

Interpreting Meaning Across Worlds: A Comparative Study of Al-Qushayri's Sufi Hermeneutics and Peirce's Semiotic Philosophy

Boudia Mhamed

Moulay Taher University, Saida, Algeria
mhamed.boudia@univ-saida.dz, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6083-4734>

Makhlouf Abdelkader

² Nour Bachir University Center, Elbayadh, Algeria
a.makhlouf@cu-elbayadh.dz, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6898-5975>

Received date: 21.01.2025; Accepted date: 11.03.2025; Publication date: 03.04.2025
doi: 10.56334/sei/8.1.43

Abstract:

This article explores the fascinating intersection among Sufi mysticism and semiotic theory through an exhaustive comparative study of the interpretive practices and approaches adopted by Al-Qushayri and Peirce. In an examination of their methods, it reveals how interpretation provides the foundation on which we build our knowledge on textual material and highlights its significance above all else when it comes to Arab-Islamic cultural traditions. The hermeneutic thought of Al-Qushayri, which aims to uncover deep spiritual meanings buried in texts, is set side by side with the semiotic approach to the world that understands language to be an active system of constantly evolving signs. In spite of differences in the theory that underpins them, both models enlighten us on the complex nature of interpretation and the many layers to meanings that are formed through interaction with texts. In conclusion, this work reflects on human beings' ongoing quest to make sense and suggests the possibility of integrating spirituality and semiotics together to shed greater insight on the deep richness that underlies human life and thus open the way towards deeper human understanding.

Keywords: Hermeneutics, semiotics, mysticism, esotericism, sign, text.

¹ **CC BY 4.0.** © The Author(s). Publisher: IMCRA. Authors expressly acknowledge the authorship rights of their works and grant the journal the first publication right under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License International CC-BY, which allows the published work to be freely distributed to others, provided that the original authors are cited and the work is published in this journal.

Citation. Mhamed B., Makhlouf A.. (2025). Interpreting Meaning Across Worlds: A Comparative Study of Al-Qushayri's Sufi Hermeneutics and Peirce's Semiotic Philosophy. *Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems*, 8(2), 672-685. doi: 10.56352/sei/8.1.43. <https://imcra-az.org/archive/356-science-education-and-innovations-in-the-context-of-modern-problems-issue-1-volvi-2025.html>

Introduction

Interpretation is an intrinsic part of philosophy and includes the effort to make sense of and assign significance to the world around us. Interpretation is like an intricate puzzle with separate pieces consisting of various philosophical thought and interpretation orientations. An interesting intersection in this area of study is found between Sufi mysticism and semiotic theory. Sufism is based primarily on spirituality and seeking deep truths and stands in counterpoint to semiotic theory's emphasis on breaking open the study of signs and symbols to disclose meanings. Both fields provide specialized viewpoints under which interpretation can be studied.

The present article intends to examine and contrast interpretive methods employed by two major thinkers: Al-Qushayri from the Sufi school and Peirce who made major contributions to semiotics. Comparing and contrasting their approaches to interpreting texts will provide insight on the variety of ways in which meanings are derived.

Of specific interest is Peirce's concept of an infinite chain of signs and the way this compels us to think about the complexity of interpretation and the multivalence of meanings in texts. Sufism adds one more dimension by highlighting inner knowledge and inner insight as part and parcel of interpreting texts. In exploring differences among these viewpoints, we work to unravel the complexity of interpretation and its consequences for textual meanings.

Ancient Arabic translations of the Holy Quran have drawn out varied opinions on the matter, most notable among them being with respect to dualities like apparent and subconscious, arbiter and akin, revelation and interpretation, transmission and mind, and novelty and know-how. The intrinsic transparency of the text, combined with the richness of interpretive symbols and signs, has given rise to varied hermeneutic strategies. Our aim is to contrast the hermeneutic philosophies of Sufi and semiotic traditions and to see how each interprets text and how far each reaches its meaning. Text ontology is marked by multiplicity in structure and level and by reading as an interactive activity incorporating these multifaceted dimensions into an integrated whole. In examining the research problem—the ways in which the interpretive methods of Al-Qushayri and Peirce differ and meet within the nexuses of textual interpretation—our work will provide insight into the larger conversation on interpretation, semiotics, and Sufism and the complex connections among spirituality, symbolism, and making-meaning.

