

# Salah Abdul Sabur and his Hallaj: a Heideggerian reading<sup>(\*)</sup>

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## Abstract

The aim of this study is to read Salah Abdul Sabur's *Murder in Baghdad* (1968) in light of Martin Heidegger's philosophy of "Being". As a major representative of existential thought, Heidegger's philosophy is concerned with explaining the various genuine avenues through which man can live authentically. Authentic living, in this sense, means one's ability to maintain a sharp consciousness that can lend one a, somehow, comprehensive understanding of the surrounding reality. Living in an epoch where the rise of suppressive ideologies dominated the scene in Europe, Heidegger questioned how one can escape from the authority of what he calls the "others" who prohibit one from freedom. For Heidegger, man's awareness of the three dimensions of time; past, present and future, is considered the golden road towards living harmoniously in a world in which man only cares for what really concerns his/her life. Language, Heidegger's "house of being", is considered the faithful vehicle towards experiencing an "ecstatic unity of time". In a region in which totalitarian regimes rose to power, Abdul Sabur, through his plays, sheds light on man's inability to enjoy freedom because of the malicious hegemonic practices the "others" exert on individuals. A close examination of the play will reveal how the characters are thrown up in their dramatic worlds without choices. Moreover, their eagerness to achieve an authentic mode of Being is blocked by, what Heidegger calls, the "they" or the "others".

**Key words:** Heidegger, Philosophy of Being, Salah Abdul Sabur, Dasein, Temporal consciousness, Murder in Baghdad

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## المخلص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة مسرحية *مأساة الحلاج* (1968) لصالح عبد الصبور من منظور فلسفة هيديجر عن "الوجود". لقد كان هيديجر من أوائل الفلاسفة الوجوديين - بجانب سارتر- الذين عُتقوا بإشكالية فحص ماهية إدراك الإنسان للوجود من حوله. ولذلك فإن هيديجر يتساءل كيف يمكن للمرء أن يعيش وجوده بشكل شرعي دون التأثير السلبي من "الآخرين" أو ما يسمى بـ"هؤلاء" الذين نعيش معهم ونختلط بهم؛ سواء كانوا من داخل الإطار الاجتماعي أو ممثلين للسلطة. وكانت إجابته تكمن في أن الإحساس بالوجود ينشأ من خلال إدراك الفرد للزمن في كليته؛ أي إدراك الفرد للحاضر حاملا الوعي بالماضي والقدرة على اتخاذ قرار يؤثر في المستقبل، وهو ما عرفه هيديجر "بوحدة الوجود الزمني". ومن وجهة نظر هيديجر، إن السبيل الوحيد لتحقيق ذلك الوجود الزمني يكون من خلال اللغة التي هي "بيت الوجود" على حد تعبيره. وبناء على ذلك، تسعى الدراسة إلى تحليل الحوار الدرامي في المسرحية وفقا لرؤية هيديجر من أجل التفريق بين الشخصيات التي تستطيع تحديد واقعها من خلال إدراكها الزمني والشخصيات التي تفشل في ذلك، ويدل هذا التحليل على عمق البناء الجمالي للغة المسرح عند صالح عبد الصبور ورؤيته للوجود الإنساني بشكل عام.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** هيديجر، فلسفة الوجود، صالح عبد الصبور، *مأساة الحلاج*، وحدة الوجود الزمني، الإدراك الزمني.

Heidegger's philosophy is considered by many to be of great complexity. For one thing, the German philosopher's speculations, as opposed to his contemporaries, often seemed totally incomprehensible. For another, Heidegger's affiliation to the Nazi regime weakened his prestigious image among other post-World War II thinkers. But the problem which made various critics and theorists avoid approaching Heidegger's philosophy lies in the fact that he uses a highly complicated language. This opinion was later advocated by a series of highly intelligent thinkers like Bertrand Russell who characterized Heidegger's writings as "highly eccentric in terminology", and his terminologies as "extremely obscure" (303). John Passmore observed that Heidegger's work is "unintelligible" (479). As a result, attempting to pin down his ideas and thoughts seems to be a difficult mission before both readers and critics. In *How to Read Martin Heidegger*, Mark Wrathall attempts to analyze Heidegger's style of writing through detecting the main features which bring about its vagueness. He explains, at the very opening chapters of his

book, that the ambiguity which surrounds Heidegger's language springs from the fact that he seeks to kindle ideas which the ordinary common language is not familiar with. Those ideas are Heidegger's insights on the fundamental features which enable people to be fully aware of their "Being". Moreover, Wrathal goes on to articulate that a specific function of the common language is its ability to communicate objects, events and experiences. Heidegger, however, like poets in the process of creation, seeks to severely abuse language in order to ignite extraordinary feelings in his readers. He, in effect, manipulates man's transparent language—that is its ability to communicate well identified patterns of meaning- in order to deliver some ideas and thoughts that cannot be communicated through the well known common verbal concepts (8-9). To put it more simply, Wrathal meant that Heidegger's philosophy strives to invade some areas which the ordinary language does not possess an equivalent vocabulary to express, Heidegger's method, I believe, depends on manipulating the common language, similar somehow to the Russian formalist school in its use of images. For the Russian formalists, the function of the literary language is not based upon transforming the non-familiar objects into familiar ones, rather a literary language must place the familiar objects within new contexts in order to bring about new meanings and broaden the artistic duration of appreciation.

At this point, the reader might question what Heidegger's philosophy has to do with literature, and it is a rightful inquiry. In fact, I believe that Heidegger's thoughtful investigations are fruitful for those concerned with examining the world of fictional characters in theatre or in the literary field in general. Thus, shedding some light on his major themes would help in fathoming out the complexities that formulate a character's language, perception of itself, of others and the world. One of those themes is that of "Being", a very ancient field of investigation which dominated the sphere of thinking of several philosophers since Aristotle. Aristotle upheld the view that what enables human beings to experience their own being, i.e. being a human being in the world, is the materialistic presence of other beings in their surroundings. The

phenomenological tradition, championed by Edmund Husserl the tutor of Heidegger, elaborated on this Aristotelean conception of "Being" and established that one's true existence springs from his/her consciousness of reality, "therefore it (phenomenology) denies the possibility of looking at the world as a separate entity from man's consciousness" (Enani70). In agreement with his instructor, Heidegger maintained that the true hermeneutical investigation of reality begins from man's perception, but unlike Husserl, he refuted the phenomenological argument which presumes that this perception is made up of some mental pictures, rather it is built on the *Dasein* (Hamouda132). What is then the "Dasein"?

