

The coexistence of arts at the level of textual thresholds in the novel Safar al-Salikeen by Muhammad Muflih

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Abstract:

This study aims to understand the formations of the cover threshold and its relationship with the various arts that are considered parallel and complementary texts, in which linguistic formation, visual formation, and Sufi discourse overlap. In fact, they work on enriching the novelistic genre in contemporary narrative writings, similar to the interaction between the art of the novel and other arts and discourses that provides literature with a new value in expression. This research paper was an approach to the novel Safar al-Salikeen by the novelist Muhammad Muflih, extracting from it the most important links and systems that coexist with narrative writing at the level of its textual thresholds.

Keywords: Textual interaction; arts; Sufi discourse; textual thresholds; cover threshold; traveler's journey.

- Introduction:

The modern Arabic novel has become a fertile field in which most types and rhetorical patterns coexist in an open and renewed discourse as it is inhabited by transformation and always seeks privacy and difference. It is not ashamed to draw from everything that would enrich its aesthetics, deepen its issues and topics, intensify its capabilities, and characterize its discourse with uniqueness and creativity.

From this standpoint, I turned towards expressive arts and literary genres, drawing inspiration from their semantic and suggestive energies and using a different modern imagination for this purpose. These arts and genres represented a reference that played a role in drawing the world of narration and directing the meaning, whether at the level of the text or the textual thresholds. Consequently, this study shed light on how to create coexistence between narration, drawing and Sufism in the cover threshold of the novel Safar al-Salikin by the novelist Muhammad Muflih. How did these discourses harmonize in a single mosaic painting without affecting the fundamentals of the novelistic component?

1. Novel and painting:

The ties of kinship between literature and art are as old as they are since the chorus was a fundamental building block of Greek tragedy. In addition, the nature of these epics combine poetry and theater, and combine in their fabric the language of words, acting, music and dance.

As the novel is one of the literary arts, it sought to contain these expressive arts and others within its linguistic structure. Moreover, its flexibility enabled it to travel continuously in order to absorb the art of painting in its structure until the novel texts became a different visual architecture. This important element expressed the essence of the narrative act within the boundaries of this creativity.

Despite the fact that both the novelist and the painter possess different production tools (the word, the brush), they were able to meet at common points that all revolve within the trinity of human creativity (sender, message, recipient); both of them stimulate the taste of the recipient and have a great impact on the human soul.

Contemporary novelists have benefited from visual art at the level of the text and platforms, transforming its dimensions into artistic semantic data that highlight the novelistic text in a new way. Therefore, the visual painting has topped the covers of many creative works, such as what was evident in the novel, *The Journey of the Wayfarers*.

2. The Novel and the Sufi Experience:

The relationship between Sufism and literature did not stop at the borders of ancient poetry and ancient stories, but rather expanded to spread its shadows in modern and contemporary Arabic literature, where the contemporary novelist found Sufi literature a fertile ground and a pure and sweet source for his novelistic experiences. Drawing from this deep sea became a feature that characterized the Arab novelistic experience. In fact, the Sufi like the novelist faces the fragile reality of social life that has been afflicted by materialism in light of economic globalization. They were eager to change for the better where all manifestations of tyranny, injustice, violence, racism, moral, political and social corruption that subjugates the human self and restricts its freedom disappear. They are in a constant attempt to escape from the constraints of life and its authority in search of suitable alternatives to the crisis of the Arab self which materialism has emptied of its spiritual content and righteous behavior. Since the narrative experience and the Sufi experience touch upon the interior of the human self and express it and seek to return the universe to its harmony and original qualities, the novel opened up to the Sufi discourse, eliciting its secrets and mysteries, drawing inspiration from its meanings and visions to re-represent them textually. "The novelist entered the heart of the mysterious Sufi experience after getting rid of the instinctive sediments and removing all impurities and defilements, to live with the Sufis in their enigmatic worlds, and to be saturated with their concepts and visions of life and the universe. Additionally, he tries to look closely at their way of dealing with God, existence and the other, so that he too becomes a Sufi of a specific school or a specific method, approaching them, asceticizing, communicating with them in the unseen. Also, he follows their paths, rises in their stations, states and ecstasies." Until he is saturated with their principles and savors the experience over and over again. Later on, he becomes

accustomed to these worlds and the ways of following them. After that luminous journey full of taste and imaginative experience based on similarity, the novelist returns from the mystical, unseen worlds to which he ascended to begin establishing his fictional narrative world on the basis of that imaginary, embodied experience. He imbues it with its ideas and knowledge laden with diversity and richness, rising above the concerns of the worldly world, which gives it a modernist tendency and confirms the depth of its Arab-Islamic roots.

