and you will succeed and find happiness.’”¹²

The character of the shaykh thus embodies wisdom and plays the role of a spiritual guide. He appears in a symbolic, enigmatic form that transcends the limits of time and place.¹³

“The shaykh is one who has traveled the path of truth and has come to know its fears and dangers. He guides the disciple, indicating to him what benefits him and what harms him (...) and his condition is that he be knowledgeable of the Book of God and the Sunnah of His Messenger, peace be upon him, and that he turn away from love of the world, status, and all similar attachments.”

Awakening the heedless is among the miracles (karāmāt) attributed to Sufi shaykhs, who are believed to possess insight into the secrets of the self and the ability to influence the hearts of others. Although this Sufi shaykh appeared only in dreams, he succeeded in shaping Omar al-Rahmani’s decisions and directing him toward the realization of his true self, illuminating his inner vision:

“Such miracles here play the role of the social reformer who rectifies members of society through an invisible authority unmatched by worldly power, making him one of the pillars of the community—working to spread justice and tranquility among its members, even among the sinners.”¹⁴

In general, the Sufi character in *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh* emerges through both shaykhs—‘Abd al-Rahman al-Akhdarī and the second shaykh who appears in visions offering guidance to the protagonist—as well as through the central figure, Omar al-Rahmani, who ultimately comes to realize that he is not an ordinary man but indeed “the last of the dervishes,” as he describes himself at the end of the novel. What unites these three characters is their embodiment of spiritual values and their shared critique of materialism, worldly power, and superficial religiosity.

5. The Sufi Place in the Novel:

The Sufi place in the novel is a symbolic space infused with emotional and spiritual resonance. It is a sanctified setting intended for remembrance, seclusion, and purification—a place where the Sufi detaches from the material world to experience spiritual tranquility. It is a space connected more deeply to the heart than to the senses:

“For the place is capable of revealing the hero’s inner psychology and contributing to his growth and development. It may be the reason his life and perspective change, helping us understand the characters’ behavior, read their inner states, their way of life, and how they interact with their environment and its events.”¹⁵

In *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh*, this Sufi space is represented by three key locations: Dīrah—the village of Omar al-Rahmani, the mountain, and the village *zawiya*.

A Sufi shaykh visited Omar in a dream and instructed him to leave the place where he lived and follow his heart, as it alone would guide him to the light:

“He resolved to return directly to Dīrah, where he had been born, raised, and had grown between the mountain and the valley and the lessons of the *zawiya*, where he played with his peers and chased dust columns in the old house.”¹⁶

All that Omar sought was distance from the noise and tumult of the city, in search of rest, stillness, and inner peace. He found no place more suitable than his village, where the mountain, the valley, and the *zawiya* where he once studied formed part of his earliest memories. Dīrah was not merely a quiet village; it was the very place where Omar was born, raised, played, and learned the Qur’an. As al-Akhdar b. al-Sā’ih writes:

“The place tied to psychological association is the place that dwells in memory. For the familiar place we lived in—the childhood home—remains forever recalled even when we move far from it.”¹⁷

In the village, Omar encountered Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-‘Umari, a man who spoke fondly of Omar’s father and the material support he had once offered to the village *zawiya*. The shaykh promptly led Omar to see the *zawiya*, which had fallen into neglect. Omar immediately resolved to restore and care for it, as his father had done before him. Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-‘Umari told him that the *zawiya* had once been vibrant and filled with remembrance, but now stood abandoned:

“This *zawiya* used to be filled with visitors, enlivened by circles of remembrance and the litanies of the Sufi path. Care for it and tend to it, so that your spirit may flourish just as this *zawiya* once flourished,” he said, then turned and walked away.¹⁸

Omar transformed the *zawiya* significantly. He turned it into a place of beauty and personally oversaw its cleaning and renovation: “The *zawiya* had changed entirely; its roof was now made of beautiful English tiles, and its walls were painted green on the

lower half and white above. The iron doors were painted red. He agreed with the builder on the cost and the payment date. Then he entered inside and found it empty except for an old mattress. He spent the entire day cleaning the *zawiya* of the dust left from the restoration work until night overcame him, and drowsiness seized him, so he slept inside the *zawiya* on the old mattress.”¹⁹

