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burns and heals. The trivialities of daily life are rendered irrelevant when life ends, when God "wipes it all," eliminating physical life and its seemingly overwhelming challenges. This act also restores balance: the natural order is restored through humans being elevated to a spiritual plane, their existing difficulties eliminated.

The last lines suggest that this is spiritual knowledge already possessed by humans, and through spiritual practice, it can be reawakened. The speaker enjoys voicing the God's names, "His Names spoken softly/invoked passionately/ sear our consciousness" (Nawwab 30, 2012). The name of God, even when spoken softly, resonates deeply in the human psyche, as a soft pronouncement is received "passionately" and is "searing." For Nawwab, this is a reminder to individuals of their true nature and of life's purpose, realigning them away from the distractions of human existence. Similarly, "Can You Hear Them" echoes themes of creation and the need of all aspects of creation for their Creator. She begins by emphasizing the need to be mindful and make efforts to understand this need: "Can you listen with the inner ear/ to their pleading whispers/ their prayers/ praising the One and Only" (Nawwab 38, 2012). At this point, the speakers are not clear, but it is clear that the listening requires personal focus and effort. This designates that the speakers may not be loud or clear, as proposed by "whispers," but the "inner ear" also suggests that these "whispers" may not be audible at all. That the whispers are "pleading" means that the speakers wish to be heard, but that perhaps they are not. It may also mean how worshippers of "the One and Only" deliberately and indefatigably exerts efforts in order to be heard. Once they are heard, they are close to God.

In the next stanza, the reason that the speakers are not heard is made clear, as Nawwab writes, "Can you hear/ the leaves, roses, stones, woods/ mountains, rivers, clouds, and skies" (Nawwab 38, 2012). This is metaphorical and also mystical, as nobody can literally hear roses, and stones: they do not make sound. However, here using the mystic's perspective, Nawwab references their relationship to their Creator and the way that in their own manner, physical elements of existence seek out their Creator. As discussed, these elements are evidence of the existence of the spiritual realm, and they provide proof of God's existence. For the mystic, the complexities of the world and all it contains are a reflection of the spiritual world. A better understanding is to believe that God's presence is manifested in everything. Once a Sufi reaches the stage of "Knowing" God, things are perceived differently. In the Sufi Tradition, one transcendence to this state when a person reaches the stage of *Waly*, one is given the attributes of God: hearing, sight and power.

Nawwab clarifies this theme in the next and final stanza, writing: "His every living creature seeking His Love/ shedding tears of need/ till His Presence/ overflows the tributaries of every pulsing vein/ every living, pulsing cell/ every source of temporal existence/ with Elemental Serenity" (Nawwab 38, 2012). With the perspective of the mystic, she has imbued all creatures with the active desire for God's love, presenting this desire as an elemental need, one that causes distress until it is fulfilled.

Interestingly, union with God is again presented as the union of after death, as Nawwab describes the "[overflowing] the tributaries of every pulsing vein." In citing veins and cells, she is taking a scientific and modern perspective. From this perspective, one knows that if veins overflow, a creature will not continue to survive. As discussed, from a mystical perspective, death also represents rebirth and a union with the Creator; it is an occasion of joy and transcendence.

This final stanza then presents an image of death, but it also only means the end of "temporal existence." Thus, death is not the end of life, and it is in a celebratory spirit that the Creator's destruction of physical life is undertaken, as it permits the creatures who are physically destroyed to ascend and join their Creator on the spiritual plane, as they had aspired to do.

This viewpoint situates temporal existence as a form of constant torment or suffering due to the degree of yearning and unfulfilled need it involves. The end of this life is then truly to be celebrated, as it involves the returning of entities to their natural and intended states. This is, of course, difficult for humans to understand in this level of existence, as discussed, but Nawwab presents death as a true rebirth, a means of transcending a limited, temporal existence. It is through the end of physical life that all living beings are transformed.

Ultimately, Nawwab heavily draws on the tradition of Islamic mystic poetry to convey ideas central to Sufism into modern Islamic culture. The poet creates a worldview in which all of the physical existence is linked to the spiritual and is evidence of the existence of God. As such, all creatures and natural objects are limited in their physical form, but it is through the transition to the spiritual realm that they may transcend and know their true purpose and identities. It is this transitional point that provides a central focus in much of Nawwab's work. Additionally, the poet uses rich, vibrant language to transform description to the level of experience, imbuing typically static aspects of nature and existence with movement and dynamism. As a contemporary mystic poet, Nawwab not only exhorts her readers to faith, she uses her poetry as a persuasive device as well.