Various theorists and critics exerted great efforts to understand what Heidegger meant by *Dasein*. Haugeland proposes that *Dasein* is "a way of life shared by the members of some community" (qtd. in Wheeler). This interpretation suggests that members of society create their own form of Being. In his quest to figure out what aspects shape man's Being, that is as a human being, Heidegger maintains that man's existence is incomplete and, thus, one's Being is usually in an open-ended status. To describe one's experience in this open ended position, he formulates a very crucial concept that was very difficult for critics to crack down: "Being- in- the world". It explains that every human being experiences a status of "being-there" in the world, in a certain context and a specific culture. To describe man's imprisonment and inability to escape from "being-there", Heidegger coins the term "Thrownness" which suggests that every human being has been deeply rooted and even situated in a structured mode, culture or tradition that is governed by strict norms since ages. In fact, Heidegger, in opposition to Haugeland's reading of *Dasein*, attacked the idea that one's culture can create a proper lens through which man can perceive his/her reality, he rather advocated the view that one's culture may usurp one's rightful path to perceive his/her mode of Being:

Dasein, as everyday being with one another,  
stands in subjection to others. It itself is not; its  
being has been taken away by the others.

Dasein's everyday possibilities of being are for the others to dispose of as they please... One belongs to the others oneself and enhances their power. (164)

To escape from this cultural captivity, one, for Heidegger, must discover his/her true authentic form of Being or *Dasein*, a journey which cannot be attained unless one is conscious of both time and space, namely being able to identify the aspects which formulate one's being-there, in specific milieu and time. In other words, an authentic mode of perceiving reality is established once man is capable of identifying the three dimensions of time: past, present and future. In this manner, Enani defines authentic Being as follows, "being aware in the present moment while being also aware of the events of the past and the probability of being aware of what might happen be in the future" (39).

The only means to reach upon such temporal and spatial unity is through language, which for Heidegger does not represent a transparent medium meant for communication, rather it is a vital tool that enables man to experience his/her authentic being-in-the-world. Contrary to his teacher who maintained that man's existence precedes language, Heidegger advocated the view that language precedes existence, believing it to be the place where man can experience an "ecstatic unity of time" (377). As a result, Dasein, for Heidegger, resides in man's consciousness of his/her being-in-the world. It is only when this consciousness is able to use language in a manner which links the past with the present to determine future decisions that man's authentic Being exists.

The above explanation of Heidegger's thoughts on Being will be used as a theoretical framework against which Salah Abdul Sabur's *Murder in Baghdad* (1972) will be read. A close examination of the play will reveal how the characters are thrown up in their dramatic worlds without choices. Moreover, their eagerness to achieve an authentic mode of Being is blocked by, what Heidegger calls, the "they" or the "others". The hero is the only character which has a sharp consciousness to reflect upon the three dimensions of time and thus, experiences a

Heideggerian ecstatic unity of time.

No critic, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, attempted to read Abdul Sabur from within a Heideggerian perspective although most of his plays depict characters who are thrown into a world in which their choices are very limited or furnished by the power of the "other". In fact, Abdul Sabur's theatre reflects his tendency to show man's inability to establish any true contact with reality because people usually fall prey to the manipulative practices of what Heidegger calls the "they". For instance, the one act play *A Passenger's Night (MosaferLel)* (1969) tells the story of a passenger who is travelling by train to an unknown destination when unexpectedly he is subjected to the malicious deeds of the train conductor. The characters of the play are a passenger, a train conductor and a narrator, the three of them are "thrown" into a specific context by Abdul Sabur in order to foreground the problem of Being and how one understands his/her mode of being. Despite the fact that the play's structure and content is in complete match with the elements of the absurd theatre, despite it highlights Abdul Sabur's anxiety over man's *being-in-the-world*. Both the passenger and the train conductor are meant to function symbolically; the former represents the ordinary man who is being oppressed by authorities while the latter stands for the state with its repressive mechanisms. In an absurd world where different tyrannical figures, like Hitler and Alexander the Great, have been portrayed by the train conductor, the play ends with the murder of the passenger by the train conductor. What is astonishing is the narrator's eccentric behavior, he simply steps away and addresses the audience telling them "What can I do/ He has a dagger/ And I am like you, unarmed/ I don't have except my comments/ What can I do" (I 681).<sup>(1)</sup> Those lines reflect Abdul Sabur's attack on his audience's consciousness as in Artaud's "cruel theatre" through which he wishes to provoke the audience's imagination and keep them in a state of unrest. The play, in effect, is meant to show how one's life is being furnished by the restrictive codes of authoritarian systems, the matter which prompted several contemporary critics to describe the play as a courageous attempt by Abdul Sabur to defend humanity against

the violent practices of totalitarian regimes (Shafik122-3).

Like Heidegger, Abdul Sabur knows very well that the golden road towards experiencing an authentic mode of being is through language. In his manifesto on the rules of creativity, especially on poetic composition, he observes:

Poetry is the voice of a man who speaks relying on different artistic devices in order to make his voice more echoing than that of others... therefore, the poet must have his special voice and language because language is owned by all people... but in the hands of the poet, language is re-organized and even placed in contexts in which its aesthetics are made clear. (16)<sup>(2)</sup>

