The Aesthetic of Verbal Repetition in Sufi Poetic Discourse – Al-Husayn ibn Mansur Al-Hallāj as a Model

جمالية التكرار اللفظي في الخطاب الشعري الصوفي

-الحسين بن منصور الحلاج أنموذجا-

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Abstract:

This article examines the phenomenon of repetition in Sufi poetry as one of the stylistic pillars that characterize its mystical discourse. Repetition does not merely serve as a rhetorical ornament but transcends this function to manifest a profound spiritual state. Within the context of mystical experience, repetition becomes a poetic act laden with emotional intensity, leading to revelation and epiphany. Through Sufi poetry, it is evident that repetition serves a dual function: on one hand, it creates a unique rhythm that harmonizes with the mystical pattern, and on the other, it reinforces and intensifies meanings, acting as a pathway to the essence of spiritual experience and an expressive bridge between the loving self and the transcendent Absolute

Keywords: Aesthetics, repetition, poetic discourse, Sufi poetry, al-Hallāj.

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ملخص:

يتناول هذا المقال ظاهرة التكرار في شعر الحلاج بوصفها احدى الركائز الاسلوبية التي تميز خطابه الصوفي، حيث لا يأتي التكرار لمجرد الزخرف البلاغي، بل يتجاوز ذلك ليغدو تمظهرا لحالة روحية عميقة ، ففي سياق التجربة العرفانية يصبح التكرار فعلاً شعرياً ينطوي على شحن وجداني يفضي إلى الكشف والتجلي، ويظهر من خلال شعر الحلاج أن التكرار يؤدي وظيفة مزدوجة، فهو من جهة يحدث ايقاعا خاصا يتناغم مع النسق الصوفي، ومن جهة أخرى يسهم في تثبيت المعاني وتكثيفها، فيكون سبيلا للنفاذ إلى جوهر التجربة الروحية وجسرا تعبيريا بين الذات العاشقة والمطلق المتعالي.

كلمات مفتاحية: جماليات، التكرار، الخطاب الشعري، الشعر الصوفي، الحلاج.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Verbal repetition is one of the most prominent aesthetic and stylistic features that characterizes Sufi poetry, especially in the context of expressing the complex spiritual experience lived by the Sufi poet. The Sufi, in his quest to reach the Absolute Truth, does not suffice with ordinary language nor does he surrender easily to direct expression. Instead, he repeats words and reiterates phrases because what resides in the heart is too vast to be expressed once only, and because the meaning transcends language itself.

In this context, the poetry of al-Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallāj emerges as a unique poetic and spiritual model, wherein the phenomenon of verbal repetition is particularly striking. It

reflects the depth of the Sufi experience and the sincerity of spiritual suffering, while also revealing a distinctive aesthetic vision.

From this point of view, the central question of this study arises: **To what extent does repetition in Al-Hallāj's Sufi poetic discourse contribute to enhancing the aesthetic and spiritual dimensions of the text?**

The objectives of this research arise as a direct response to this question. The study aims to uncover the aesthetic and expressive functions of verbal repetition in Al-Hallāj's poetry and to clarify its relationship with the spiritual experience. Additionally, it seeks to analyze the rhythmic and psychological effect of repetition on the reader. The study also intends to identify the unique nature of this repetition through its connection to the concepts of *fanā'* (annihilation), *tawḥīd* (unification), and *wajd* (ecstatic love).

To achieve these aims, we adopt a stylistic approach, focusing on analyzing selected poetic texts by Al-Hallāj in terms of the structure of repetition and its aesthetic implications within the Sufi context. The goal is to uncover the expressive and aesthetic characteristics of this style in constructing the spiritual experience.

Before delving into an analysis of this aesthetic phenomenon as it appears in Al-Hallāj's poetry, it is worth pausing briefly to consider this phenomenon in poetic heritage more broadly. Repetition is a style that has been common since ancient times; it appears frequently in Arabic speech and poetry. However, the degree of attention and care it received from early

scholars of rhetoric was limited. This was due to a firm belief that repetition was merely an incidental phenomenon that did not significantly contribute to the construction of poetic work. This led them to avoid delving into it or giving it much consideration—though this was not due to intentional neglect on their part. Rather, it stemmed from a particular critical perspective and an understanding of poetry shaped by the literary circumstances of each era. As one scholar put it, "Repetition was a secondary style in language at the time, so there was no need to expand on assessing its elements or activating its meanings." (Nazik Al-Malaika, 2000, p. 275)

When repetition was addressed, attention focused mainly on the semantic benefits it might provide. Al-Zamakhshari, for instance, expressed this view clearly when he said: *"Its greatest benefit is emphasis; it has been said: When speech is repeated, it becomes confirmed."*(Al-Zarkashi, 2006, p. 627)

However, the artistic creativity of this style has taken on a different aspect in modern times compared to how it was viewed in the past. Today, repetition is not limited to the repetition of words or phrases but extends to sound itself.