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rainbow of serenity/ and inhale the aroma of blossoming acceptance/ as the canvas of your soul/ explodes in radiant colors/ beyond our unseeing eyes" (Nawwab 29, 2012). "Scorched" ground is a ground that is dry and barren, possibly as the result of an arid climate or of disaster such as fire. Conversely, the fact that the figure being hailed is "rising" from it suggests death and rebirth. Bathing can be seen as preparation for the afterlife and for communion with the Creator. Similarly, the rainbow is often used to signify a path to the afterlife; and Nawwab's use of nature themes repeats in the "aroma" of "blessings."

Throughout "Canvas of the Souls", Nawwab reinscribes intangible items as concrete ones, with a rainbow becoming a bridge, acceptance becoming similar to flowers, and the soul becoming a canvas. This also echoes the way that though signs of God's existence are observed in the physical world and are sufficient evidence for believers, they are not concrete proof. Concrete proof is not necessary, but nonetheless, spiritual aspects are eternal and in the moment of death, as depicted by Nawwab, they become concrete.

In "Canvas of the Souls," death is presented as a moment of creation, in which the blank and unformed canvas is not only repurposed and designed, but "explodes" in "radiant colors." This vivid and dynamic imagery depicts a sort of ultimate coming into being, far beyond what the physical world can yield. All of one's perceived identity and purpose is rendered irrelevant in the moment of death, as this is also the moment of communion with the Creator and of ultimate reconnection with the source of all. It is in this moment and this realm that true existence occurs.

The last line, "beyond our unseeing eyes," speaks to the loss and sorrow individuals feel in response to the death of a loved one. The transformation occurring within death is not evident from the perspective of the physical realm, which is limited. Though believers may have some understanding, Nawwab suggests, they cannot properly apprehend the nature of the rebirth that occurs in the moment of death. The contrast between the radiant, vivid canvas that explodes and the eyes that are not able to see it underscores the degree to which those situated in physical existence are limited by this existence. Death is beyond human understanding, but it represents a joyous moment of completion.

Escape from the physical realm is also depicted in "The Plain of Radiance." Nawwab begins:

"The nightingale of knowledge ascends/ joined in flight across the first river, first ocean/ by flocks of doves of grace/ alighting on the reborn trees/ of lush certainty/ along the path of freedom" (Nawwab 30, 2012). Notably, birds are animals of flight, they are able to travel between realms, and they ideally represent qualities that are considered to exist across both realms, such as knowledge and peace. Water, also, is considered to represent the barrier between worlds, as well as the unconscious. Birds can ascend above this barrier and traverse it with ease. The trees are "reborn," existing in the spiritual realm, and they represent "lush certainty" to the believer, who must attempt to maintain faith and signs of God in the physical world.

In this flight, the birds travel over a path, which is the path also undertaken by spiritual followers. It is the "Path of freedom from ego, from greed/ from gossip, from hatred/ from named and unnamed evils" (Nawwab 30, 2012). These are all pitfalls of the material realm and human failings. However, when humans are their ideal and most spiritual selves, they no longer have these weak attributes. Interestingly, the "named and unnamed evils" suggest that though the faithful can name and be wary of certain, specific evils, evils exist which may or may not be identified or knowable. Evil is, Nawwab suggests, an inherent problem of the material world, but one that is not existent in the afterlife. Transcendence allows individuals to exceed human limitations and defeat all vices.

It is this iteration of the individual that is the highest ideal of what humanity can be. Nawwab writes, "As the self perks up/ expounds, expands/ in fascinated thankfulness/ brimming thankfulness/ for the revealed, radiant plain of glory." The self "perking up" suggests that this same self was beaten down or discouraged by the evils of human life in material existence. The self, or soul, gains form and size as it literally grows to be all that it can and should and contemplate the glory of God, "expounding" and "expanding." "Fascinated thankfulness" suggests that the self is both entranced by the transformation and by the new realm and is glad to exist in its most ideal form, the soul is so thankful that it is "brimming" with gratitude. The "revealed" plain underscores that spirituality is, to some degree, hidden in daily life and must be sought out. Contrariwise, in the afterlife, this glory is plain (Nawwab 30, 2012).