The *zawiya* is traditionally a space for retreat and seclusion, representing a moment in which the worshipper detaches from the material world and immerses in spiritual contemplation—a condition in which clarity and spiritual unveiling occur. As Ali Abu Shami explains:

“In the Maghreb, the *zawiya* consisted of a prayer room with a *mihrab* and the tomb of a saint or descendant of the Prophet beneath a dome, a room dedicated to Qur’an recitation, an office or school for memorizing the Qur’an, and rooms reserved for guests of the *zawiya*, pilgrims, travelers, and students.”²⁰

Many devout Muslims chose to establish *zawiyas* and places of worship, adopting wool garments and distancing themselves from worldly luxury and indulgence.

The natural Sufi space also emerges in the novel through the mountain. For centuries, mountains have served as refuges for ascetics and worshippers seeking solitude and contemplation, far from the distractions of society:

“This mountain was not merely a giant mass of rock and white earth. For Omar, it was part of his childhood and his past, when he spent his days playing on the mountain, climbing up and down. He remembered how he tracked the nests of the partridge and the skylark, and how many elders scolded him for that, claiming the land belonged to Sidi Mu‘ammar’s endowments and that hunting on the gypsum mountain was a violation of his sanctuary. Many legends circulated among the people of the village and neighboring villages about those who dared violate the shaykh’s sacred ground.”²¹

Some mountains have historically been associated with the saints who inhabited them—those who withdrew from the material world to devote themselves to worship and nearness to God. The mountain mentioned in the novel, located in Dīrah, was considered sacred due to its association—as villagers believed—with the endowments of Sidi Mu‘ammar.

Thus, the Sufi place in *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh* constitutes a fundamental element in shaping the novel’s meaning. These places—sites of remembrance, seclusion, and inner serenity—enable the main character to detach from the clamor of the material world and reconstruct his spiritual awareness. The *zawiya*, in particular, serves as a pivotal turning point in Omar’s spiritual journey: through it, he transitions from a condition of fragmentation, anxiety, and doubt to one of calm and tranquility. It

becomes a symbol of spiritual retreat, introspection, and the pursuit of truth. Accordingly, place plays a crucial role in forming Omar's Sufi identity.

6. Definition of Sufi Time:

Sufi time diverges from conventional narrative time. It does not progress in a linear sequence from past to present to future; instead, it unfolds as a spiritual journey in which the soul, as understood in Sufi thought, may traverse from one realm to another within the same moment. Added to this is the realm of visions, wherein time dissolves, and all temporal dimensions merge into a singular instant.

‘Abd al-Qadir ‘Amīsh states: “The Sufi conception of time comprises three types in terms of focal vision (focalisation). There is axial time, or what may be described as degree zero of narrative action; the time of events (the narrated or recounted time); and then there is a third kind of time specific to Sufi writing and the Sufi literary text in particular: the time of mystical vision. This is the time of the spirit in its moments of illumination, its ecstasies, and its longing for the higher light—or what the Sufi sees in his sleep. And in the Sufi belief system, everything the Sufi sees in a dream is a truthful vision.”²²

“Al-Azari succeeded in making the events of his novel unfold in moments that shatter the boundaries of natural time. He creates a temporality of his own—one governed by the accumulation of spiritual experiences and capable of transcending material reality—so that psychological time becomes broader than external time. This Sufi temporality in *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh* helped develop the protagonist's character and guided his search for truth.”