3. Representations of the arts in the cover of the novel “Journey of the Wayfarers:”

“Journey of the Wayfarers” is a novel by Muhammad Muflih published in 2014. It deals with the concerns of retirement and old age experienced by seven friends. Al-Hashemi Al-Mashlah, Basafi Al-Maidi, Al-Hajj Al-Arabi Al-Shili, Houari Al-Bani, Rabah Al-Lama, Tahami Al-Farsi and Ashour Al-Zikri. Their daily meeting place was an old seat in a public square in the city of Ghilzan, where they lived, so they were nicknamed the owners of the Granit seat. Their interests in life differed and their ideas varied to the point of contradiction, but their goal was one; to search for a new destination that would save them from the miserable reality that is full of corruption and is dominated by chaos and utilitarian morals and is led by personal interest.

This group was the reason for the change in the condition of the novel's hero, the armed Hashemite, as he was initially aroused by the character of Basafi Al-Maidi which pushed him towards the world of Bedouin art. he started singing to escape from a bitter reality that made him feel alienated and spiritually impoverished, especially after his previous retirement. As a result, he felt that he had lost his social status; as the treatment of his family changed, and everyone abandoned him due to the artificial relationship between them.

The feeling that he was a prisoner of the job and its requirements, the desires and interests of his family, and the requests and interests of his friends disappointed him and increased his misery, so a feeling of loneliness took hold of him, embittering his life and increasing his depression.

But as time passed, this world no longer tempted or satisfied him because he did not reach the happiness he dreamed of through it. Then, he met the Arab Shili Sufi pilgrim who belonged to the Khadriyah Fatihiyah order. He gave his life a new meaning, so he turned away from love songs and threw himself into the arms of the world of Sufism as a worshipper and ascetic, traveling the earth from one presence to another and from one shrine to another. He hoped that a ray of light from its owners would reach him and he would be saved. This world was a new stage of rebirth, dispelling the bitterness of misery and enriching life with hope.

In his novel, Muflih anticipated Sufi worlds with which he furnished its architecture and built its pillars to monitor a journey into the interior of man, desiring to refine his self and build it according to the Sufi style, escaping from the evils of man, the problems of society, and the sorrows of reality. These worlds were his tool for criticizing the lived reality and the corruption that had spread in it. He looked after both the ruling authority that had violated all prohibitions and the people who had abandoned all beautiful values and had been mortgaged to every newcomer and were fascinated by it, imitating and imitating without caring about considering its consequences. It is as if, by this return to the Sufi heritage, he aims to know the way in which the past can influence the present, in addition to pushing it towards higher expectations.

Due to his investment in the potential of the Sufi experience, the novel flourished with the Sufi presence in all its elements, and became a Sufi cognitive world with multiple meanings and diverse visions, open to reading and interpretation. Hence, this study aims to reveal the dimensions of the Sufi presence in the threshold of the novel's cover by clarifying its images and forms and clarifying its cultural dimensions and problems.

4. Semiotics of the cover discourse:

Textual thresholds are a crossing point to the paths of any literary text, linked to the content of the texts and their apparent and implicit contexts. In his two books, "Thresholds and Borders", Gérard Genette paid great attention to thresholds due to their importance in producing the text's absent meanings. Every threshold carries a meaning, as it cannot have been placed arbitrarily, which allows the reader to open the doors of interpretation and produce meaning.

Hence, the importance of thresholds comes from their close connection to the patterns of text production, and we cannot consider the novel or any creative text that may arise in isolation from the indicators of the introduction and textual qualification, as it falls within its textual and external framework according to textual relationships that make it branch out with what surrounds it.