It should be clear how Abdul Sabur's perception of poetic language is similar to that of Heidegger's who presumes that poetry assumes the role of "inaugural naming" and thus, Being exists in language. In fact, the power of the word or the dramatic language is what, in effect, characterizes the theatre of Abdul Sabur. He points out, "I have explicitly expressed it throughout my plays, especially in *MassatAlHallaj*, that the greatest belief is the belief in the power of the "word" " (ibid, p 16). Superbly, the dynamics which govern the actantial sphere in Abdul Sabur's *Murder in Baghdad* can only be decoded through a close reading to the influential effect assigned to the characters' dramatic language. In this play specifically, Abdul Sabur does not weave a dramatic language which serves to fulfill the basic purposes of language, that is communication, rather he manipulates all the artistic devices of poetic language in order to show that the place where the characters fight for their "Being" is in language. As a result, language as an arena where characters fight in for their beings plays several functions on the level of the play's dramatic action. The first part of the play is entitled the "Word" which powerfully reflects Abdul Sabur's genuine belief in the power of the word. In fact, the power of the word in the play is shown in how it kills, promises and revives people's souls. When the three strollers in the

opening scene of the play ask the Crowd how did they kill Hallaj, they say "with words" (I i 4). Surprised with the Crowd's answer, the three strollers ask another group of Sufis about how Hallaj was murdered, they declare "We killed him with words" (I i 6). In redeeming himself before Hallaj's body, Shibli, Hallaj's best friend, contemplates "But when I faced the inquisition, I wanted to stay alive/ And I uttered vague words... I am the one who killed you" (I i 9). The previous utterances reflect the deep impact of the "word" in the play's main action; that is Hallaj's death. The Crowd, the group of Sufis and Shibli all contributed in a wicked conspiracy through which Hallaj's crucifixion is carried out. When Hallaj is imprisoned, he explains to his other two fellow prisoners that he has been jailed for attempting to "resurrect the dead" and when he was asked how would he do that, he said through "words" (I i 45-6). For Hallaj, the power of the word resides in changing people's way of thinking and how they perceive reality.

Relying on his poetic skills in writing poetry, Abdul Sabur's *Murder in Baghdad*, more than any other play he wrote, emphasizes his uneasiness with how people, in Arab nations and namely Egypt, perceive themselves. My contention is that Abdul Sabur's play echoes his social responsibility as an artist, he actually questions whether one can really achieve a genuine *Dasein*- consciousness of one's being in time- through identifying time as a "continuum":

Time as a continuum is the irrefutable proof of being: Using an argument from Husserl, Heidegger sees this continuum as most potent in what really '*matters*' to one. Without being fully conscious of it, man is continually threatened by 'oblivion of being', both in the past and the future. If successful in defeating it, and many persons are, then 'authentic' being will be the reward; if unsuccessful or if no temporal consciousness is cultivated, and people are satisfied with the transient pleasure of the



moment, they will suffer from inauthentic existence.(Enani4)

A careful study of the characters' speeches in *Murder in Baghdad* will reveal that the temporal element is being brilliantly manipulated by Abdul Sabur to reflect upon man's "throwness" in the world and how the past as present is the real force which drives Hallaj, the hero of the play, towards reaching an authentic mode of being, contrary to other characters who fail. Abdul Sabur's handling of time is made clear from the opening scene of the play with the rise of the curtain, the stage directions explains "*At the back of the stage, to the right, a tree trunk with a short branch. The scene does not suggest the traditional (Christian) cross, only a tree branch, with an old man crucified on it*" (I i 3). The image evokes, in the audience's imagination, the Christian crucifixion, although Abdul Sabur intentionally mentions that the scene should not suggest this meaning, still one's imagination in the auditorium cannot resist setting a comparison between both images; that is of Hallaj and Christ. In this manner, the crucifixion image prompts the audience's imagination to recall a historical incident from the past, Christ's crucifixion, to the present. Semiotically, Abdul Sabur, in effect, grapples with the audience's consciousness/*Dasein* to test their ability in not only reading the scene but also understanding what sort of connotations does the scene deliver. An expert spectator will quickly decode the crucifixion image and read it as a symbol which reflects upon the characteristics of the crucified character. In other words, the tentative spectator will read the crucifixion image as a clear message by the playwright to foreground that the circumstances through which the fictional character on stage has been crucified is similar to that of Christ. The dramatic irony in this scene lies in the fact that although other characters appear on stage and start to inquire about the identity of the crucified man and why was he crucified, the image has already communicated signifiers related to the identity of the crucified man in the audience's consciousness. Relying on the language of symbols, Abdul Sabur masterfully guides his audience's perception towards predicting that the reasons behind the murder of this man on tree is the story of the

scapegoat character who is put to death by his community. As a result, the audience waits impatiently to test whether its predictions are true or false. In fact Abdul Sabur, in grappling with the temporal element through the special use of symbols, allows his audience to test their expectations through the flashback technique as a method to unveil the story behind Hallaj's crucifixion.

Following the first scene and bearing in mind the connotations released by the crucifixion symbol, the audience delves deep into witnessing the peculiar circumstances which brought about Hallaj's death. At this point, I would like to argue that the flashback technique, as a dramatic device from which the earlier events of the play are being told, allows the audience to experience a very complicated form of what Heidegger calls an "ecstatic unity of time". Heidegger maintains that genuine being comes from one's ability to perceive time as a continuum in which all horizons of time, the past, present and future, merge together in one's consciousness. To understand how the audience experiences this temporal merging of time, it is important to identify two different temporal spheres which extremely intermingle together and brings about a whole complex of time sequence; that is the real and the fictional time. The real time sphere is meant to connote the audience's experience in performance, while the fictional time sphere represents the fictional progression of time among the characters of the play. The complexity comes from the fact that Abdul Sabur skillfully merges both time sequences together to the extent that detecting one from the other is hard to pin down. What concerns the research at the moment is to crack down how Heidegger's ecstatic unity of time operates in the audience's consciousness, thus a special focus on the real time sphere is required. In my point of view, Hallaj's crucifixion scene is considered the pivotal point around which the three dimensions of the audience's horizons of time are located. It has been exposed how the crucifixion symbol invites the audience's consciousness to recall a real historical event from the past into the present moment of the performance. In this manner, two horizons of time overlap together in the audience's *Dasein*: the present and the

past. Once the audience probes into the flashback mode and as events keep unfolding, the audience actually experiences some unknown future course of events which will eventually lead to the initial point from which the play started, Hallaj's crucifixion. It is Abdul Sabur's flashback technique which creates all this complexity. One might question now how the audience experiences some future course of events when in fact they perceive some earlier events which are meant to explain what happened before the play opens. In fact, for the attending audience, the temporal experience of the flashback is not experienced as past events but rather as clusters of a future-oriented series of actions which happen in the present moment of performance. In other words, the audience activates all his receptive senses in order to decode the various operating sign systems on stage.