In "The Plain of Radiance," Nawwab underscores the idea of the spiritual realm as providing solace and soothing to the world-weary soul. This poem is in contrast to her works which seek to celebrate the spiritual within everyday life and to reassure readers of the existence of God. Here, the poet acknowledges the difficulties of worldly existence and the challenges that they present. Mystical poetry depends, to some extent, on physical existence and the difficulties of human experience, against which to base their musings on the spiritual.

This theme also resonates in "The Circle," though in a much subtler manner. Nawwab writes, "In vain we circle/ around the simple, the trivial/ forgetting in the maze/ that it is all a flicker in the candle of life" (Nawwab 30, 2012). She comments on the nature of humans to fixate on seemingly minor difficulties, which causes them to lose sight of larger scale issues, such as the meaning and purpose of existence. For devout Muslims, this purpose is reunion with the Creator. Nawwab uses the imagery of a "maze" because humans are often only able to see what is directly in front of them, growing confused or aiming to negotiate what appears to be a complex problem, not having the perspective to understand that it is a minor component of a larger puzzle.

The next lines show how this problem is remedied: "As the flames surge/ and the One, *as-Salam*/ wipes it all/restoring the balance" (Nawwab 30, 2012). Flames are typically affiliated with death and destruction, and so Nawwab invokes an image of destruction, of the end of life but it has a larger association with the flames of love that

through to conquered reason/ carrying forth the message, the *Amanah*/ the trusted messenger bore forth/ the ultimate of ultimates/in words beyond the ken/ unsurpassed eloquence/ mighty wisdom/ in savored, solid passages for mankind/ to live by and be lived" (Nawwab 20, 2012).The importance and significance of the words almost acquires a quality of hyperbole, as the message is "the ultimate of ultimates," the words are "beyond the ken," and their eloquence "unsurpassed." Nawwab makes it clear that these are not ordinary words, which may be surpassed. These words are, again, scripture, as their purpose is "to live by and be lived." Therefore, though it is the scriptural words that are identified as being the most important, traditional poetry and songs are also important and can also meaningfully convey spirituality. This is the highest purpose of words and life. However, it is history, and perhaps spirituality that gives birth to, that allows for the scriptures, songs, and poems to convey meaning.

While many of the poems, such as the previous ones, are ecstatic in their mood, Nawwab takes a tone of caution against spiritual complacency in the poem "Let's Not Forget." The poem begins "The cup overflows/ with the *barakat* of His Grace/ Let's not forget the next phase" (Nawwab 25, 2012). She invokes blessings in the first line, but instead of celebrating these blessings, the poet ends the stanza on a line of caution, noting that the distraction and fulfilment of abundant blessings can also result in a lack of desire to strive for more.

This striving is necessary to improve the state of the material world. Due to the abundance in the physical world, it is easy for religious followers to feel fulfilled and to consequently ignore the needs of others. Nawwab warns that this is a danger that must be guarded against. The poet writes, "The passions of his worshippers fill up the world/ strife, hunger, poverty/abound" (Nawwab 25, 2012). Though the passions fill the world, they cannot displace the evils of the world. This theme is continued in the next stanza, which reads, "Yet his signs supersede all/ with his Mercy and Light/ let's not forget the next phase" (Nawwab 25, 2012). Consequently, despite all of the negative occurrences in the world, positive signs of the Creator are more prominent. Nawwab repeats the last line of the first stanza in the last line of the third stanza, creating a refrain and drawing attention to the message. It is the "next phase" which is of the most importance, and which must be a rationale for everything that humans do.

However, it is important not to forfeit happiness in spirituality to focus on the problems of the material world. Rather, some element of wanting is necessary to retain investment in the physical realm and to aspire for the spiritual. Nawwab writes, "Without hope, dreams, yearnings/ how can we strive for the/ Final and Sought After Meeting?" (Nawwab 25, 2012). Hope, dreams, and yearnings all have in common an element of desire, of something that is needed to fulfil them. Therefore, it is crucial that worshippers not be completely satisfied with the physical realm, as this may prevent them from focusing on the problems of the material realm and also may keep them from aspiring to the spiritual realm. While Nawwab exalts the aspects of creation that appear in the world, she also cautions against being completely satisfied with these aspects. Ideally, within Sufi tradition, one communes with God through apprehension of nature, but one also aspires to the spiritual realm. This theme is evident in "Let's Not Forget." As the "Final and Sought After Meeting" ends the stanza and the poem, it provides emphasis to the reader, creating a direction for the poem that mimics the direction that the reader is expected to aspire to.