Omar al-Rahmani's journey begins with his search for truth and his rejection of the wild material world that he despised, along with the competitive zeal people exhibited in pursuing it. He chose departure, seeking purity of soul and inner peace. Omar began to see a Sufi shaykh in his dreams, who consistently urged him toward virtue and encouraged him to abandon the world and renounce it. The dream, which recurred often, became for Omar an opportunity to alter his life and perception. To him, the dream was preferable to suffocating reality; it was enough that he felt peace and comfort whenever he encountered the ascetic devotee:

“Omar tried to reach him but in vain. He was running along the shore, calling out ‘O shaykh!’ repeatedly, until he awoke still calling out. At that moment, he realized that what he had seen was a dream. He sought forgiveness, wiped his face, and immediately went to the bathroom. He washed his face and returned to his place, holding his towel and thinking about the dream and the shaykh's words. The details of what he had seen were not an ordinary dream; it was a vision carrying signals and warnings—the secret of true happiness, which lies in knowing the essence and merging with it, and in being absent from all material contingencies.”²³

These visions succeeded in transforming Omar's character. They illuminated his path and led him toward what was right: "For the vision plays a great role in preparing the Sufi; it is one of the means of inspiration, guidance, and deliverance."²⁴

By the end of the novel, Omar ultimately realizes that, for the Sufi, reality and dream are intertwined, and that Sufi temporality differs fundamentally from that of ordinary people. The soul exists beyond time and is not governed by material limitations:

"He then wrote with his pen on the paper: 'The life of the last of the dervishes has ended,' then placed three dots, threw the pen onto the paper, and fell asleep on the table... He awoke to find himself under the shade of the giant eucalyptus tree. He had not slept there—yet how had he been transported? It seems that Omar, the last of the dervishes, had interwoven reality with dream. The only certainty was that the spirit is vaster than the narrow confines of matter, and that the heart—small as it may be—is capable of embracing the entire world through love, not through indwelling."²⁵

Thus, Sufi time is articulated in the novel as follows: "It is a fluid temporality in which he moves freely—free like the spirit, dwelling in every time, rebelling against places and physical confines. It is a spirit that moves from one time to another, from the constriction of human time to a wider time. Such is the life of the spirit—not the life of the body that grows heavy upon the earth due to its clay-like nature."²⁶

Sufi time in *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh* disrupts ordinary temporality. It represents a moment of liberation from the present, in which the spirit separates from the body. It is an illusory time, yet one in which truth is apprehended in the spiritual instant when the soul detaches from the body and finds itself elsewhere—just as occurred with Omar al-Rahmani. It is the time of unveiling and clarity, a spiritual temporality that replaces physical time, grounded in moments of illumination and inner revelation.

7. The Narrative Sentence and Sufi Structure:

The narrative sentence in the Sufi novel is imbued with symbolic and spiritual depth. It centers on the inner experience of the character and frequently incorporates memory, contemplation, or vision, consistently carrying emotional and spiritual significance. Through this symbolic artistic language, the novelist conveys ideas to the reader and reveals a reality in which materialism overwhelms fragile souls—while attempting to confront this condition and suggest paths of resolution.

Al-Azari demonstrates in the novel that human existence is perpetually shaped by a struggle between materialism and spirituality, and that one of the two must ultimately prevail. The individual is faced with a choice: either transcend desires or succumb to them—thereby becoming no more than a being enslaved by instinct. This is precisely what Sufi teachings caution against, as the Sufi chooses detachment from material pleasures, devotion to the worship of God, purification of the heart, and renunciation

of worldly indulgences—food, drink, clothing, wealth, and prestige—in favor of the path of truth, obedience, and piety.

“The essence cannot be grasped by the senses, nor encompassed by knowledge, nor contained by reason. Only the heart can comprehend and recognize the essence; only through love is the essence known. I know that your mind holds many questions, and this is the beginning of emerging from confusion, for the one who asks acknowledges that he is ignorant or astray—and this is the beginning of knowledge and guidance.”²⁷

The shaykh of the vision thus informs him that true happiness resides in the essence, whose dwelling place is the heart, and that this essence is none other than divine love.

‘Abduh Ghalib writes: “This name—Sufism—is derived from purity, and purity is the cleansing of the inner self from desires and impurities. The science of Sufism concerns itself with purifying the heart from desires such as the love of authority, fame, and praise from people, and from impurities, meaning spiritual diseases such as malice, envy, arrogance, vanity, conceit, and suspicion toward others.”²⁸

From the preceding passage of the novel, and in comparison with the principles of the Sufi doctrine, it is evident that Sufis consistently focus on the heart. The heart is the origin of desires and must therefore be purified until it becomes transparent and directed solely toward the worship of God—free from all else.