In returning back to the original spot from which the play opens, Hallaj's crucifixion scene, Abdul Sabur succeeded in creating a cyclical structure that enables the audience to experience a Heideggerian ecstatic unity of time. What is also worth drawing attention to is how Abdul Sabur manipulates this cyclical technique on the level of language, Shafik observes that he proficiently weaves some parallel syntactic forms which foreground the cyclical shape of narration in the verses (121). To support this argument, Shafik quotes from the prisoner's speech in act two, "My mother didn't die of hunger. She lived with hunger! / Because of that she fell ill in the morning, was paralyzed at noon, / And died before nightfall" (II i 48). I would like to point out that this balanced arrangement of some similarly structured lines prevails in the speeches of other characters. For instance, the Crowd's speech in act one shows this parallelism:

They lined us up, row upon row  
The tallest, loudest one  
Was put in front;  
Those with soft voices, and the hesitant,  
Were sent to the back rows.  
But front and back,

They gave us each a pure gold dinar,  
Shiny, never touched before.  
They said, "Shout 'Hretic! Heretic!'"  
We shouted, "Heretic! Heretic!"  
They said, "Shout 'Let him be killed, his blood  
be on our heads!'"  
We shouted, 'Let him be killed, his blood be on  
our heads!"  
Then they said: "Go". And we went.  
The loudest, tallest one  
Went away first;  
Those with soft voices, and the hesitant,  
Went away last (I i 5)

In narrating how they betrayed Hallaj, the Crowd speaks in a specific form of language which is clearly centered on parallelism. In fact, this parallelism is reflected on two levels: the verbal as well as the actions narrated. The former shows how the group employs some recurring form of sentences, as in their peculiar use of both direct and indirect speeches. The latter exposes how the story line ends from the point out of which it started, exactly like the cyclic shape which Abdul Sabur selected as a pattern of narration for the plot of the play. The Crowd explains how they were lined up in an organized manner, those tall with loud voices in the forefront, while those with soft voices at the back front. Moreover, the mission assigned to them is actually centered also on a repetitive act, all what they have to do is just to repeat the dictated words upon them, therefore, the narrated action also foregrounds Abdul Sabur's passion of this cyclical technique. Once their mission is accomplished, the manner through which the Crowd is sent away reflects an organized cyclical pattern similar to how they were lined up at the beginning, those tall with loud voices are allowed to leave first followed by those with soft voices.

On the level of diction, it should be clear how the Crowd keeps repeating the word "they", which is mentioned five times and suggests the

extreme pressure, in Heideggerian terms, "the others", can exert in determining one's life. It is, thus, prompting to raise the question: who are those "others"? In fact, Abdul Sabur makes it clear from the very opening scene of the play that those "they" are meant to connote representatives of the oppressive authority in the play. Once the Crowd leaves, a group of Sufis enter and mentions clearly the identity of those "they", "And so the Sultan delivered him to judges,/And the judges returned him to the Sultan/ And the Sultan delivered him next to jailer,/ And then at last when his limbs became filigreed with blood,/ His wish was fulfilled" (I i 7). It should also be clear how the cyclical pattern also predominates in this speech, the matter which stimulate the research to question what sort of dramatic function does this stylistic feature fulfill and why does Abdul Sabur prefer it specifically? In fact, I would like to argue that this repetitive form of similarly constructed clauses is a stylistic feature which characterizes the dramatist's distinctive ability in formulating a specific form of language for specific type of characters. A close examination of the identity of the characters who speak in accordance with this cyclic texture will reveal that they represent the type of characters who are unable to achieve a true consciousness of time. Both the Crowd and the group of Sufis have fallen prey to the manipulative practices of the authority in the play and thus, they lost their *Dasein*; that is their ability to experience *being-in-the-world*, in one's own milieu and time. As a result, it is worth noting how Abdul Sabur brilliantly manipulates this cyclic technique on both the external as well as the internal communication systems. On the external level, it has been shown how Abdul Sabur brings the audience to experience a Heideggerian ecstatic unity of time in which a real historical incident from the past is recalled in the present moment of performance. The effect of this past-present moment is reflected in how the audience is eager to test their expectations throughout the future course of events of the play. On the other hand, the cyclic pattern which characterizes the verbal utterances of some characters is meant to show up how they live inauthentically, in Heideggerian terms, and, therefore, their language lacks any reference to temporality. Thus, before exposing how

Hallaj's language reflects his sharp consciousness of time and his ability to identify his being *there*, his position in the world, it is important first to shed some light on the verbal behavior of other characters whose language reflect their monotonous way of thinking, and, as a result, their understanding of their *Dasein* is shattered.

The first three strollers who appear on stage demonstrate Abdul Sabur's clear dramatic significations. His intent is to create a circulative verbal texture which marks the characters' level of awareness. The three characters are a merchant, a preacher and a peasant. Surprised by seeing the crucified body of Hallaj, each one of them begins to comment on the scene:

**Merchant:** Look! What have they put in our square

**Peasant:** An old man, crucified

What strange things one meets nowadays

**Preacher:** He appears to be in a deep sleep.

**Merchant:** His eyes are downcast.

**Preacher:** As though the burdens of the world  
were upon his shoulders

And life had been too much for him.

**Merchant:** the tired branch is bent... and he  
stares at the earth

**Preacher:** Looking for a grave beneath his feet. (I i 3)

Despite the fact that the above excerpt foregrounds the identity of three different speakers, their dialogue exchange, in effect, is, stylistically speaking, composed of a single contexture. To prove this proposition, a slight redistribution of the characters' turns will reveal how the generated meaning remains unaffected. For example, if the Merchant's comment, "His eyes are downcast" is said before that of the Preacher's "He appears to be in deep sleep", the whole meaning remains unchanged. Their speeches complement each other and thus, they stand for what Manfred Pfister calls "monological tendencies in dialogue" (129). This form of dialogue prevails in drama when all dialogue participants show complete consensus over the topic under discussion, therefore no semantic changes

take place reducing all tension to zero degree.