Most contemporary scholars agree that the repetition of a particular sound by a poet carries a specific connotation that reflects an internal emotion. The sonic resonance may even surpass the logic of language itself, moving beyond mere sound to a meaning that stirs and reinforces the text's significance. (Mahdi Hilal, 2006, p. 155)

Thus, repetition stands out as a key feature and one of the most striking aspects of modern stylistics. It carries countless benefits and gains, playing an active role in constructing the

poem's musicality and highlighting the poet's ability to craft and structure the text skillfully. For, "sound inherently carries a certain rhythm and musical tone, and if it is repeated according to a specific pattern, it produces another layer of rhythm." This pattern, in turn, becomes evident through distinction and repetition—formation and repetition are the foundation of structural coherence— (Masoudi, 2007, pp. 45-46) which grants the text a kind of harmonious music that aligns with the poet's emotions and feelings.

2. The Aesthetic of Repetition in Al-Hallāj's Poetry: The Aesthetic and Expressive Function

2.1 Repetition of Words Between Rhythm and Sufi Emphasis:

Anyone who contemplates the poetic output of Al-Hallāj will find that repetition is not merely ornamental language or a formal device inserted into the text for the sake of sonic effect. Rather, it constitutes a spiritual necessity, expressing the movement of a soul immersed in remembrance (*dhikr*), seeking truth, and captivated by divine love. It is clear that "pure repetition without the slightest shift in partial meaning results in redundancy, as we see in colloquial language." (Daoud, 2007, p. 65) Therefore, in Al-Hallāj's poetry, the repeated word is a living pulse of the Sufi state, spoken from within rather than merely uttered by the tongue.

Thus, repetition is not simply a matter of recurrence—it is an attempt to anchor divine manifestation and ecstasy within poetic language. When the poet repeats a word within the poetic text, he is striving to affirm a certain truth more insistently than

others. As it has been said, repetition "places in our hands the key to the idea that dominates the poet's mind—it is one of the unconscious illuminations that poetry casts upon the poet's inner depths, thereby allowing us to witness them." (Nazik Al-Malaika, 2000, pp. 276-277)

In this light, Al-Hallāj, through his intensive repetition of certain words and phrases, opens the way for his reader to enter a **mystical world** in which subjective experience overlaps with symbol, meaning with presence, and word with spiritual taste (*dhawq*).

For instance, when he says: (Mohamed Basil , 2002, p. 148)

I am the Truth—Truth of the Truth,

Not by His essence, and there is nothing beyond."

Repetition in this verse emerges as an integrated aesthetic and semantic technique, bestowing upon the poem a circular Sufi rhythm that reflects the states of *fanā'* (annihilation) and *ittiḥād* (union). The repetition of the word "al-Ḥaqq" (The Truth) four times within a single hemistich suggests a kind of semantic ascension that mirrors the spiritual progression—from annihilation in God, to divine manifestation, and ultimately to complete identification (*tamāhī*). In this context, repetition becomes an act of unveiling, a mirror reflecting the repeated manifestations of the Divine across infinite degrees of presence.

He also says: (Mohamed Basil , 2002, p. 131)

To the Truth in creation belongs a true Truth,

By Truth, when the visitation is true.

By them, not through them—for they are not they,

And none but them in the loftiness of purity.

So all in all, the whole of all,

From the All through the All—letters of His dawn."

In these verses, we witness the culmination of Sufi repetition in Al-Hallāj's poetry, where the word becomes a mirror of its meaning and a vessel for its spiritual manifestations. Phrases such as *"li-l-ḥaqq," "ḥaqq," "ḥaqīq," "bi-ḥaqq," "idhā ḥaqqa ḥaqq"* repeat the same root, creating a circular rhythm that gives the illusion of repetition while each occurrence opens onto a new semantic dimension, reflecting the various levels and manifestations of Divine Truth.

Al-Hallāj also employs repeated pronouns—*"hum" (they), "lāhum" (not they), "bihim" (through them), "ghayruhum" (other than them)*—to dissolve the duality between self and other in a repetition that articulates the doctrine of unity of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). Likewise, his repetition of *"kull" (all), "bi-kull" (with all), "jamīʿ," "al-jamīʿ," "kull al-kull" (the whole of the whole)* expresses the fusion of the parts into the Whole, where language itself becomes a mystical experience that transcends rational exposition. Here, repetition is not mere ornament, but a tool of aesthetic and semantic unveiling, transporting the reader from the surface of the word to the inner depth of its meaning.

And when he says: (Mohamed Basil , 2002, pp. 158-159)

I am the one I love, and the one I love is I,

We are two souls dwelling in one body.