Nevertheless, Nawwab does not expect that the spiritual follower will wait with ultimate patience, as he or she is human. She addresses the theme of spiritual yearning and the desire for greater fulfilment in "His Signs." She begins with "Unsung tunes crowd in/ competing for deliverance/ threads of need twine and pull up/ the hinge of open wants" (Nawwab 25, 2012). Here, the songs are not yet manifested: they are "unsung." This could also be a reference to the fact that the songs are not yet known and celebrated, that they go without acknowledgement. That the songs are competing for deliverance shows that there are so many songs of worship or praise to be sung, yet there exist limited worshippers and time in which to sing them. Interestingly, need and want are presented as thread and a hinge. It is need that can temporarily bind and address want, which is non-essential. Still, this metaphor shows the intensity of want and the impact that it can have on loyal religious adherents who are eager for communion with God.

This challenge is created, according to Nawwab, through adherents' awareness of God's presence through signs in the material world, paired with the expectation that they will wait with patience for communion with God. She writes, "yet when will deliverance ascend/ as the subtle signs of His Presence/ flow through layers of being" (Nawwab 25, 2012). This question, underlying the way that God can be perceived throughout the physical world, creates a tension. The adherent can observe that God is real, yet he or she does not know when deliverance will ascend, when the promised communion will occur.

The more evident the presence of God, the more the desire for communion grows, as observed in the next lines: "and His Signs attest in clear concrete manifestations/ driving us with yearnings/ to enter the Hall of the Blessed/ to simply catch a glimmer/ and humbly pay honor and homage/ to His Essential Essence" (Nawwab 25, 2012).This implies that the relationship with God as it exists in this realm is not the direct relationship that worshippers may wish. Instead, worshippers must be satisfied seeing signs of God, rather than of his presence, and they must worship in ways that are not directly received. Religious adherents may so wish to see the Divine that this takes the form of a "yearning," to the point where they would be satisfied merely to "catch a glimmer" of God. The last line, pertaining to "His Essential Essence," explains the nature of this yearning: for the faithful Muslim, God is as essential as food or air. Though the need for God's presence cannot be completely fulfilled in this realm, adherence to Islam is a promise of later heavenly reunion.

The titular poem "Canvas of the Souls" addresses the theme of spiritual rebirth, exploring death as a means of exceeding the physical realm. The poetess writes, "Rising up from the scorched ground/ rise up, rise up/ bathe yourself/ in the raindrops of blessings/ step onto the

when they are done by rote or mimicry and without sincerity. It is the spirit and intention of worship that provides communion with God.

Nawwab further develops this idea of sincerity and its place in worship in the next stanza, writing: "The Beloved's love/the Great One's mercy/the spiritual bond/are out of the equation/we lost the core" (Nawwab 18, 2012). In this stanza, Nawwab implies that active engagement is crucial to maintaining a relationship with God. Love, mercy, and connectedness are all lost through routine attention to prayer and worship that does not truly engage spiritual life. Interestingly, the author writes of an "equation," suggesting that the spiritual relationship is an equation of sorts, and that it must be reciprocal to continue. This is very different from views of an Almighty that suggests an unconditionally loving entity; a positive relationship with the creator must be actively maintained. The final line of "we lost the core" suggests that this is the central theme, or "core" of the poem: Nawwab is concerned with the mystic loss of spiritual communion with the Creator.

The poetess next develops the role of Sufism in maintaining Islamic practice in a meaningful way. She writes, "Who savors the fruit/ and leaves the heart, core" (Nawwab 18, 2012). Savoring fruit is a sensual and physical experience, which is juxtaposed against the soulless prayers undertaken as a sense of obligation or propriety. As in "The Two Worlds Celebrate," worship may be undertaken through physical, sensory, and ordinary experiences, provided that they are undertaken with a sense of wonder and authenticity. Nawwab shows that spirituality is not undertaken in proscribed ways and in limited contexts, but through meaningful and accurate engagement with the world, which is a matter of choice and intention, not routine and expectation. The second line of this brief stanza, "who leaves the heart, core" suggests that this is the same person "savor[ing] the fruit." This imagery evokes eating the flesh of a fruit and leaving its core, with the seeds, behind. Within this imagery, the fruit is enjoyed, providing sustenance, and the seed provides life and continuance. "Leaving the core," suggests leaving behind, as one does not typically consume a core when eating fruit; however, transcendently "leaving" it also suggests preserving something which is valuable so that it may continue. This suggests that ordinary enjoyment and pleasure within the world of creation is a more meaningful and may be new form of worship than that which is proscribed.

