

A SUFI MYSTICAL LOVE-STORY: AL-HALLAJ AND IBLIS (I)

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Abstract: In Husayn Mansur Al-Hallaj's (c. 858 – 922 A. D.; c. 244 – 309 A. H.) view, by spectacular revalorization, Iblis's saga moves relatively further from the reverberations of damnation, to load itself with complex Sufi significances. Recognizing himself in the image of the brightest angel, cast away from the celestial hierarchy, the mystic equivocally hindered by judiciary and thanatological imperatives identifies himself seductively, impenitently, with the lonely angel that, although blamable, needs – more than anyone else – the protection of the One and Only God, the steady protection of His Presence. The experience of the rebellion-fall is thus assumed as a vocation of martyrdom.

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The fall of Iblis and of the cohorts of angels under his command represents, according to the *Qur'an* tradition, the theocratic punishment of a rebellion against God and Adam. The angelic beings, made eternal, mold by the Creator from fire before the times, thus redefine their condition by the power of choosing one of the two variants contained in the hallucinatory, labyrinthine *either / or* of an implacable alternative: *either* submission without a trace of pride or doubt to the Almighty, to His sometimes incomprehensible decisions, *or* an overflowing of apostate zeal, vanity and intellectual individualism, capable of generating, in the melting pot of angelic will and freedom, the trenchant, point-blank rejection of the divine command, the affirmation of *the other* order or logic of the Creation, meant to gravitate around the axis of damnation, around the refusal to worship the spiritualized hypostatization of clay.

In Husayn Mansur Al-Hallaj's (c. 858 – 922 A. D.; c. 244 – 309 A. H.) view, by spectacular revalorization, Iblis's saga moves relatively further from the reverberations of damnation, to load itself with complex Sufi significances. Recognizing himself in the image of the brightest angel, cast away from the celestial hierarchy, the mystic equivocally hindered by judiciary and thanatological imperatives identifies himself seductively, impenitently, with the lonely angel that, although blamable, needs – more than anyone else – the protection of the One and Only God, the steady protection of His Presence. The experience of the rebellion-fall is thus assumed as a vocation of martyrdom¹.

For the seeker of God, troubled by the protesting sadness of the forsaken lover, the idea of moving away from the Loved One loses its meanings, since, to Him, nearing and furthering represent the same thing, or *two equivalent experiences*. The society of divine forsaking outdoes, in fact, any immersion into solitude, no matter how tragic, how traumatic, as well as the participation in any kind of commune vanities. Love is, otherwise, par excellence, the force that nears, that brings together, that merges. The Lover is the master of *Fiat*, of the power of awakening fragments of non-being into being. Even suffocated by the

¹ Cf. Husayn Mansur Al-Hallaj, *The Ta-Sin of Before Endless-Time and Equivocation*, 30, in: Husayn Mansur Al-Hallaj, *Tawasin*, Aisha Abd Ar-Rahman At-Tarjumana (trans.), *The Tawasin*, Berkeley & London, Diwan Press, 1974, p. 48.

embitterment of the rupture, the mystic, rebellious seraph, devastated by love, impenitently relishes in the ultimate certainty of Abrahamic monotheism, by which the pious servant is predestined to prostrate only in front of Him².

The unlimited, theocratic-anarchic, proclamation of His holiness is the reason why Iblis – to whom Al-Hallaj places himself in a theosophical-symbolic equation – denies the order instituted by theodicy. Beyond the limits of reasonable thinking, fanaticized by the overwhelming, absolute truth of the *Tawhid* (“Allah is One, Only, Unique and confessed as One”), his out-of-gear reason can only dance in circles around Him. The fundamentalist monotheistic Credo of the all-too-bright damned angel is thus expressed, in the language of a theological choreography of Sufi inspiration, through *tahwis*, the war dance of the spinning Bedouins. Confronted with the pointed, trenchant, aggressive recollection of the Divine One, what remains of Adam? Nothing but He-Himself. Everything that *is* in Adam is *nothing else* but God. The Lover’s proximity induces, according to Hallaj, a state of delirium in the beings of searchers and losers of God, through His eye that curves with desire, and that devours any shade or inertia of the idea of ego³.