As Omar wandered through his house, he descended to the garage to tidy it in order to park his car. There, he found many shelves filled with old items, and among them, he discovered a beautiful box containing old papers inscribed with Sufi expressions:

“He leaned against the wall and read the first paper: ‘Whoever tastes, knows; whoever knows, draws; whoever draws, becomes intoxicated; whoever becomes intoxicated, draws near; whoever draws near, annihilates; and whoever annihilates, arrives.’ These words caused a violent tremor in Omar’s soul, making him walk as though half-unconscious. He remained in this state of intoxication, walking without awareness until he reached the *zawiya* of Shaykh al-‘Umūrī. He entered and took a place in the *zawiya* among the visitors and dervishes, remaining there for some time—praying with them, attending their circles of remembrance, and sleeping in the courtyard of the *zawiya* beside the fountain.”²⁹

What Omar al-Rahmani read on that paper arguably represents the Sufi path, which comprises ten pillars “that the seeker must uphold, follow, and keep constantly before his eyes: continuous remembrance, hunger, wakefulness, withdrawal from people, silence, renewal of repentance, gratitude, patience, contemplation, and the learned, enlightened shaykh.”³⁰

This is precisely what Omar affirms at the end of the paper when he reads: “Whoever draws near annihilates, and whoever annihilates arrives.” This realization is what led

him to the *zawiya*, where he secluded himself with the dervishes—living among them, attending their lessons, and sleeping there. Sufi language is a distinct form of expression that often conceals its meanings behind symbols or signs intended to communicate profound and expansive truths. Through *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh*, Al-Azari intentionally draws on Sufi terminology, rich in aesthetic resonance and dense in symbolism.

The Sufi language in *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh* is not merely decorative or stylistic; it elevates the narrative beyond a simple story into a realm of spiritual reflection and inner unveiling. It is a language that concerns itself with essence and interiority, not with superficiality or external form. It grants the novel a philosophical and spiritual dimension characterized by symbolism, suggestion, and at times, deliberate ambiguity.

8. Conclusion:

The conclusion of this study may be summarized in a set of key findings:

- Sufism is an Islamic intellectual doctrine based on the purification of the soul and heart. It is a spiritual path through which the Sufi seeks to transcend worldly desires and detach from them in pursuit of the station of *iḥsān* and ultimately, union with divine reality.
- The title *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh* carries substantial semantic depth, encapsulating the content and purpose of the novel. The dervishes symbolize spiritual values that are nearing extinction in a materialistic age.
- The Sufi character is embodied in Omar al-Rahmani, who is marked by asceticism and the defense of truth. Other figures appear as well, including ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Akhdarī—a historical personality defined by piety and renunciation of worldly pleasures.
- Time in the novel does not follow a linear progression; the past and present intersect, and at key moments, temporal flow is suspended to allow an internal, spiritual temporality in alignment with the Sufi perspective.
- Space transcends its geographic function and becomes a symbolic, sacred realm. The village of Dīrah, the mountain, and the *zawiya* acquire symbolic significance that reflects the protagonist’s inner condition and guides him toward clarity and insight.
- Language is the most prominent component in shaping *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh*. It is a suggestive and symbol-laden language derived from the Sufi lexicon, built on ambiguity and semantic density.
- Ultimately, *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh* presents a deeply spiritual experience, revealed through the integration of its core narrative elements—character, time, space, and language—which do not function in isolation, but come together to form a

coherent Sufi structure that transcends material reality and articulates a spiritual-existential vision.

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Footnotes:

¹ Ali Ali Abu Shami, *Sufism and Sufi Orders in the Late Ottoman Era*, Bisan for Publishing and Distribution, Beirut–Lebanon, 1st ed., 2017, pp. 25–26.