This idea is furthered in the last stanza of the poem: "Reviving the essence/ we embrace peace/ and are devotees of Higher Love" (Nawwab 18, 2012). It is this stanza that most shows Nawwab's view of mysticism, that it can reclaim the spirituality lost in perfunctory religious performances. Though the core has been lost, it is revived through the connection to material enjoyment depicted in "savor[ing] the fruit." It is the role of mystics to then reclaim lost spirituality through contemplation and enjoyment of the ordinary; additionally, through mystic poetry and song, mystics can encourage such awareness in other Muslims, helping them to remain spiritually aware. In this stanza, mysticism is juxtaposed against socially validated religious practices; the poet sets the two at odds and as being mutually exclusive. Ending with the reference to "Higher Love" echoes the earlier references to a relationship with the Divine, which must be actively maintained. It is therefore the role of mysticism to maintain this relationship through the appreciation of the everyday. While one might consider the eating of fruit to be mundane and the performance of religious rituals to be sacred, Nawwab inverts these characteristics to reassure the relationship between spirituality and orthodox religion.

Nonetheless, Nawwab also positions orthodox religion and spirituality as being mutually important and beneficial. "The Revered Word" begins with, "We reside in the land of words and letters/ where letters burst forth with every drop of water/ poured forth with floods of rain" (Nawwab 20, 2012). The reference to "residing" draws forth the idea of a home or a realm, where one lives. As in Nawwab's other poems, there is reference to a land, yet rather than being a land rich with fruit and lush nature, it is a land constructed of textual elements. These changes, in the next line, where letters are married to the image of water and made dynamic: "bursting forth." The letters intensify as the water does, bringing text and nature together. In this image, Nawwab also presents the words as water, showing that they are as essential to life and correlated to nature as is water.

The parallels between words and nature continue in the next stanza. Nawwab writes: "where letters were birthed with the birthing of humanity/ as every word became an island to live on/ every word became a wave racing along the coasts/a haven in the scorching heat/ a balm under shielding palm trees" (Nawwab 20, 2012). Letters are anthropomorphized as they are born as humans are, and at a parallel time. Interestingly, the words come into being and develop alongside humans and their history, yet they are separate. The words also become a part of the land and part of the water, as well as a sanctuary. This is the role of scripture in the world: to provide spiritual nourishment and sanctuary from the rigors of daily existence. Ideally, the words of sacred texts and the practices they espouse are paired with the mysticism found in contemplating creation.

Nawwab then correlates the essential role of mystic song and poetry with its role in the Sufi tradition. "As uncharted history unfolded its pages/ in reams of forgotten ages/ and the world of words rose, amassed, coalesced/ through poems and celebrated songs/perfuming the very air/ with revered resonance" (Nawwab 20, 2012). History, here, is something that appears in pages, as opposed to something that is understood first-hand, through events. However, when history—something that now has agency—unfolds its pages, the world of words moves, upward. This interplay between text and dynamic imagery shows the text as something that is not static, but alive. The "reams" of paper are from "forgotten ages," but they now come to life. It is through the rising of words, which occurs as the result of the sentience the words have gained, that poems and songs take flight. The poems and songs also bear scent, further typing them to the natural world. It is history, perhaps as represented through the text, that allows for the spreading of spirituality through the poems and songs.

The significance of the words is amplified in the last stanza: "As the blade of the mighty, magnificent pen/ sliced

2007). It is also through symbols that one achieves unity and oneness with the Divine. Because symbols have both a physical component in the material world and the meaning ascribed to them, which does not have actual form in the physical world, the apprehension of symbols represents the juncture between realms. They are thus most ideal for representing the perception of the Divine in the material world, due to these dual components (Erzen 73, 2007).