In Al-Hallaj’s text, Iblis refuses to bow to Adam, who is *someone else* than Him, even though God commands him to do so, even though he is aware that his act will draw the eternal divine curse on him. The demonic alterity, instrumented by sin, *hubris*, rebellion, is outlined through the dynamics of following the translation, the exile from the area of blessing into the exiguous, excruciating space of divine imprecation. At the same time, however, Hallaj surprisingly states that there is no unitarian or worshipper like Iblis among the inhabitants of heaven, as, to him, there is no way to other-than-Him⁴.

Iblis’s guilt is placed into relativity, just as that of the crucified mystic, whose limbs were cut by brutal forces susceptible to dissolve the bodily outer skin, without the centrifugal force of theological annihilation, which animates the carousel of self-sacrifice in the name of the pure truth of a religious ideal, unable to trigger a prudent, terrified recanting of his scandalous assertions. In the prophetic conversation between Al-Junayd of Baghdad (835 – 910 A. D.; 220 – 297-298 A. H.) and Al-Hallaj, the former warns the latter on the nearing of the time when his body “will crimson a piece of wood”. Seduced by the imminence of immolation, ready to strengthen, to test his risky rhetoric of words through the undeniable, irreversible rhetoric of a beatific *diasparagmos* of the meaningless flesh, Al-Hallaj utters his Hamlet-like line with visionary, martyr-like exhaustion, with tragic-ironic detachment, a kind of boundless, infinitely-generous, weariness of brightly-blinding inner jubilation capable of delineating, in the proximity of the Loved One, an inexpugnable theological standpoint from where the said crimsoning, paradigm of a covert spiritual alchemy, may be contemplated with the priceless equanimity of a fallen angel that has assumed the path of re-ascension: “The day I will crimson a piece of wood, you will wear the garb of Formalists.”

By the condemnation uttered by the Inquisitional-Pharisaic establishment, any anonymous martyr or messiah, in his capacity of “friend of the Absentee Friend”, accomplishes the ritualistic prelude of encountering oneself, one’s own vocation, a hagiographic impasse versified by Omar Khayyam (c. 1048 – 1131 A. D.; c. 440 – 529 A. H.):

² Cf. Husayn Mansur Al-Hallaj, *Muqatta’a* 13-14, in: Louis Massignon (ed.), *Diwan*, Paris, Seuil, 1981, p. 71-72. See also, Al-Hallaj, *The Ta-Sin of Before Endless-Time and Equivocation*, 12, in: At-Tarjumana, *The Tawasin*, p. 43.

³ Cf. Al-Hallaj, *Muqatta’a* 28-29, in: Massignon, *Diwan*, p. 86. See also, Al-Hallaj, *The Ta-Sin of Before Endless-Time and Equivocation*, 10, in: At-Tarjumana, *The Tawasin*, p. 42.

⁴ Cf. Al-Hallaj, *The Ta-Sin of Before Endless-Time and Equivocation*, 6, 11, in: At-Tarjumana, *The Tawasin*, p. 42-43.

“These fools, by dint of ignorance most crass,
Think they in wisdom all mankind surpass;
And glibly do they damn as infidel,
Whoever is not, like themselves, an ass⁵.”

Fully invested with redemptive attributes and privileges, placed in the antechamber of the empire of the unseen, the stigmatized saint, the guide of donkeys who cannot be a donkey becomes truly apt of carrying, beyond the eerie thanatological interlude, the burden or cross of the revelation of the unrevealing. Although he wins the direct confrontation with Iblis, Al-Junayd is relatively outperformed on the metaphysical checkerboard pattern in the ineffable perimeter of which the encounter with Al-Hallaj took place. The sober, tempered master does not enter the heretic gate of *reality*, the ogival entrance of the esoteric meanings, carved, forged through the effort of the intoxicated madman, which miraculously synthesized, in the ephemeral interval of his own being, in the eternal interval of his own soul, the accomplishment of the Sufi truth⁶.