1. The Significance of Interpretation in Arab-Islamic Culture: Al-Qushayri's Contribution to Ash'ari Hermeneutics and Qur'anic Exegesis

The Holy Quran occupies a pivotal role in Arab-Islamic society, and its comprehension is indispensable to people within this civilization. Interpretation, originally meant to be used in religious contexts, has huge significance. Prophet Muhammad, blessings and peace be on him, prayed to Allah to provide Abdullah bin Abbas with insight into the interpretation of the Quran and

indicated its importance by mentioning, "'Oh Allah, give him understanding of religion and teach him interpretation.'" In accordance with Al-Mustadrak on the Two Sahihs (Al-Mustadrak 'Ala As-Sahihayn - Al-Hakim), as stated by Ibn Abbas and based on Ibn Abbas citing: "The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, was in Maimunah's house. She conducted an ablution for him and Maimunah stated to him: 'Abdullah bin Abbas conducted an ablution on you.' Then the Prophet spoke: 'Oh Allah, give him understanding of religion and teach him interpretation.' Al-Hakim confirmed this narration with agreement by Al-Dhahabi, Al-Iraqi, Al-Busiri and Al-Albani (Al-Hâkim, 405H)."

Ibn Abbas was one of the earliest to interpret the Holy Quran at the time of the noble companions. His pupils were Mujahid, Ataa, and Tawus, who were distinguished interpreters in the subsequent generation "the followers". Subsequent interpreters drew on their work. Worth mentioning is that interpretation, at least in the outset, sought to glean meanings conforming to the Quran and Sunnah and scholarly views.

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, an Islamic scholar, believed that interpretation takes place when evidence supports a possibility, especially in instances whereby the surface meaning is ambiguous. He believed that any interpretation is away from the truth, something that is supported by metaphorical interpretations by scholars like Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya (1997). Al-Ghazali discussed extensively the clash among reason and tradition regarding interpretation. Some people like the Mu'tazilah support interpretations away from the literal meaning, something reiterated by subsequent scholars. They believe that hermeneutics are against the initial intent and require evidence (Al-Ghazali, 1992).

Defining "hermeneutics" precisely is not easy. It had its beginning in Western civilization and made its way into Arab culture. It is grounded in an intellectual system that informs its comprehension and application within cultural systems.

Following the teachings of Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd (d. 595 AH) defines hermeneutics as the exercise by which one brings about the transformation of the meaning of a word from literal to metaphorical in keeping with Arabic linguistic practice. In his opinion, the aim is to move the denotation of a word away from its literal or overt sense to its metaphorical one. This analytical approach alludes to the general practice among Arabic people to use similes, analogues, and other figures to describe ideas in accordance with their comparisons or affinities with others and thus extend the reach of figurative language (Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya, 1997).

Al-Qushayri, whose full name is given as Abdul Karim bin Hawazin bin Abdul Malik bin Talha bin Muhammad Al-Qushayri and who is popularly known as Abu Al-Qasim, is well known to have been one among the major Sufi leaders. Having been born in 377 AH and having died in 465 AH, he was an advocate of the school of thought belonging to the Ash'ari school and one among the major contributors to Sufi tradition. Al-Qushayri went deep into the practice of hermeneutes with special

focus on his interpretations in the chapter on attributes and his magnum opus "Lata'if al-Isharat" on the exegesis of the Quran. In making distinctions clearly between erudite and lay interpretations of religious scriptures, he takes the verse "Take four birds" (Al-Baqarah, verse 260) and symbolically identifies these birds with qualities like ornamentation and sustenance. Among the birds mentioned are the peacock with its imposing presence, the wise and erudite crow, the proud and showy rooster, and the elegant duck. As proposed by Al-Qushayri in his interpretation of this verse on the Quran, one who considers the symbolism of these birds has experiences with deep revelations on the splendor of nature ornamentation, the sagacity of creation, the wonder of being, and the never-ending search for sustenance.