The cover, with its linguistic components and absent and present icons, is one of the most prominent of these textual thresholds due to its connection to the content of the text, its ideas, topics and goals. Therefore, Genette believes that the cover painting and what it contains of small icons (author's name, title, genre, image, color, publishing house...) is not only a parallel text, but rather a major important threshold that parallels the entire internal texts, as it represents the identity of the text and the entry visa to the sanctuary of the text with its secret corridors.

Accordingly, starting from the cover of the novel "Safar al-Salikeen", Muflih tried to enter into the heart of an old Sufi novelistic theme, but at the same time it is new. Moreover, it took its modern form from the gems of novelistic modernity that renewed awareness of Sufism and Sufism as discourse and thought, and looked at it from the perspective of the qualitative modernization of the new novel from the angle of the proximity of texts and their dialogue according to the doctrine of "Bakhtin". The text is no longer just a letter and a word and then a sentence only, but it has become a color and a shade and a form and an image. Additionally, the text has become primarily visual, so the image in its various types has become a basic component in literature modern visual media, as it tells interesting stories, may help us understand concepts or ideas that are unfamiliar to us. It also tries to convince us of them because of their authority and influence, so they are the expressive media that give the idea a certainty and persuasion, and reveal the interconnected relationship between the language of narration and the language of visual art, which is different from the language of words, based on the fact that both visual and writing are creative works that complement each other.

Therefore, Muflih sought to direct a pictorial discourse through the visual scene that he presented on the cover of his novel, tempting his reader to decipher its codes and link them to the title and the text. Consequently, the novel achieves its communicative function in addition to its semantic value.

The cover image is made of symbols, colors, shapes and movements that forms a semantic structure that visually expresses the content of the text with a high and superior degree of brevity and perfection. Hence, the study seeks to articulate the dimensions of this cover image, starting with:

4.1. The blue color and its significance:

The blue color represents the dominant color on the cover of the novel "Safar al-Salikeen" to refer in its overall style to the color of the sky that removes worries and calls for spiritual joy and heartfelt reassurance. In fact, the soul finds, when seeing the sky in its vastness, bliss, comfort and expansion, with what the sky color allows of the ability to imagine calmly and contemplate inwardly, so the mind becomes pure and clean, the heart senses the greatness of the Creator, and the soul swims in a wide space that indicates elevation and depth, and symbolizes divine love and adoration. Since the color of the sky indicates sublimity and elevation, "it is more like an open invitation to people calling them to rise above and transcend what they see in worldly life. They should be content with what is important and necessary of it, and turn to what is with God Almighty".⁽¹⁾ because the world is blameworthy according to the Sufis, not blameworthy for its own sake with its goodness, comforts, and pleasures, but blameworthy if the soul becomes attached to it, so the servant must...

The world should be in his hand and not in his heart, since the heart is the place of looking to God, so he must be satisfied with what helps him on his path. Thus, the soul by its nature tends towards its physical nature, so it strives with all its effort, and harnesses all its energies for the sake of building its temple, as it is "filled with every passion and desire, tainted with defects and every stumbling block, inclined to every calamity and affliction, commanding every error and slip, compounded with every corruption and temptation, tied to every laziness and indolence."⁽²⁾

Therefore, the Sufis believe that the first step on the path to happiness is to get rid of the desires and temptations of the soul, especially since it always seeks to stand between the servant and his Lord. As a result, it is necessary for the person to be aware of its tricks, and not to respond to its whims, which is not possible except through struggle, asceticism, and patience. In fact, the goal behind all of this is the happiness of the Sufi by being absorbed in the remembrance of God and enjoying being close to Him and communing with Him. His presence with God is not disturbed by the soul, for it is the origin of man's misery. Therefore, he must struggle with it and train it to do good and transform it from the light to the heavy with kindness, gentleness, and gradualness. Moreover, he can continue his journey to God, and turn to what is with Him for what is in it of sweetness that those who were deceived by worldly life, and drowned in its rotten mud, have not tasted. So, the remembrance of God revives the heart and purifies it from its filth and impurities. The servant rises light and at ease, and this is the first description of the seeker until he accepts this path and enters among its people.