Iblis is a duality of Azazel, God's Adversary in the Biblical tradition. The celebration of the Day of Atonement or *Yom Kippur*⁷ would reach its ritual peak by the sacrificial sending of a goat to HASHEM and of another, apparently identical, to Azazel (*la'azazel*). In *Tawasin*, Al-Hallaj believes that Azazel is the good name, carried by the too-bright angel before the fall, a detail that seems to indicate a parallel tradition, extra-Qur'anic and also extra-Biblical. The theocratic authority, in this new context, is symbolically coded in the form of a theological duality. Azazel-Iblis would have been invested, in the divine economy of the Creation, with a mission in Heavens and another one on Earth. In Heavens, he preaches the good works to angels, and on Earth, he preaches the evil deeds to people and *jinn*. Isolated in paradox, in the meaninglessness of any action, he is ruled by the tragic awareness of the fact that all roads to salvation are being *a priori* denied to him: “If I had known that prostrating would have saved me I would have prostrated. But I knew that after that circle were other circles. I said to myself in conjecture, if I come out safe from this circle, how will I come out of the second, the third, and the fourth? The first circle is the circle of Allah's Will. The second is the circle of His Wisdom. The third is the circle of His Power. The fourth represents His Knowledge before Endless Time⁸.”

Why does Al-Hallaj identify himself with Iblis? The individual that has reached mystical knowledge but is categorically, brutally rejected by the theological order, by inquisitorial authorities, symbolically places the awareness of his own truth in the archaic, traditional image of the rebellious, damned angel. The implacable guilt of insubordination to the divine command is somehow mystically redeemed by the monotheistic God whose intense and infinite Life knowingly transgresses all dogmatic limits, and even the hypothetically not to be transgressed limit of Allah's own injunction.

According to Al-Hallaj, Iblis is a more radical monotheist than Allah Himself, Who commands him to worship *other* than Allah. Mirrored in this celestial paradigm, Al-Hallaj is, through the covert communion of revolt, more of a believer, more zealous than the representatives of the pharisaic structures that sent him to death. The command of bowing in

⁵ Omar Khayyam, *Rubai'yat*, 156, in: Edward Henry Whinfield (trans.), *The Quatrains of Omar Khayyam* (Second Edition), Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1893.

⁶ Cf. Farid-ud-din Attar, *Tadhkirat al-Awliya'*, Arthur J. Arberry (trans.), *Memorial of the Saints*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books / Arkana, 1990, p. 264-271.

⁷ Cf. *Torah, Leviticus* 16-17.

⁸ Cf. Al-Hallaj, *The Ta-Sin of Before Endless-Time and Equivocation*, 19, 26, in: At-Tarjumana, *The Tawasin*, p. 45, p. 47. See also, Al-Hallaj, *The Ta-Sin of the Divine Will*, 4, in: At-Tarjumana, *The Tawasin*, p. 51.

front of Adam can also be hermeneutically approached as a Qur'anic 'rewriting' of the *Book of Job*.

The ontological tragedy contained by the mythological-theological saga of Iblis may ensue from the collision of three truths. The infinite, theocratic truth of the omniscient God, according to which the created beings, regardless of the substance of their creation (fire, clay) and their rank in the celestial-worldly hierarchy, must unconditionally submit, with secondary enthusiasm, with the urban purity entailed by the absence of any concretizations of contradictory will, to the laws of the referential system outlined by the baroque architecture of the divine commands, must always accomplish them, even when their ultimate, rounded meaning is not fully accessible, convertible in terms of angel or human reason, as long as they are revealed by the Divine Will. Adam's truth and that of the obedient angels, who uncritically accept the order, who gravitate with *sama* notes around the theocratic principle, without taking into consideration the concomitance of some parallel orders. Between the limits of a peaceful organization, of conceded beatitude, the non-conflict nature may be comfortably experienced as a privilege, cardinal virtue, *status quo*. Lastly, the contesting, *authentically* affirmative truth, of the Iblis-Hallaj type, by which the ontological-epistemological substance of the accepted, imposed order is fascinatingly, sinfully, revealed precisely by overturning this order, in its conflicting, heart-rending experience, in the assumption of its denial through rebellion, in the mystical theology induced by celestial irony and sapience, in the premeditation of the eternal damnation of a theocratic nature – the only one, in fact, capable of punishing a rebellion of such magnitude, which challenges the cosmic proportions through the severe remembrance of the initial norms, specified by *kalamu'llah* at the spermatic-rhetoric origin of the incomprehensible universe. This follow-up of the fall-rebellion in which spiritualized eyes may read the symphonic apogee of the intensity of human existence, the apex of the waste, courage, freedom, intelligence and meaninglessness of the Adamic living, reverberates over millennia in the theocratic-sacrificial story of the world, spectacularly at all times, though somehow naturally-unnaturally, in many faces and destinies of indomitable rebels that mysteriously preserve Luhe power, rather sacred, of reminding those interested in the intoxicating truth or in that only lethally developed by the continuity of pilgrimage down here, that the locking into ephemeral, suffering and limited knowledge can only be annihilated, in collusion with the Loved One, by openness and closeness into metaphysics, into an eternity happy at last, although the predictable price of the exile to Paradise is mistaken for the due date of an ingenious damnation, one capable of homeopathically impregnating with its infernal elixir, in evanescent dosage, not just the predetermined hazard of historical misapprehensions, but also the undeserved intimacy of every moment.