The hermeneutic process is defined by moving beyond the surface level of a text to uncover its deeper intended meaning (Al-Bajuri, 2002). It is an earnest interaction with the text that comes to acknowledge its inner reality might not be the same as its literal meaning. Careful study and investigation, the hermeneut strives to identify the underlying message intended by the writer. This effort is akin to an act of granting permission to the text to say more than its superficial nature allows, with the interpreter modestly submitting to an elevated comprehension and conceding that final knowledge resides with the Divinity.

The hermeneut's role proceeds beyond interpreting words to unlocking their spiritual significance through an attitude imbued with deference to the unknowable knowledge of the Divinity. Interpretation is also an area of hermeneutics in which the surface meaning may go beyond to something more profound and establish itself within the teachings of the Book and the Sunnah (Jarjani, n.d.). Nevertheless, the most concise and fullest definition of hermeneutics to our current knowledge is presented by foundational scholar Ibn al-Subqi in his book "Jam' al-Jawāmi'". "Hermeneutics takes into account the literal meaning rather than the inferred; if confirmed on evidence, it is considered true and if considered conjectural, rendered invalid or unsubstantiated, and therefore not to be interpreted" (Al-Subki, n.d.).

2. Al-Qushayri's Contribution to Ash'ari Hermeneutics and Quranic Interpretation

The Ash'aris interprets according to presumptions about alternative meanings rather than just one single usual one. In the verse in the Quran "(They forgot God and He forgot them)" (Surat Al-Tawbah, verse 67), the "forgetting" can either mean punishment or loss of knowledge among Arabs. But more traditionally and usually it will mean punishment. In this verse then, therefore, they attribute the move away from the usual interpretation to the less usual one regarding loss of knowledge since it will be incorrect to attribute forgetfulness to God. They hold that instead it means abandonment or distance.

The Ash'aris, however, believe that articulating a word based on its looks alone is not trustworthy without evidence. They are of the opinion that if solid evidence establishes an occurrence impossible, then deviating from the word's appearance is the right interpretation. They

refer to this divergence as an act of misinterpreting it only when there is no evidence and not even a conjecture to provide its justification. They believe it to be misleading to stray away from the appearance of a word without any just cause. Fundamentalists criticize this way of approach, especially with similar verses, when it sways away from literal meanings to concealed meanings. It is an approach based on context, practice, and the intention of the speaker, which may sometimes be derived from the word itself or through supporting clues. Suppose a person says, I saw a lamp, but it wasn't the object he referred to when he spoke about a "prostrating lamp." In the first one, he meant the object that is illuminated by the term "lamp," whereas in the second one, it referred to the devotee person based on the word "prostrating."

Based on the interpretation given by Al-Qushayri to the Almighty's statement in Surah Al-A'raf (7:33), regarding immoral deeds, Allah says, 'My Lord has only forbidden immoral deeds, those of them that are out in the open and those that are hidden.' In this context then, jealousy manifests itself in two ways: first, the jealousy of the Truth, the blessings be His, towards His servant, whereby the servant does not attribute his actions to creation alone and thus keeps himself away from envying others; and second, the servant's jealousy on the side of the Truth, whereby the servant keeps all actions and intentions purely on the side of the Truth alone, the Most Exalted One. Therefore, this jealousy will never be against God Almighty but against keeping to His principles alone. Jealousy against God Almighty denotes ignorance and can lead one to stray from religion. Jealousy on God's side means to put His rights first and to see to it that all actions are purely on His service alone.

The scholars belonging to the Ash'arites, such as Al-Qushayri, did not abuse the interpretation right. They rather imposed conditions and checks on its acceptance. The main ones are:

1. The Ash'aris believe that texts should be understood based on their literal meaning, which doesn't change unless absolutely necessary. Before interpreting differently, there must be strong evidence proving that understanding the text literally is impossible.