Abdul Sabur, I believe, intentionally weaves the above dialogue exchange patterned after the monologic criterion, in order to highlight the characters' egocentrism. Their egocentric behavior is further made explicit by the playwright when, following the above lines, each one of them show his eagerness to know the story behind Hallaj's death:

**Merchant:** Yes. The story might be interesting;  
And I perhaps could tell it to my wife,  
When I go home tonight.

For she loves a bit of chatter at table

**Peasant:** As for me, I am curious by nature,  
Just like a stupid woman;  
Every time I try to suppress my curiosity,  
My instinct gets the better of my manners.

**Preacher:** How nice it would be  
If there were a moral lesson to his story,  
A moral that would stir the emotions of the  
public,  
For my mind is barren  
And I can't find a subject  
For my sermon this Friday (I i 3-4)

A close examination of the speech of each character shows how the *Dasein*-consciousness of one's being in time- of each one of them is restricted within the realms of experiencing the transient pleasure of the present moment. The Merchant wants to know the story behind Hallaj's murder to entertain his wife, while the Peasant strives to suppress a personal feeling of curiosity in knowing people's secrets, and finally, the Preacher hopes that Hallaj's death might bear a moral lesson which he can tell in his Friday's sermon. Each one of those characters experiences certain "thrownness" or, what also Heidegger calls, "disposedness" in specific time and space. Time, for Heidegger, represents the undeniable

evidence of being. The above verbal interaction manifests man's typical attachment to the present and a clear negligence of both past and future, a rejected mode of being which Heidegger ascribes the name "present at hand". It entails the experience of human beings when they witness the presence of other beings, whether humane or non-humane, through contemplation. The behavior of the three characters and their reaction towards Hallaj's body reflect their contemplative method in reading their surrounding reality. They keep describing Hallaj's physical features and how he appears to be "in deep sleep", his eyes are set "downcast" and the branch of the tree is "bent" as if it stares to earth in search for a "grave" for the dead body. Moreover, their close connection to the present moment is furthered enhanced as each one of them explains how he will manipulate the story behind Hallaj's crucifixion. This utilitarian behavior has been described by Heidegger as a mode of being in which people perceive the surrounding objects only through using them. Heidegger calls this type of being: "ready at hand". In both modes of being, whether *present* or *readyathand*, one's *Dasein* – being conscious of time- is totally lost due to the fact that time as a continuum does not exist. The absence of the temporal element is quite shown in the above dialogue exchange among the three characters, it signifies how they perceive their reality either from a contemplative or a manipulative perspective.

Other characters in the play also show a severe inability to reflect upon their *being-in-the-world*, or even create a harmonious relation with their temporal and spatial surroundings. The stage directions declare the entrance of three men, "*one hunchback, one lame, and one a leper* (I iii 23). The following dialogue reflects how their sphere of thinking is profoundly attached to the short-lived pleasures of the present moment. To reflect upon man's "thrownness" in the world and that one's being is ruled by not only the influence of the "others" or one's companionship, Abdul Sabur allows both the lame and the leper to recall their rejoiced experiences when they meet Hallaj:

**Lame:** When I hear his good words, I feel  
That I can bend my leg, I can run, I can play.



Yes, I feel as though I were a bird flying freely in  
his own skies.  
But as soon as I leave his presence,  
The shadow of doubt, doubt of my own power,  
comes over me  
And I begin to drag my bad leg again, limping  
painfully,  
**Leper:** when I see him, I feel as if the sun had  
heard my plea,  
And had dyed the humiliating spots on my skin,  
So I could walk in the streets, proud and handsome,  
With rosy arms,  
Without a flaw or a blemish.  
But as soon as I leave him, I wrap myself in my  
rags  
And hide my sores, my affliction, my disease (I iii  
24)

As in the previous dialogue among the three strollers, the above conversation is another powerful example of severe monological tendencies in dialogical forms. Although the above passage foregrounds the presence of two dialogue participants and thus, an undisrupted form of communication is expected to emerge, the fact that both characters employ the same referential context creates a semantically unified structure. In other words, both characters show complete agreement over the topic under discussion, which is Hallaj's magical ability to make them experience some transient joyful feelings, therefore, the monological feature predominates to the extent that the passage can be read as a wholly structured monologue that is spoken by a single individual, rather than a dialogue. It appears, I believe, that Abdul Sabur has deliberately chosen this monologic quality as a specific stylistic feature which marks the *Dasein* of characters who inauthentically perceive their being. Despite the fact that the above dialogue between the leper and the lame reveal

their ability to memorize a specific personal episode from the past to the present and thus, enjoy an ecstatic unity of time as Heidegger maintains, the way they recall the incident to the present reflects how a specific "mood assails us" (Heidegger 175), obstructing the development of one's sharp consciousness of time.

One of the major factors which could influence man's perception of reality is one's mood or state of mind. For Heidegger, according to Enani, one's emotions seem irrational and can hinder one's rational thinking from establishing a genuine contact with reality in a manner that enables one to understand his/her position in the world. Extreme emotions, in effect, lead to certain states of mind which can severely affect one's perception of the surrounding reality (83). In the case of both the Leper and the Lame, they suffer from chronological diseases which will never be healed, therefore, they feel that they have been "thrown" into a world in which their freedom has been usurped by metaphysical power. Both characters' mood of being manifest that man is always "thrown into or delivered over to circumstances that are beyond our control" (Wrathal, p 35). Feeling desperate in a world which refuses to take notice of their pains, both characters fall prey to the domination of the "other", in their situation Hallaj represents this other. In describing how Hallaj provided them with an alternative reality in which they can experience some pleasant feelings, both characters, in effect, are unable to discover that Hallaj has actually placed them in an ecstatic mood which will never change their state of "throwness". This fact is true as both characters reflect how they badly feel once they leave Hallaj's presence. On one hand, the Lame observes, "the shadow of doubt, doubt of my power comes over me", while the Leper contemplates, "I wrap myself in my rags". Hence, the research proposes that both characters' recollections are not proofs of the Heideggerian ecstatic unity of time, rather they are reminiscence of some blissful states of mind.