As for the scandalous assertion "I am the Truth" or "I am God" (*ana'l Haqq*), its very pathetic, aggressive, martyr-like relief seems to complement the fact that:

"Hallaj was taken to the gallows tree
And cried: I am the Truth; they could not see
The meaning of his words and hacked at him
Tearing his bleeding carcass limb from limb⁹".

It is also worth mentioning that in a *risalah* entitled *The language of ants*, Suhrawardi incorporates the parable of *Enoch and the Moon*: the Moon describes itself as a pure, bright

⁹ Cf. Farid-ud-din Attar, *Manteq at-Tair*, v. 2283-2298, v. 4255-4271, Afkham Darbandi, Dick Davis (trans.), Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1984, p. 114, p. 220.

and dark celestial body; in want of immanent light, it shines when a likeness of the sunlight is reflected by the mirror of its own body; looking at itself, it only sees the Sun – any awareness of ontological otherness is gone, which is why the Moon has good reason to claim: “I am the Sun”¹⁰. The allegoric relief of this story is a plea meant to apologize the public excesses of the Sufi masters intoxicated with the proximity of the divine – a school in whose hagiography Al-Hallaj occupies a paradigmatic position, next to Abu-Yazid Al-Bistami (d. 848-849 or 874-875 A. D.; d. 234 or 261 A. H.).

Alongside ample apologetic reactions, the complete picture of the reception of Al-Hallaj’s locutionary-illocutionary-perlocutionary enunciation also contains the complementation of trenchant incriminations. In *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, Ibn Tufayl (c. 1100 – 1185 A. D.; c. 494 – 580 A. H.), in key with the verdict pronounced by the instances of Islamic Orthodoxy, accused Al-Hallaj of mistaking the awareness of joining together his own being for the proper identification of his being with God¹¹. Likewise, Muhammad Ibn Muhammad Al-Ghazzali (c. 1056 / 1057 – 1111 A. D.; c. 450 – 504 A. H.) accused the absurdity of the mystical union between man and God: “Things have gone that far that some people boasted with their union with God, i.e. that in His revealed presence, they watch Him and enjoy intimate conversations with Him, saying: Thus it’s been spoken to us and thus we speak¹².” From the perspective of the ontological non-nearing of human existence on the orbit of the *tawhid*, such accusations can be refuted by the argument of Al-Kharraz (d. 899 A. D.; d. 286 A. H.) in *Kitab al-faraj*: “God alone has the right to pronounce the word I, no one else. For anyone else who utters the word I, the gnosis remains unrevealed.” In other words, the mystic who utters *ana* can only utter *ana’l Haqq*¹³.

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¹⁰ Cf. Shihab-ud-din Yahia Suhrawardi, *Al-Risalah*, 9, W. M. Thackston (trans.), London, The Octagon Press, 1982, p. 85-86.

¹¹ Cf. Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Malik Ibn Tufayl, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, Lenn Evan Goodman (trans.), *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, Los Angeles, Gee Tee Bee Press, 1991, p. 95-103.

¹² Cf. Abu Hamid Muhammad Ibn Muhammad Al-Ghazzali, *Kimiya’e Saadat*, Claud Field (trans.), *The Alchemy of Happiness*, London, The Octagon Press, 1983, p. 7-8.

¹³ Cf. Paul Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, Beyrouth, Dar El-Machreq, 1991, p. 248-250.

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