2. The Holy Quran should be interpreted by keeping in view its plain and well-known meanings when it was revealed. Avoid interpreting its verses in abstruse or contradicting ways.

3. In order to comprehend something properly, one should be able to say it in a form that suits its intended significance. We cannot therefore distort the word of the Quran so that it takes an unreasonable meaning. In doing this, interpreters should have a proper understanding of Arabic and its regulations.

4. Interpret keeping in mind the context to know what the writer meant to say. Don't make the text say something it wasn't intended to say.

5. We agree that an interpretation found to be incompatible with settled legal principles is invalid. Inconsistency can emerge when an interpretation is incompatible with religious principles, with Sharia rules or with common sense and linguistic practice. This view is widely accepted by Ash'ari Imams. As an example, Al-Qushayri believed that any interpretation inconsistent with the Quran or the Sunnah is not valid (Al-Qushayri, 2001).

6. The individual who performs hermeneutics should be qualified. They should be morally and scientifically sound and an authority on Arabic language and techniques and know the principles of Sharia.

Interpretation should only be made with an absolute need, like in the protection of property. Otherwise, adherence to the Ahl al-Hadith school of thought is recommended, which promotes leaving the interpretation of doubtful texts to Allah alone (Al-Bajuri, 2002). However, it should be emphasized that influential Sufi thinkers like Ibn Arabi, Nabulsi, and Abu Hamed made it perfectly explicit that their comprehension of the Qur'anic text does not negate its apparent significance. They rather adopt the nuances and patterns in the language. They don't make use of their interpretations to guide action like some other faiths do.

3. Understanding Meanings with Semiotics, Al-Qushayri, and Sufism

The theory of signs has been developed since the beginning of the 1900s. While Anglo-Saxon scholars used to support one branch termed semiotics, the majority used semiology in Europe. The two are differentiated by the facts that semiology is viewed as an overarching theory that includes the philosophy of signs, and semiotics is viewed as an applied approach to examining human texts, discourses, and activities by means of deconstruction, synthesis, and interpretation. The applied aspect of semiology is what semiotics is mostly referred to as (Hamdawi, 2005).

William James (1842-1910), an American psychologist and friend and colleague of Peirce, used the term "experience" to refer to the mystical spiritual path in his book "The Varieties of Religious Experience." Other researchers in the area have used this term ever since. James outlined four major characteristics of this mystic experience (Zaddiq, 2008).

1-Describing the experiment is difficult when we attempt to do so in an exact scientific fashion. Standard vocabulary usually does not cut it. In order to fully comprehend it, you must try it yourself – describing it like you are in it and not just on the outside looking in.

2- It is to comprehend facts even when those facts are poetic or emotional.

3- A brief, sudden outburst of inspiration.

4- They may feel hesitant when an individual attempts it, as if something above them is controlling them.

Since Sufism makes this distinction in writing into two categories, i.e., non-Sufic writing and Sufi writing, non-Sufic writing is defined as controlled by the writer and deliberate and secular in nature, and Sufi writing is identified as unconscious and above ordinary limits. Sufi writing is thought to come directly from the Divinity to reach the illiterate people too. Ibn Arabi has defined this practice as the Divine dispensing lessons directly into the heart without instructions (Ibn Arabi, 1972).

Al-Qushayri, in his work, offers an in-depth exposition to the verse "Indeed, the Most Gracious is firmly established on the Throne" (Quran 20:5), highlighting the omnipresence of God's knowledge. His argument is that God's omniscience infuses uniformly into all that exists and thus makes spatial proximity or distance irrelevant when it comes to God's comprehension. In doing so, applying spatial confinement, point of origin, or dependency on God is making unnecessary assumptions about the Godhead. Al-Qushayri highlights that describing God to any particular point or containment or point of origin would restrict God's boundless nature and therefore reduce its transcendent character (Al-Risala, 9).