Concerned with man's "throwness" in the world, Abdul Sabur tackles the idea of evil and questions whether does it spring from man's inner tendency to sin or is it a natural phenomenon which is

predetermined by destiny. In one of the most beautiful scenes of the play and a one that can be read as patterned after a Shavian drama in which the clash of ideas dominates, Abdul Sabur depicts a philosophical dispute between Hallaj and Shibli. On one hand, Hallaj perceives evil as man-made, therefore, he observes, "and the chained prisoners, a mad guard stands over them/Whip in hand/Who knows who put it there? Not he-/He raises it over the backs of the charges/Men and women enchained, forgetting the freedom which they lost" (I ii 13). In this manner, Hallaj's description of how people's freedom is taken away from them corresponds to Heidegger's insights on the critical role of the "others" or the "they" in determining one's *being-in-the-world* and even one's consciousness of being human. In response to Hallaj's words, Shibli questions:

Now I have questions too. Let me ask you  
Who was it who created death,  
Disease and pain?  
Who brandd the lepers  
And lunatics with their stigma?  
Who blinded the blind?  
Who stopped the ears of the deaf?  
Who tied the tongues of the dumb?  
Made the Negro black, the yellow races yellow?  
Who put us in this world as prisoners (I ii 14)

Commenting on this speech, Shafik contends that Shibli perceives evil as metaphysical, as a result, it cannot be understood, it is an authentic part of the universe and its existence has a specific hidden purpose which only God knows (120). Shibli's conception of evil shows that man's destiny has been designed by God, as a result, one has no choice in determining his/her mode of being. Whatever attempts man will make to live authentically, in Heideggerian terms, they will end up, for Shibli, living inauthentically. Satisfied with his state of "thrownness" in the world, Shibli, like other inauthentic characters in the play, lack any sense of the

temporal element and thus, he lost his *Dasein*; that is being human. He is totally immersed in the world of mysticism which provides him with *someready at hand* blissful temporary experiences. Thus, at one point he delves deep into his thought to reflect upon those momentarily pleasures:

Whereas in our mystic Way, we regard the Inner Light  
I, myself, look down into my heart,  
And I regard it, and I rejoice.  
In my heart, I see trees and fruit,  
Angels, worshippers, moons  
Green and yellow suns, rivers,  
Golden jewellery, and treasures of rubies.  
I see secrets, and images,  
Each at its best,  
Each in its most beautiful form (I ii 11)

The above speech reflect Abdul Sabur's skillful ability in designing a special stylistic texture for characters whose *Dasein*- perception of time- is shattered. The fact that Shibli is deeply attached to the present moment which bestows upon him some momentarily joyful feelings is shown in his peculiar use of language. Overwhelmed with extreme happiness in abiding by mystic principles, Shibli keeps repeating similarly constructed syntactic phrases as in "I see trees and fruits" and "I see secrets and images", "each in its best" and "each in its most beautiful form". This correspondence does not only prevail on the syntactic level but also supersedes in Shibli's verbal behavior. In expressing his excessive pleasures in Sufism, he relies on a series of abstract nouns like "angels", "green and yellow suns" and "moons" which, in turn, foreground a high level of abstraction from his reality. In fact, Shibli's use of some abstract nouns to express his mystic feelings promote the research's contention that Abdul Sabur intended to weave a distinctive dramatic language which is built on parallelism, or takes a cyclical shape, in order to

highlight characters who lost their *Dasein*; that is the ability to identify the past as present to determine future choices. Shibli's speech along with other characters' language examined up till now lack any temporal reference. Time, in effect, does not exist in their sphere of thinking and thus, their "thrownness" and subjection to the dominance of "others" reflect their lost *Dasein*.

On the other hand, Hallaj represents Heidegger's ideal model of the human being who struggles to reach a genuine identification of his *Dasein* through sharp consciousness of time. His verbal communication manifests Heidegger's perception of language as the "house of being". In fact, Hallaj's "thrownness" can be read from within his special use of a language that intermingles all three dimensions of time. Before exposing how his utterances represent this ecstatic unity of time, it is worth pointing out that another two dramatic techniques have been cleverly manipulated by Abdul Sabur to foreground his concerns over the nature of man's *being-in-the-world*, namely the dramatic conflict and the tragic hero.

Shafik argues that the character of Hallaj represents the problem of the intellectual who is torn between his social conscience and his personal experience. The former motivates him to revolt against oppression, while the latter prompts him to enjoy mystic ecstatic feelings in being close to God (118). Therefore, it can be said that the dramatic conflict operates in the play from within two levels: an external as well as an internal one. On the external dimension, the conflict exists between Hallaj and the oppressive regime in the play which strives to control people's souls, Hallaj's awareness of his social responsibility towards his society tempt him to extend a hand for his fellow oppressed people and save them from the cruel practices of the authority. As a result, each party, Hallaj and representatives of the regime, is determined to break the other's will and prove that the grounds upon which each one builds his views are totally false. On the other hand, the internal conflict takes place within Hallaj's own feelings and thoughts as he is hesitant whether he should abandon Sufism to help his people or turn a blind eye to the

pervasive evil in the world and remain in adherence to the joyful alternative reality offered by Sufism.

Reading both types of conflict from within a Heideggerian angle, Hallaj, effectively, rejects the hegemonic practices of the regime alongside with belonging to sophism as both of them represent the influential behavior of the "other", in Heideggerian terms, who hinders one from experiencing an authentic mode of being. In choosing to revolt against the repressive acts of the regime, Hallaj shows an extreme persistency to uncover the manipulative practices through which the authority imposes a restrictive code of ethics upon people. Moreover, to do so, he abandons sophism or, in other words, the transient pleasure experienced in sophism and which intensely attaches him to the present moment in favor of assuming the role of the social reformer. In fact, Hallaj's refusal to submit to the power of the authority and to the short-lived happiness in sophism provokes critics to question the grounds upon which he took such decision. Due to the fact that Hallaj's decision marks the rise of action in the play, Khalil Semaan contemplates that the crucial issue in the play "is not the action itself", namely the clash between Hallaj and the authority, "but the reasons which lie behind the action" (Semaan xvii), which signifies Hallaj's intentions to leave sophism and rebel against the government. In attempting to unravel Hallaj's complex motivations, Semaan raises the question, "is it after all al-Hallaj's longing for the Beloved that inevitably results in his martyrdom, or is his death rather a punishment for the sin he has committed by divulging his relationship with God" (ibid).