Moreover, Erzen notes, the principle of love and "understanding with the heart" are central to Islamic mystical poetry. It is through admiration and love of God and his creation that humans feel a sense of unity and understanding of creation. Within Islamic artistic tradition, it is through love that wisdom and understanding are attained. Additionally, the individual apprehending creation and all of creation are part of God, as well. Erzen writes that "three principles-of change, of uncertainty, of love-point to a conceptual world as constructed of opposites that work in conjunction with each other: sacred and profane, humans and God, lover and beloved, male and female. Meaning is created in their conjunction, accessible through love, rendering us similar to what we try to understand" (Erzen 73, 2007). These three themes of the major principles are prominent throughout Islamic mystic poetry and are central to the work of Islamic mystic poets.

It is within this tradition that the work of Nimah Ismail Nawwab fits. A female Muslim mystic poet, Nawwab is a Saudi national who writes in English. Her work has focused on the role of women within Islam and Muslim-dominant cultures, with a focus on the mystic tradition. It stands as a representation of "authenticity of traditions, values, and culture of Muslim women" (Alghadeer 17, 2013). *Canvas of Souls* draws on Sufi tradition in a modern time, representing the contemporary direction of Sufi poetry. It lures heavily on existing themes and imagery used in Islamic mystic poetry, calligraphy and art.

For instance, the poem "The Two Worlds Celebrate" exemplifies Nawwab's focus on the natural world and the spiritual realm underlying it. The poem addresses the connection between the realms of the material and the spiritual, as well as the ways the presence of God appears throughout creation. The speaker describes various aspects of the physical realm that are a part of God's blessings: for example, she invokes "birds of peace" and "birds of prey," as well as "roses, jasmine, lotuses" (Nawwab 17, 2012). The figures of the birds and the flowers present exotic imagery, almost like a paradise. She goes on to describe "grains of sand, rock, boulders/rivers and oceans." These items are all proof of the existence of the Divine, as they "silently, stridently mark your presence" (Nawwab 17, 2012). In the worldview presented, there is no meaningful distinction between the spiritual and the physical; rather, they inform each other. The very air and breath is infused with the Divine. As discussed, this duality between worlds is an important component of traditional Sufi poetic works, and it is echoed in the work of Nawwab.

However, within the world presented in "The Two Worlds Celebrate", there is some current nebulous between the physical and the spiritual worlds, even as "their quiet prayers in Your honor/rise through the very air we breathe." Nawwab writes, "Yet the two worlds are divided/in a temporary holding period/Till the Final Joining/takes hold in full magnitude" (Nawwab 17, 2012). Therefore, the realms are both joined and infused with each other, but they are also separate, as it is in the afterlife that the worlds will become one. Until then, one can observe spiritual aspects in the physical world, and one can plan for, and aspire toward, the physical realm. For the mystic, contemplation of the physical world supports the existence of an afterlife and both worlds conjure up the amalgamation with God.

The mystic imagery of a paradise proliferates through the last stanza, in which the humans are completely saturated with the love of God. For example, the last stanza reads, "With every heartbeat, soulbeat/We celebrate your Power and Love/Unity and Love, Love and Mercy embrace us/and we drink from the wine of your creations/in blissful blessed peace" (Nawwab 17, 2012). Physicality is invoked through the beating of a heart, which is paralleled with the beating of a soul, the poet draws a parallel between the heart and soul through aural and visual images. Celebration is then not something that is deliberately undertaken, but which is infused through the doings of everyday life activities, through ordinary contemplation. Likewise, "unity," "love" and "mercy" are anthropomorphized, as they are capitalized as proper names, and depicted embracing "us," presumably all of humanity. The act of drinking wine can be understood to be metaphorically different; as the drinking of wine here is pleasurable and can be intoxicating, and so is the beholding of creation and its reflection of divinity. The ideal espoused in the poem is revealed in its last sentence: "peace," which is both "blissful" and "blessed." Presumably, peace is the natural state of humans, as it comes along with contemplating creation. It is also an ideal state of mind and soul that ascend as the result of the contemplation of nature. Though the joining of the spiritual and physical realms into one has not yet occurred, peace can still be attained through the spiritual aspect found throughout nature and throughout the physical world.