Peirce's view is one that transcends semiotics being merely tools to use to analyze texts or build analytical structures; rather, he takes it to be basic elements constituting reality itself to the extent that semiotics are necessary to perceive reality itself. His treatment of logic is the logical procedure itself and identifies it with semiotics, the study and interpretation of signs and symbols to communicate. The "formal" or "quasi-necessary" rules from observed patterns and not absolute are what make us abstract general principles from particular instances to ascertain how signs work despite the vulnerability of our comprehension to error by reason of having to make do with partial observation and interpretations.

In this view, Peirce contends that logic essentially revolves around understanding the workings of signs and symbols, acknowledging its reliance on current observations and interpretations, which are subject to evolution with further learning:

LOGIC, in its general sense, is, as I believe I have shown only another name for semiotic, the quasi-necessary, or formal, doctrine of signs. By describing the doctrine as "quasinecessary," or formal, I mean that we observe the characters of such signs as we know, and from such an observation, by a process which I will not object to naming Abstraction, we are led to statements, eminently fallible, and therefore in one sense by no means necessary, as to what must be the characters of all signs used by a "scientific" intelligence, that is to say, by an intelligence capable of learning by experience. (Peirce, 1902)

Peirce conceptualizes the world as abundant with signs, interconnected within an extensive and intricate web. He perceives this interconnectedness as an ongoing process, where signs continuously reference one another, giving rise to a dynamic system. Peirce posits that this process

is perpetual, asserting, "A sequence of referrals that lose their impact as soon as they become integrated into human behavior" (Krade, 2005), thus fostering a continuous cycle of signs that permeates all aspects of existence.

In his discussion of interpretive issues, Peirce starts from the idea that hermeneutics and its various forms represent modern versions of ancient philosophical and epistemological questions. He takes readers on a journey through history, mythology, philosophy, and logic to uncover the origins of interpretation methods used then and now. He highlights two cases where interpretation reaches its peak: one where interpretation is guided by rules and boundaries, creating an intricate web of references, and another where interpretation knows no boundaries, leading to a plethora of overlapping references without restriction. Peirce argues that while finite interpretation is confined by limits and defined by its conclusions, infinite interpretation, on the other hand, lacks purpose and allows for endless connections without a definitive endpoint. However, he warns that embracing infinite interpretation risks undermining the foundational principles of Western civilization, as it suggests that all ideas are equally valid, even if they contradict each other, and that interpretations can lead to absurd conclusions.

Umberto Eco's hermeneutics lectures offer insightful information about the topic, which he explains as an interactive process with texts to interpret the world and produce new textual products. Hermeneutics transcends interpretation for Eco; it is a living relationship with texts to uncover layers of meanings and meanings. A good example of this concept exists in Eco's application of using the solar system explained by Newton's laws as a form of hermeneutics. Eco's understanding is one that emphasizes the multi-faceted aspect of interpretation, integrating elements such as linguistic analysis, historical context, and the uncovering of implied meanings. In his book "Interpretation and Overinterpretation," Eco (1992) advances this all-encompassing strategy, characterizing interpretation as the art of solving texts, demystifying their signifying modes, uncovering underlying intentions, and understanding their broader contextual frames.

Eco (1980) suggests that a text is an open universe in which the reader is able to find infinite connections, inviting the readers to investigate them and find connections beyond the surface sense. To Eco, "Books are not made to be believed, but to be subjected to inquiry. When we consider a book, we mustn't ask ourselves what it says but what it means." (as quoted in Barthes, 1967, pp. 146-148). This emphasizes the importance of questioning and interpretation when reading literary works. According to him, readers must know that each line can carry submeanings in order to understand a text correctly.

Instead of just stating things outright, words in a text often imply much more. The joy of reading comes from uncovering these hidden messages, realizing that texts can convey everything

except what the writer explicitly states. Eco warns against ending interpretation too soon, as true understanding comes from grasping the text's secrets, which often lie in what is left unsaid.