4.2. The human icon:

The cover painting shows an image of an unknown man standing on a barren land, which has been afflicted with drought through the many cracks that occupy half the cover area, calcified by salinity to express in its entirety. The collapsed ground that the basis of life that the hero of the

novel, Al-Hashemi Al-Mashlah, and his friends live in has reached in a time of corruption and the dominance of a blurry vision and the control of the bourgeois class that has trampled on all values and distorted the values of society. Consequently, it does not deny evil and does not know goodness, it is driven only by a tendency to consume.

This man is enveloped in blackness, surrounded by thin and sometimes dense clouds of mystery and illusion, because the color of the body. Ibn Arabi sees it, is black due to its darkness “without any radiance in it at all”⁽³⁾ and resulting from his lack of awareness of himself and his beloved, so Muflih deliberately concealed the physical features of this man. He also made him stand in the middle of the ground with his hand on his cheek, and his left ear does not appear in the picture; this is because the Sufi experience is specific to the world of the spirit, not the body, and in order for the vision to occur, the Sufi must “exit from himself and strip himself of his attributes until God bestows upon him some of His attributes” (ninety-nine), so he becomes more intense in seeking the essence of God, transcending the limits of existences to the One who finds, making himself the center of the universe and its orbit.

Despite this, he remains bound by his humanity and does not transcend it to annihilation in the Creator. According to Abdul Jabbar Al-Nafri, annihilation is from the self and from other than God, not from the absolute self. The servant remains a servant and the Creator remains a Creator.

Therefore, the traveler must get rid of all the material and moral restrictions that prevent him from reaching God. He must get rid of everything he knows and everything he sees; that is, he must empty himself of everything other than God. Whoever chooses God does not need anyone other than Him, so he enjoys Him in his heart and obtains the vision.

This image, despite the absence of its features, is consistent with the image of the Hashemite Sufi, the one wearing the cloak. In fact, the novel drew through the narrative section in which the narrator introduces himself: “I saw his huge, luxurious Kat-Kat car, which caused the disfigurement of my face and the amputation of part of my left earlobe”⁽⁴⁾ Accordingly, Muflih did not care to highlight his external features as much as he cared about the circumstances that made him take this path.

4.3. The bird icon:

The bird is an important symbol in Sufi literature, especially the stories of the Ascension and the symbolic messages of the bird. Sufis use it to symbolize the soul and its journey towards liberation from the slavery and servitude of the body.

Although this symbol lived outside the Sufi text as a universal human symbol that witnessed a presence in various literatures, arts, philosophies and cultures, preserving its meaning that it was known to Sufis since ancient times . Basically, its fame spread and its brilliance shone with Sufi literature, as it was a symbol for expressing their spiritual experiences. The Sufis took it as a symbolic space to express their spiritual experiences with their mystical and philosophical dimensions and their quest to break away from the world of matter and the dungeons of ignorance in order to reach the divine meanings devoid of all worldly benefits and fleeting pleasure.

The bird is a metaphor for the transcendent spirit in the Sufi tradition because the Sufi seeks to perish in the truth. The spirit always dreams of flying and returning to its luminous origin, as the prison of the body has exhausted it. It had to surrender to the rulings of the Sharia and the etiquette of the path in its direction towards the world of truth. These rulings and etiquette are two wings with which the traveler to God soars.

With the same symbolism and significance, Muflih invoked the bird icon on the cover of his novel. The observer notices in it the image of seven white doves of the same form, the higher they rise in the lower sky, the stronger and larger they become, clearer and purer. The aim was to refer to the radiance of the soul and its awareness of the self in its journey of ascension to the world of sanctification and its attainment of divine love through its seven stages that the Sufis call the stations (the station of repentance, the station of piety, the station of asceticism, the station of poverty, the station of patience, the station of trust and finally the station of contentment). These stations of arrival through which the traveler gradually passes as he fluctuates from one state to another until he reaches his goal and hope by realizing his witnessing.

Whenever the soul is freed from anything other than God and the self's desires, aspirations and lusts are broken, it is able to travel to God and reach the highest heavens, so it finds comfort in God and tranquility and peace descend upon it.