Ever since the covenant of love was made,

Examples for others have been struck through us.

So when you see me—you see Him,

And when you see Him—you see us.

O you who ask about our story,

If you saw us, you would not distinguish between us.

His soul is mine, and my soul is His—

Who has ever seen two souls inhabiting one body?"

We find that repetition in this context is not mere linguistic embellishment, but rather an expression of the unity of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*)—the dissolution of duality between lover and Beloved, between Creator and creation. This repetition establishes an emotional state that transcends the limits of logical language, moving into a realm of union and indwelling (*ittiḥād* and *ḥulūl*). Thus, repetition holds a twofold significance: it both intensifies and affirms the meaning, and it endows the text with a melodic quality that harmonizes with the poet's emotional state—whether calm or enraged, joyful or sorrowful (Abou Al-Adous, 2007, p. 259). This creates a profound link between the repeated word and its psychological and stylistic context, reinforcing the unity of theme and message being conveyed to the reader. (Al-Samidai, 2010, p. 188)

In Al-Hallāj's poetry, repetition is also tied to an inner conflict between body and soul, between the longing for annihilation (*fanā'*) and the desire for subsistence (*baqā'*). When the poet repeats, he is not merely repeating the same thing—but rather, he is repeating his emotions, because the ultimate Truth

has not yet fully revealed itself to him. He continues to reiterate the word, to chant it, to surround it—hoping that language might open up to previously sealed manifestations. Therefore, the reader of Al-Hallāj is not merely reading poetry, but rather participating in a spiritual state.

Hence, repetition in the Sufi discourse in general—and in Al-Hallāj's poetry in particular—performs a dual function: it is, on one hand, a means of artistic expression, and on the other, a spiritual practice, as in the repeated chanting of *"Allāh, Allāh, Allāh"* in *dhikr*. In this sense, repetition becomes a linguistic manifestation of the Sufi state, for *dhikr* in its essence is repetition, and Sufi expression in its core is written remembrance. As has been said: *"For an emotion to become a true spiritual sentiment, it is not enough for it to occur once—it must be repeated to take form."*(Al-Kufahi, 2011, p. 15) This gives rise to a stylistic phenomenon that becomes a foundational element of the literary work.

A perfect example of this is found in his saying (Mohamed Basil , 2002, pp. 123-124):

"I saw my Lord with the eye of my heart,

I said: Who are You? He said: You.

There is no 'where' for You in where-ness,

And no 'where' contains where You are."

"You are the One who has transcended every 'where',

So where is the where—O where are You?"

"Imagination has no illusion of You—

So how can illusion know where You are?"

"You passed beyond the boundary of nearness—

So even 'where' no longer knows where You are."

"In my subsistence, and in my non-being,

And in my annihilation—I found You."

"You are my life, and You are my heart,

So wherever I am—I am You."

"You encompass all knowledge of all things,

So all I see in everything—is You."

"So who is there to pardon me, O my God,

When I hope for none but You—You."

Repetition also appears in Al-Hallāj's poetry as a tool for generating inner rhythm—a rhythm that does not rely solely on traditional meter and rhyme, but is built upon the repetition of sounds and words in a way that breathes a Sufi musical spirit into the poem. This rhythm allows the reader to feel the spiritual impact of meaning before grasping its rational content. Here, repetition embodies a form of remembrance (dhikr)—the kind whose value increases and whose level elevates with each repetition, just like the invocations (*awrad*) and chants (*adhkār*) of the mystics, in which the Divine Name is repeated to affirm the presence of God both in the heart and on the tongue.

A beautiful example of this aesthetic repetition appears in Al-Hallāj's poem: (Mohamed Basil , 2002, p. 132)

"From the lights of the Light of lights, in creation—lights

arise,

And in the secret of the secret of those who journeyed—
secrets reside.

And to the cosmos, within the worlds, there is a stillness of Being—That dwells within my heart, guiding and choosing."

In this poetic context, Al-Hallāj weaves a mystical linguistic tapestry, perfectly integrated with the structure of repetition. Words are summoned in ascending cycles, generating a complete semantic and aesthetic energy. The repetition of expressions such as "nūr" (light), "anwār" (lights), "sirr" (secret), "asrār" (secrets), "kawn" (cosmos), "akwān" (worlds), "yakūn" (to be), "mukawwan" (that which is created) produces an internal rhythm—
one that mirrors the orbiting of meanings around the center of Divine Truth. It reflects the multiplicity of divine manifestations and the intertwining of spiritual realms.

Here, repetition is not mere recurrence or reiteration, but a gradual unveiling of the depth of the spiritual experience. Each word represents a spiritual station, and each repetition a step in ascension. Beauty arises from structural parallelism, and meaning intensifies through phonetic harmony and semantic symmetry—
so that the heart becomes a dwelling for the cosmos, and the word becomes a gateway to the secret.