²Ibid., p. 28.

- ³ Bassam Musa Quttous, *The Semiotics of the Title*, Ministry of Culture Publications, Irbid–Jordan, 1st ed., 2001, p. 39.
- ⁴ Raymond Lifchez, *Takkāyā al-Darāwīsh (Sufism, Arts, and Architecture in Ottoman Turkey)*, trans. ‘Abla ‘Awda, Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, Abu Dhabi–UAE, 1st ed., 2011, p. 19.
- ⁵ Majd al-Din Muhammad ibn Ya‘qub al-Fayrūzabādī, *Dar al-Hadith*, Cairo–Egypt, 2008 edition, “Chapter of Alif,” entry: *Ākhir*, p. 41.
- ⁶ Ahmed Al-Azari, *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh*, Oxygène for Publishing and Distribution, Algeria, 1st ed., 2025, p. 75.
- ⁷ Ibid., p. 168.
- ⁸ ‘Abdullah Hussein, *Sufism and the Sufis*, Hindawi Foundation, Cairo–Egypt, 2017, p. 19.
- ⁹ Bouziani al-Daraji, *‘Abd al-Rahman al-Akhdarī (The Sufi Scholar Who Excelled in His Time)*, Ministry of Culture, Algeria, 2nd ed., 2009, p. 14.
- ¹⁰ Ahmed Al-Azari, *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh*, pp. 64–65.
- ¹¹ Ibid., pp. 159–160.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 108.
- ¹³ ‘Abd al-Mun‘im al-Hafni, *Dictionary of Sufi Terminology*, Dar al-Masirah, Beirut–Lebanon, 2nd ed., 1987, p. 143.
- ¹⁴ Muhammad Abu al-Faḍl Badran, *Literature of Sufi Miracles (A Study in Form and Content)*, Zayed Center for Heritage and History, United Arab Emirates, 1st ed., 2001, p. 78.
- ¹⁵ Al-Sharif Habila, *The Structure of Narrative Discourse (A Study in the Novels of Najib al-Kilani)*, Modern World of Books for Publishing and Distribution, Jordan, 1st ed., 2010–1431 AH, p. 192.
- ¹⁶ Ahmed Al-Azari, *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh*, p. 139.
- ¹⁷ Al-Akhḍar Ibn al-Sā’ih, *The Aesthetics of the Constantinian Space – A Reading in the Novel Memory of the Flesh*, Al-Adīb Publications, Oran–Algeria, n.d., 2007, p. 13.
- ¹⁸ Ahmed Al-Azari, *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh*, p. 151.
- ¹⁹ Ahmed Al-Azari, *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh*, p. 156.
- ²⁰ Ali Ali Abu Shami, *Sufism and Sufi Orders in the Late Ottoman Era*, pp. 145–146.
- ²¹ Ahmed Al-Azari, *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh*, p. 155.

²² ‘Abd al-Qadir ‘Amīsh, *The Poetics of Narrative Discourse (Narrativity of Reportage)*, Dar al-Amal for Printing, Publishing, and Distribution, Tizi Ouzou–Algeria, n.d., 2012, p. 17.

²³ Ahmed Al-Azari, *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh*, pp. 109–110.

²⁴ Muhammad Abu al-Faḍl Badran, *Literature of Sufi Miracles (A Study in Form and Content)*, p. 184.

²⁵ Ahmed Al-Azari, *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh*, pp. 169–170.

²⁶ ‘Abd al-Qadir ‘Amīsh, *The Poetics of Narrative Discourse (Narrativity of Reportage)*, p. 17.

²⁷ Ahmed Al-Azari, *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh*, p. 109.

²⁸ ‘Abduh Ghalib Ahmad ‘Issa, *The Concept of Sufism*, Dar al-Jil, Beirut–Lebanon, 1st ed., 1992, p. 11.

²⁹ Ahmed Al-Azari, *Ākhir al-Darāwīsh*, p. 158.

³⁰ ‘Abduh Ghalib Ahmad ‘Issa, *The Concept of Sufism*, p. 28.