In order to explain how far Hallaj can be held accountable for his martyrdom or actions, the research reads his character from within the lens of the principles which make up a tragic hero. In fact, Semaan's question raise the idea of whether Hallaj has deliberately strived for martyrdom or his martyrdom has been pre-destined by God as in the Greek tragedies whose heroes' downfall is designed by the curse of gods. To grapple with this idea, a return to the delivered information by the text is the best solution. The commentaries made by other characters in the

opening scene of the play advocate the view that Hallaj has willingly endeavored towards martyrdom, the leader of the Sufi group reflects:

He (Hallaj) used to say:

"If my head and limbs were washed with blood,

Then I would be cleansed as were the prophets"

He wished for death, he longed to return to heaven,

As though he were a heavenly child who was lost,

A child who had strayed from his Father in the dark of night.

He used to say:

He who kills me fulfils my wish

And that of God. (I i 7)

At another point of the play, Shibli, Hallaj'ssufi best friend, ponders before his dead body saying, "you loved and you gave magnanimously/ But I with held my gift/when you saw the Light, you longed to return to It/ Now you have returned" (I i 9). It is worth mentioning that the word "Light", in Islamic theology, connotes God and thus, the following pronoun "It" is capitalized to generate this meaning. As a result both Shibli's and the Sufi leader's words support the view that martyrdom came as a result of Hallaj's inner desire to experience the presence of God. This wish to return to God should be born in mind because it will be further elaborated on in explaining Hallaj's consciousness of time in relation to the Ultimate Being.

In opposition to the released information in the text, one is overwhelmed by Abdul Sabur's claim that in selecting a dramatic pattern for his Hallaj, he preferred the classical form which depends on the "Greek concept of *Hamaratia*" (18). Although Abdul Sabur acknowledges the fact that he built the character of Hallaj patterned after the tragic hero's flaw, I would like argue that this confession opposes the ideology of his revolutionary theatre. The concept of *Hamaratia* entails that the hero suffers from a specific point of weakness in his character which brings about his downfall. Macbeth's ambition, Oedipus' impulsive

behavior and Agamemnon's pride are all examples of the fatal disadvantages in the characters of those heroes. Hallaj, on the other hand, does not suffer from an incurable intrinsic quality in his character, unless Abdul Sabur perceives that divulging his relationship with God is a sin which God avenges Himself upon. In this manner, Hallaj, like Oedipus, is a character whose destiny has been sealed by metaphysical power and thus, his martyrdom is a curse rather than a gift as Hallaj perceives it. Although this conception shows a complete agreement with the research's contention that Abdul Sabur's theatre reflect upon man's "throwness" and shed light on one's inability to live freely under the rule of totalitarian regimes, the fact that his plays represent acts of dissidence against the restrictive code which the Egyptian intellectuals had experienced during Nassir's regime shows Abdul Sabur's keenness on exposing man's existential journey towards identifying his *Dasein*. In other words, I believe that the hidden bent beneath which Abdul Sabur wrote his plays, and specifically *Murder in Baghdad*, comes from his deep desire to not passively draw our attention to our "disposedness" but rather to how we should escape from this "throwness" through establishing a harmonious relation with our own milieu, relying on an acute consciousness of time. Language, Heidegger's "house of being", fulfils this role for Abdul Sabur and his Hallaj.

An examination of Hallaj's language will show up how Abdul Sabur has "thrown" him into a world in which his freedom of will guides him towards living authentically. In fact, Abdul Sabur's success as a dramaturge comes from his special talent as a poet who masterfully manipulates language and drives it into the direction which can best serve his dramatic purpose. In showing his anxieties over man's "Being", Abdul Sabur succeeded in formulating two distinct textures of poetic language. It has been shown how the dramatic language of other characters is monologically structured in order to foreground their monotonous way of thinking and their close connection to the transient happiness of the present moment. In weaving a special form of language which can mark Hallaj's character from others, Abdul Sabur, I believe, has put Heidegger's



idea that language is the locus of being into effect. Hallaj is the only character in the play who speaks through a language which merges all sequences of time, namely bringing the past as present to determine the future. To put it more clearly, Hallaj fulfills Heidegger's proposal that authentic "Being" can only be reached through a genuine identification of the three temporal dimensions of man's existence.

I would like to argue that Hallaj's ability to call upon people, in the future course of events of the play, in order to show them the path of living authentically, gains its strength from two moments in which Hallaj recalls two personal experiences from his past. Each time he dominates the stage to his own ideas, Hallaj speaks in a language which fuses all horizons of time; the past, the present and the future. In one of the scenes in which the audience is "thrown" by Abdul Sabur into exploring the string of events in the flashback, Hallaj is discovered while he is holding a conversation with his Sufi friend, Shibli. The topic around which their dialogue revolves is whether man has a free will to act or, as in Heidegger's terms, one is "thrown" into the world without any choices and must strive for authenticity. Hallaj observes:

In such eyes as theirs, I see a glow  
Which means something-something-but I don't  
know what  
Words glow in their eyes: I am not sur what they  
mean  
Someties I think I read there:  
"Now you see me;  
But you are afraid to see me.  
God curse your hypocrycy."  
...  
Then tears may come to my eyes; or I may  
suffer(I ii 12)

Hallaj's narrative brings about the anguish feelings which he experiences upon seeing his fellow men in society suffering. Besides the fact that his

speech reflects how a past moment is called into the present, his description reveals how people are "thrown" into a mode of being which they have not chosen to live by. It should be clear that the purpose behind raising this topic in the first place comes from Hallaj's inability to live harmoniously in a world in which people's lives are being fashioned by "others". In reflecting upon how people's freedom is chained, Hallaj says, "and the chained prisoners, a mad guard stands over them/whip in hand... men and women enchained, forgetting the freedom which they lost" (I ii 13). It is worth highlighting how Hallaj describes freedom as something "lost", which, in turn, means that it was given but owing to the influential effect of the "others" in society, it has been lost. The previous lines by Hallaj manifest how people are born into a world of servitude which is dominated by "others", those others are the representatives of the oppressive regime. Thus, by the end of his speech, Hallaj tensely claims, "Listen Shibli!... how can I close my eyes to the world/and not wrong my heart" (I ii 13). In this manner, Hallaj's decision to react against the pervasiveness of evil in his society and his decision to abandon sophism comes as a result of the above context in which he memorizes the distressing feelings he experiences when he witnesses other people suffering in his community.