2.2 Repetition of Phrases and the Intensification of the Gnostic Experience:

Upon careful examination of Al-Hallāj's poetry, it becomes evident that repetition is not confined to single words—it

extends to entire phrases and poetic constructions. He often repeats complete statements to emphasize the Divine Presence that he seeks and longs to encounter. These recurring phrases form a spiritual melody, resembling intimate supplication more than conventional poetic address. One striking example of this appears in his verses: (Mohamed Basil , 2002, p. 161)

The guide was for Him, from Him, to Him, through Him—From the Witness spoken of in the Revelation of the Criterion.

The guide was for Him, from Him, through Him, and unto Him—Truly, we found in Him a sign of clarity."

In this poetic context, Al-Hallāj opens each line with repeated phrases such as *The guide was for Him, from Him, to Him..."*and *The guide was for Him, from Him, through Him...,"* where this structural repetition grants the text a measured and ascending rhythm, reflecting the gradual nature of Sufi realization. This repetitive linguistic architecture at the beginning of each line constructs a spiritual framework suggesting that Truth can be known only by God, through God, and within God—a semantic vision that affirms the unity of path and source.

Aesthetically, this repetition generates an inner musical energy, endowing the poem with a ritualistic quality that deepens the Sufi awareness: that the guide and the One being guided toward are one and the same, and that knowledge of God can only occur through God Himself.

Thus, repetition here becomes a gateway to understanding the concept of the Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) and the manifestation of Divine Truth in the mirror of Sufi language.

In another context, Al-Hallāj says: (Mohamed Basil , 2002, p. 147)

I' am the one whose soul longs—For his own end, willingly, as it clings to it.

I am the one, in shameful sorrows—Cries out from desolation, drowning within them."

In these two verses, the opening phrase "I am the one" (anā alladhī) is deliberately repeated, creating a powerful confessional and emotional depth. Aesthetically, this repetition produces an inner rhythm that anchors a meditative tone and grants the poem a musical unity that intensifies the sense of spiritual tension and existential alienation. It highlights the centering of the Sufi self at the moment of acute awareness—of pain and the longing for annihilation.

By insisting on the phrase "I am the one", Al-Hallāj inscribes his Sufi identity through verbal persistence, revealing a shattered self searching for salvation in suffering, and finding in confession a means to both union and purification.

What grants Al-Hallāj's repetition its uniqueness is his ability to employ it without sacrificing meaning. Each repetition carries a fresh charge of significance, with "a vital semantic function that goes beyond the direct linguistic role of signifier and signified, connecting instead to a set of poetic functions that result from both musical structure and imagistic mechanism." (Al-Samidai, 2010, p. 194)

Here it becomes evident that verbal repetition in Al-Hallāj's poetry is not a superficial stylistic phenomenon—it is a foundational component of Sufi discourse. It serves aesthetic and

spiritual functions that mirror the inner horizon of the experience being lived. This experience can only be grasped through verbal insistence and the continuous return to the evocative word.

Every repeated word in his poetry not only restates itself, but also reopens the gates of meaning, drawing the reader into an emotional and aesthetic immersion in the heart of the mystical journey. Al-Hallāj's poetry thus stands as an eternal witness to the intertwining of art and spirit, of language and Truth, of poetic expression and unveiling.

3. CONCLUSION

In light of the foregoing, the results of this study can be summarized by emphasizing the aesthetic and spiritual value of verbal repetition in the poetry of Al-Hallāj, as both an artistic device and a mystical tool contributing to the fabric of Sufi discourse:

- Verbal repetition in Al-Hallāj's poetry is not a mere stylistic phenomenon, but rather a core component in constructing Sufi discourse. It performs both aesthetic and spiritual functions, reflecting the inner horizon of the mystical experience—a reality that can only be accessed through verbal insistence and the continual return to evocative words.
- Repetition imparts to the poetic discourse an inner rhythm that mirrors the heartbeat of the Sufi experience.
- Repeating a single word across different contexts expands its semantic resonance. Every repeated word in Al-Hallāj's verse does not merely echo itself, but reopens the gates of meaning, drawing the reader into emotional and

aesthetic engagement with the core of the mystical journey.

- Al-Hallāj relies on the repetition of phrases to affirm essential Sufi values such as love, annihilation, and union, thus deepening both the emotional and spiritual impact.
- Repetition helps construct a linguistic structure open to interpretation, in harmony with the inherent nature of Sufi discourse, which tends to resist closure and invites contemplative reflection.

Based on the results of this research, we propose the possibility of broadening the study to include other forms of repetition in Al-Hallāj's poetry, or to compare his work with other mystical experiences, such as those of Ibn Arabi or Ibn al-Farid, in order to deepen our understanding of the aesthetics of repetition within varying spiritual and linguistic contexts.

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