4.4. Author's name threshold:

The author's name is one of the important thresholds contained in the cover, as it performs a specific and advertising function; it designates and specializes the literary achievement, gives it literary value, and helps it to promote, consume, and attract the recipient to it.

Muflih has been accustomed in most of his novels to have his name on the cover, as you always find him keen in his novels to have his name on the cover and on top of it as the producer of the text, as his presence was before the existence of this or that text.

So the author's name came studded with white on the blue sky, on top of the title of the novel on the right, occupying a middle position between two doves that have risen above all the doves, contemplating this Sufi world, drawn to its magic and temptations, fluctuating between the positions of trust and contentment with what the white color carries as a sign of "generosity and trust, and judgment, and worship, and gratitude, and contentment"⁽⁵⁾. He was directing the consonants of his name open towards the divine light, revealing his position towards this thought and this experience, highlighting the intensity of his connection to his spiritual heritage. As a result, the name is transformed in addition to the designation into a cognitive framework that specializes the novel and contributes to supporting it aesthetically and communicably.

Muflih, like the Sufis, realizes that there is no happiness in turning to the world and indulging in its fleeting pleasures. For the meaning of happiness for him goes beyond its material meaning represented in attachment to the world and its decorations, and what results from it of false and fleeting pleasures. For true and permanent happiness is in resorting to God as behavior and method, for God to be the ultimate goal that man seeks

to reach in order to achieve perfection, for the happiness of the servant is when he makes the matter of his Lord prevail over The desires and wishes of his soul. It makes him rise to the highest levels and join the horizon of the angels, "But if he leaves his soul to its desires and immerses himself in desires, then he descends to the level of beasts, and resembles them in characteristics and the purposes of life, and departs from them in his human form." So whenever the servant is freed from the bondage of the body and all its desires, his happiness is achieved, so he gains the love of God, and finds comfort in His closeness and is absorbed in His remembrance and communion, so His lights shine upon him and he lives worldly happiness before the happiness that God has promised His pious servants in the world of the hereafter.

4.5. Title threshold:

The title is at the top of the textual openings, as it is one of the most important semantic elements in writing any literary text, as it carries in its context the contents of the text. Its connotations are subject to absence, and it also enjoys "a special poetics, and in its ability to provide the recipient with one of the important keys to open the locks of the textual universe in the work. In addition, the title space contains of semiotic signs and signals that the text refers to in one or more of its layers", and this linguistic economy is what made it the focus of the connotations that the text presents.

The novel's title, entitled "The Journey of the Wayfarers," tops the front page of the novel, appearing distinctive and announcing its special nominal nature due to its great importance; thanks to it, things are controlled and navigated with complete confidence. The reader visually observes a large title sitting on a medium-sized cover space, dominating all the other threshold elements below it.

The title was placed in a place that gives it visual focus and an iconic dimension. The visual level gives the title a distinctive aesthetic and poetic quality, which can be observed in the book of the seekers. It is written in a prominent thick red font that has an effective impact on the reader's eye, so that we move from linguistic connotations to pictorial, formative connotations. On this basis, this journey is tiring and extremely difficult, were it not for the upper light whose attraction tempts one to continue on the path and overcome difficulties. "Choosing the path of Sufism means choosing a difficult path in which the seeker encounters horrors in himself, as he looks forward to what can only be achieved through sacrifice, giving, shedding blood, and cheapening the soul,"⁽⁶⁾ because it is a path of unique love that differs from the usual concept of love among other people, and therefore it is worth the struggle. Struggle, fatigue, dealing with sincerity, and fulfilling the conditions until intimacy, majesty, and beauty occur, so that the traveler emerges from the glow of suffering to the light of truth, from the stage of the seeker to a higher, spiritually complete self, freed from everything that binds it to the prisons of the body and the world, so that the journey on this path is, for the Sufi personality, an inseparable part of its cognitive formation as "life and worship, for it is the path illuminated by divine light and leading to God" because it always aspires toward the absolute.

In order for the word “sālīkin” to rise in the cover, added to the word “Sāfar” with their whispered sounds that reflect the reality of this inner experience, a linguistic sign that the Sufi invests in to confirm his human identity, seeking to repair the cracks in his self by ascending and rising in a group of Sufi stages and ranks through the stations (maqamat) that he passes through on this path.