Even when Shibli attempts to remind him that sophism prohibits him from discussing worldly matters, Hallaj recalls another memory into the present in order to support his view that it is his duty to raise people's awareness and save them from the hegemonic practices of the authority. Therefore, he reminds Shibli:

Do you remember what Amru-l-makki told us when  
He bestowed on us the Robes of Order?  
He said: "My sons!  
True love  
Is the death of the lover  
So that he may live in the Beloved  
...  
I intend therefore to perfect my love of God

To lose my identity in His/.

...

You ask me what I intend to do?

I intend to go to the people

And tell them about God's will (I ii 22-3)

The above speech by Hallaj represents the perfect example of Heidegger's conception of a *Dasein* that possesses a sharp consciousness which determines its future choices relying on historical moments which are invited into the present. In the above passage, Hallaj recalls a specific incident from the past to the present, therefore, it can be said that his speech bears two different consciousness or *Daseins*, one which is deeply rooted in the past and another one which is seen now in the present moment he speaks the above speech. Moreover, his "being" in the past does not exist separately, rather it influences his present consciousness and "being". In this manner, his future claim that he intends to go to people and tell them to be like God acquires its strength from the previous lines in which he brings about a historical personal experience into the present moment. For Heidegger, Hallaj is the true expression of living authentically through employing a form of consciousness which freely binds different temporal elements into a single present moment.

The previous analysis shows how Hallaj has successfully experienced an ecstatic unity of time through which all horizons of time overlap. In supporting his view that it is his main role to help other people in society, Hallaj recalls the special meeting with their sufi tutor who told them that true love, in sophism, is the "death of the lover" in the "Beloved", namely to experience a state of unity with God. Relying on this sufi tenet, Hallaj is determined to make it a universal experience and tell people how they can experience absolute freedom in identifying themselves in relation to God. In fact, what I would like to argue for in the remaining few pages is that the manner through which Hallaj seeks people to experience a special unity with God represents a new temporal experience which severely affects people's perception of their *being-in-*

*the world.*

For Hallaj, God has created man free and thus, no one should be subjected to any form of authority. As a result, he declares to people that:

God wished His goodness to be evident, and His  
light to shine  
So from the breath of Omnipotence  
He fashioned a form of clay  
And breathed into it some of His emanation/  
He clothed it, and He ornamented it. His  
creation was Man  
Thus, to Him we are a mirror in which He  
contemplates  
(I ii 27)

Following Heidegger's perception of language as the house of being, Hallaj takes the initiative to change people's perception of not only themselves but also of the world. In fact, Heidegger's idea that language assumes the role of "inaugural naming" is best exemplified in the above passage. In a 1936 essay on the essence of the poetic language, Heidegger maintains that poetry does not reflect objects which exist in reality, rather objects in a poem come into being at the same moment the poet names the object. The inaugural naming in Hallaj's speech comes from the fact that he wants to express an idea which his interlocutors, the ordinary people of Baghdad, are not acquainted with. For those who are not familiar with mystic doctrines, like Hallaj's people, God is a transcendent Being who exists outside man's temporal and spatial spheres, but for mystics, like Hallaj, He is "immanent" in the world and man, like other beings, is a reflection of His Being (Semaan xviii). In this manner, Hallaj struggles to make people understand that their *being-in-the-world* is a reflection of God's *Being-in-the-world* and due to the fact that God is AlMighty Being Who is not subjected to any form of power, man should also experience the freedom of will which God bestowed upon.

To put it more clearly, Hallaj seeks to make his fellows identify

their mode of being with that of God's. This proposition is clearly manifested by Hallaj when he keeps repeating "God is Mighty/Be like Him", Abdul Sabur, I believe, through his Hallaj, has created a new form of the tragic hero who is neither patterned after the Aristotelian conception, which depicts a hero who is dominated by fate, nor the modern perspective which reflects the hero's weakness before some social or economical forces, Abdul Sabur's tragic hero is an individual who is fully aware of his freedom of will and thus, revolts against any form of force which attempts to break his humanity. Moreover, unlike the Greek tragic hero who struggles to escape from the destined curse of gods, Abdul Sabur' tragic hero knows very well that his fate is part of God's design and even strives to put God's will into effect (Kahashabah133). Thus in several scenes, Hallaj's speeches reflect that his decisions are made by God, for example in the prison he pleads to God to guide him, and once the Warden enters and tells him that today is his trial, he observes, "This is the best thing God has given me/ God has chosen/ God has chosen" (II ii 62).As a result, Hallaj wants people to experience a special unity with God through fusing their worldly temporal dimension with that of God. The only means to reach such state is through death.

Based on the above, Hallaj's death, which is seen in the opening scene of the play, can be considered Abdul Sabur's implicit message to the audience. The scene evokes death, but it is a death for the sake of reaching total emancipation from worldly shackles which, for Abdul Sabur, are meant to connote the influential behavior of "others" in society, in Heideggerian terms, represented by oppressive totalitarian regimes. The message entails that man must revolt against any sort of subjection that denies them freedom, even if it means to die. Death, for Abdul Sabur, is the ultimate expression of freedom.

### Notes

(1) All the extracts that have been quoted from *Mosafer Leland Al Ameera Tantz* rare translated by the researcher.

(2) This extract from Abdul Sabur's essay *Tagrebyfel Sher* is translated by the researcher

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