However, Nawwab can also be read to be somewhat critical of mainstream religious practices. For instance, in the poem "Lost and Found?" the poet decries insincere worship as that which is performed by rote and which is not imbued with a sense of authentic meaning. The poet writes, "We lost the core/worship diligently/with minute, particular movements/wrapping touted diction/extolling the mundane without spirit/we lost the core" (Nawwab 18, 2012). That "we lost the core" brackets the series of actions described suggests that the actions have resulted in this spiritual loss, and that the loss is of importance. A "core," is an essential or foundational aspect, which religious practices as described throughout the stanza suggest that the "core" of religious worship that has been lost. The description in this stanza evokes precision and care, as the actors "worship diligently" with "minute, particular movements." This suggests that they apply great care to their prayer and how it is performed; however, it is just that: a performance, as their "wrapping touted diction" results in "extolling the mundane without spirit." Therefore, Nawwab writes of the sense of mysticism that is essential to spirituality. Though everyday life may be infused with spirituality and worship, as suggested in "The Two Worlds Celebrate," so, too, may activities of worship be stripped of their spiritual aspect

Introduction:

Islamic mystic poetry has for centuries expressed themes and understandings common to spiritual experience, particularly as it impacts daily life (Renard xi, 2004). This specific poetic tradition draws on religion, and it has also developed its own tradition as a poetic genre. Though the genre has long existed in Muslim-dominant countries, it perseveres into the modern age. One of the more prominent Islamic mystic poets is Nimah Ismail Nawwab, a contemporary Saudi female poet. Nawwab writes of the roles of women in society, but she also focuses on traditional Islamic themes of mysticism throughout her work.

This article seeks to examine the history of Islamic mystic poetry to discuss Nawwab's work, particularly her acclaimed 2012 book of poetry, *Canvas of Souls*. In discussing the Islamic mystic tradition through the work of scholars such as Annemarie Schimmel and Khalil Semaan, among others, the positioning of Nawwab in this tradition will be clarified. Specifically, this article is interested in the application of common themes of Islamic mysticism in the work of Nawwab that exemplify the Sufi perspective on Islamic philosophy. Close reading of selected poems from *Canvas of Souls* will be undertaken to illustrate how, as a modern Islamic mystic poet, Nawwab positions her work both within Islamic ideals and within mysticism.

It is necessary to consider the history of the Islamic mystical tradition to properly understand Nawwab's approach to it. Islamic mysticism has an extremely long tradition, which is also evident in its literature. This mysticism originates in Sufism, which also has an extensive poetic tradition dating centuries back. Semaan defines mysticism as efforts to join humans with the Absolute, but not in traditional, orthodox ways (518, 1979). Whereas prayer and other conventional means of communing with the Divine takes an indirect form, mysticism takes the direct form of communion with the Almighty, through apprehension of creation (Semaan 518, 1979). In 1975, Annemarie Schimmel, one of the leading experts in the field, described mysticism as that which "contains something mysterious, not to be reached by ordinary means or by intellectual effort" (Schimmel 3, 1975). Ordinary analysis is not appropriate for truly understanding mysticism. It is for this reason, according to Schimmel, that writing about, or analysing mysticism presents difficulties. Paradoxically, this may also be the reason that mysticism has been of great interest to scholars. Nonetheless, this mysterious aspect of spirituality is a common component in many religions, and it relies on that which is beyond the sensual and the rational to create profound spiritual experiences and emotionally move participants (Schimmel 5, 1975). He also adds, it is love of the Divine which both elevates mysticism above asceticism and separates it (Schimmel 5, 1975). Whereas mainstream or orthodox religion can be understood as proscribed practice and codes of a religion, mysticism is personal and inexplicable (Knysh 7, 1999). Within the mysticism of Islamic Sufism, both respects for God and closeness to God are emphasized to adherents (Knysh 7, 1999).

It is this history that has informed Islamic mysticism throughout time, creating a tradition that has endured into modern culture. This is evident in the poetry of Islamic mysticism, which typically exemplifies themes of the spiritual in everyday life, and which expresses both reverence and a feeling of unity for the Absolute through the contemplation of everyday life and ordinary surroundings. However, Schimmel notes, a division existed between the scholars (typically of law) and the mystic poets, with the latter preferring immediate understanding, as opposed to knowledge gained by poring over books and ideas (Jamal 8, 2009). This creates some challenge in the study of texts rooted in Islamic mysticism. Despite this, abundant studies on the topic have proliferated.