As for the red color in which the title is written, “it is the expression of what is surging in the conscience of the Sufi lover who finds in the shedding of his blood a kind of ecstasy of Sufi martyrdom. In this sense, the goal of the Sufi is to give his life to attain the honor of bloody death. When he achieves that, the status of the owner of that blood has been elevated because he has nullified the right of his blood for the sake of the one he loves, meaning that the blood has been shed for a goal desired by the Sufis”⁽⁷⁾; reaching the Supreme Self, and annihilation in the Absolute.

The red color is then an interpretation of a physiological and psychological state that is closely linked to the human soul and its changes.

The title enjoyed a special engineering and artistic load that shows that the title that Muflih chose for this narrative imagination is a Sufi title par excellence.

It is worth noting that the word “al-sālīkin” (those who follow the path) with its Sufi and mystical connotations is associated with the character of the novel’s hero, the Hashemite al-Mashlah, but it is mentioned in the plural form, since the Arabic language allows for the plural to be used for one person, and the singular to replace the group if the speaker wants to glorify the action or its doer. Perhaps Muflih’s reason for using the word “al-sālīkin” in the sound masculine plural is that if the servant follows this path, his heart will be safe, which is the main goal of the Sufis. The path to liberation from the captivity of the body and connection to the holy, luminous world is the heart, the soul, and purification of the self. If the heart is sound, the rest of the body will be sound. Hence, he believes that understanding the Sufi experience enhances the spiritual aspect of society, to be a solution to the existential and formative problems of man, as this experience gives man the opportunity to get to know On himself and discovering it, he is able to achieve himself amidst the great material rubble and the enormous civilizational tide, so he is happy with life with God because whoever knows himself has known his Lord, and thus his heart is safe and his life is straight. After gathering the elements that make up the cover, it becomes clear that the selected image is full of meanings.

Al-Nuraniyyah reflects the Sufi presence in a clear and obvious way, as it breathes in all its particles and details through Sufism and its sea which confirms. In fact, the language of the novel is a mixture of different languages because the narrative discourse according to Bakhtin’s theory is not made in one style, but rather is based on linguistic and stylistic diversity; this is due to the genres and arts that permeate the world of the novel affect its style in that they enter the novel carrying with them their own languages and distinctive stylistic means, which expands the stylistic fabric of this narrative imagination and deepens the diversity of its languages and dialogue.



5. CONCLUSION

At the end of this approach, we can say:

Through his novel, Muflih seeks to write modernistic ally, as he believes that the novelistic work remains limited unless it opens up to different genres, intertwining with them in order to create an aesthetic dialogue between different creative voices, especially since the novelist creates within a literary genre that has the ability to swallow all genres and arts and place them under its banner because it stores the world with all its visions and trends.

The cover threshold of the novel, *The Journey of the Wayfarers*, embodied the most extreme forms of gender overlap, in a unique dialogical harmony, through which the novelist was able to combine different arts (painting, Sufism, literature) that added to the text cognitive richness, aesthetic inspiration, a spiritual dimension, and linguistic diversity.

6. Margins and cases:

- 1- Dhari Mazhar Saleh, *The Significance of Color in the Holy Quran*, Dar Al-Zaman, Damascus, 1st ed., 2012, p. 28.
- 2- Abu Al-Qasim Al-Junaid, *Letters of Al-Junaid*, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Masryia, 1988, p. 63.
- 3- Dhari Mazhar Saleh, *The Significance of Color*, p. 54.
- 4- Muhammad Muflih, *The Novel of the Journey of the Wayfarers*, Dar Al-Kawthar, Algeria, 1st ed., 2014, p. 10.
- 5- Dhari Mazhar Saleh, *The Significance of Color*, p. 27.
- 6- Muhammad bin Amara, *Sufism in Moroccan Poetry, Concepts and Manifestations, Schools*, Casablanca, Morocco, 1st ed., 2000, p. 131.
- 7- Muhammad bin Amara, *Sufism in Moroccan Poetry*, p. 131.

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- 1- Abu Al-Qasim Al-Junaid, *Letters of Al-Junaid*, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Masryia, 1988.
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