Another issue posed in the study of Islamic mysticism, in addition to the immediate and perceptual understanding preferred by those writing the poetry, is the cultural and historical specificity of the spirituality of mysticism (Nicholson 12, 2007). For example, De Certeau and Brammer point out that perceptions of mysticism and spirituality are always rooted in, and influenced by, culture and history (11, 1992). It is important to consider, according to these authors, that specifically, particular regions in the Islamic world will tend to regard concepts in unique ways, which may be understood differently elsewhere. This is one of the elements that makes the cross-cultural or cross-historical study of literature challenging and sometimes problematic, but specifically in regard to concepts as complex as mysticism, which is not rooted in abstraction and explanation (De Certeau 11, 1992). The understanding of a concept will always be colored by a cultural understanding, which may be very different from a work's culture of origin. Mysticism does not easily lend itself to study, let alone cross-cultural study.

We should also mention the dissent that exists between the tradition of Sufism and many Muslims, despite the lengthy history of Sufism within Muslim practice. For instance, Seyed-Gohrab writes that "Islamic mysticism offers a person the possibility of uniting with the divine without any mediation...the mystic goal is to attain Union with the Divine, after which the mystic, purified from all his human attributes and qualities, can dwell with the immaterial Beloved eternally" (438, 2011). However, the development of the individual into a perfect being, one that can reach the level of the Almighty, is a blasphemous concept to many orthodox Muslims. While Sufism has long existed within Islam, a tension persists between orthodox practices and mysticism, and this results in some Muslims rejecting an important element of what Sufis think of popular religious texts. Sufism has played a major role in Islamic art, particularly poetry. A vast tradition of mystic poetry exists, and within many Eastern cultures, it is through understanding and knowing tradition that one is able to attain originality (Seyed-Gohrab 438, 2011).

In other words, it is expected that one will thoroughly engage with existing traditional texts or pieces and work in their style before aspiring to create anything unique. Furthermore, symbols acquire particular importance in Sufi; as Erzen describes, "it is through symbols that one is awakened; it is through symbols that one is transformed; and it is through symbols that one is expressive" (Erzen 71,

نعمة إسماعيل نواب: شعر صوفي معاصر

منيرة بنت بدر المهاشير

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الكلمات المفتاحية: الشعر الصوفي الإسلامي، التصوف، الشعراء السعوديون، نعمة نواب.

ملخص البحث: يجسد ديوان الشاعرة السعودية نعمة إسماعيل نواب الموضوعات التقليدية للشعر الصوفي الإسلامي رغم بروزها كشاعرة معاصرة، وتعتمد الشاعرة على أفكار بارزة في الصوفية لفحص الروحانية في المكونات المادية للحياة اليومية: طبيعة وخصائص العالم المادي، التي تُهيئ وفق التقليد الصوفي الإسلامي وفي ديوان الشاعرة الأخير لاستشعار الوجود الإلهي وضرورة التعايش السلمي مع مكونات هذا الكون، وتدمج في شعرها تشبيهات ثرية للطبيعة مع العقيدة الإسلامية لخلق روح متجذرة في كلٍّ من المادية والروحية. تدرس هذه المقالة الكيفية التي تبرز فيها الموضوعات الأساسية في التقاليد الصوفية، مثل: التعالي والتحول. ومن خلال قراءة مجموعة مختارة من القصائد فإنَّ الشاعرة تؤصِّل لوجود الفطرة الإيمانية وتدعو من خلال التفكر للإيمان بالله. مما لا شك فيه أنَّ الشاعرة نعمة نواب التي تعدُّ من الشعراء السعوديين المعاصرين، قد وظَّفت شعرها كوسيلة روحية مقنعة للإشارة لموروث الشعر الصوفي الإسلامي.

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Nimah Ismail Nawwab: A Contemporary Mystic Poetry

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Abstract: The work of female Saudi Arabian poet Nimah Ismail Nawwab exemplifies traditional themes of Islamic mystical poetry, though she is a contemporary author. Throughout her poetry, Nawwab draws on ideas prominent in Sufism to examine the spiritual in ordinary components of daily life. Nature and features of the physical world are - in the Islamic mystic tradition and in Nawwab's work- proof of the existence of God and natural coexistence. The poet, photographer, pairs lush nature imagery with Islamic belief to create work rooted in both the physical and the spiritual. This article examines how themes central to the Sufi tradition, such as transcendence and transformation, are featured in Nawwab's work. Through close reading of her poetry, it is seen that she both reaffirms the faith of readers and exhorts them to believing in God. Nawwab then uses her work as a spiritual persuasive device providing a contemporary example of the rich legacy of Islamic mystical poetry.