Both Peirce and Eco hold a similar view on semiotics, or the study of symbols and signs. Peirce felt that signs are not hard and fixed in what they signify; rather, they are fluid and open to interpretation. In the same way that Eco calls on readers to enter into texts, Peirce's semiotics implies that signs in texts are infinitely interpretive. Both scholars emphasize the importance of breaking through the surface to reach meanings beneath, highlighting how communication and interpretation are interactive and dynamic processes.

French philosopher Roland Barthes (1967) discusses the concepts "death of the author" and the "birth of the reader" in the sense that the greater significance the reader gives, the less conventional role the author performs (Barthes, 1967). This allows for various interpretations of a text but also raises questions regarding the author's impact on interpretation. When does interpretation take place? Is it being done during writing, after finishing, or does the writer not have any control at all, and is it entirely in the reader's hands? Critics analyzing a text find it helpful to inquire whether the writer knows because the writer's knowledge is explained in terms of interpretations of the text, which highlights the disparity between what the writers intends and what the text means.

Peirce delves into the concept of signs, which encompass various elements such as tangible, sensory, abstract, and human aspects. He posits that all signs, as per his perspective, invariably point to other signs, thus creating a self-contained world of signs. This notion prompts an inquiry into methods for escaping this enclosed system. Peirce advocates for an examination of the text's internal structure, emphasizing the analysis of its constituent elements, reconstruction of these elements, and a focus on form rather than the author's intent or external context. This method advocates for the utilization of intertextuality to discern textual connections, scrutinize the interaction among texts, ascertain textual origins, and manage external influences within the text itself (Hamdawi, 2005).

In the semiotic approach, we analyze three key elements of a text: what's on the surface, what's in the back, and how it all connects. The surface is where we discuss things like titles, icons, and margins, and how the text is divided. This includes looking at where things are placed on the page and how they're organized. We also consider time. When does the text take place? Is it before, during, or after certain events? This helps us understand the context better. And there is the plot itself. We separate it into three: the beginning, the middle, and the end. This helps us to better envision how the story flows. We also notice who's involved. Who are the heroes? What do they have to do with the story? This helps us see how the plot thickens.

Style considerations are paramount in the examination of text. These are language usage, tone, and writing style, all of which have a heavy impact on the overall effect of the text. Attention

should also be paid to the visual appearance of the text on the page, such as sentence length, paragraphing, and punctuation, all of which come together to create its visual shape. Furthermore, an examination of the subject matter and themes that are being discussed in the text would be required in order to understand its overall message. Finally, an examination of the form and meaning of the text involves the recognition of recurring themes and symbols in order to make sense of their significance (Greimas, 1976).

4. Exploring Meaning and Truth In Peircean Semiotics and Sufi Hermeneutics

Sufism distinguishes itself from various schools of thought, such as jurists, interpreters, modernizers, and philosophers, owing to fundamental disparities in their goals and foundational perspectives (Zaddiq, 2008). Their differences extend beyond occasional references to interpretation, measurement, and opinion to the core absence of reliance on textual authority or its literal meanings. At the heart of Sufism lies esoteric knowledge, diverging from conventional and doctrinal interpretations of texts. Instead, Sufis prioritize direct spiritual experience and intuitive derivation of judgments from sacred texts through self-assessment. They place significant trust in personal intuition, discernment, and inner illumination, often referred to as "openness" or "revelations" within their tradition.

They are not bound by the constraints of conventional authority, either preceding or succeeding them. Instead, the very essence of the text may cloak itself in layers of profound significance, as Sufism tirelessly pursues truth in its myriad interpretations, transcending the mere words and lexicons. It disregards the superficial adornments of textual scales, delving instead into its profound depths and nuances.

While recognizing that traditional scholars often confined themselves to the literal interpretation of texts or adapted them to the mundane realities of everyday life, Sufism acknowledges a deeper, esoteric layer within Sharia law. While some esotericists claimed that a single verse could yield sixty thousand interpretations (Suyuti, n.d.), many Sufis, apart from the extremes among them, embraced a belief in both the apparent and hidden dimensions of scripture. The apparent meaning, accessible through conventional exegesis, contrasts with the hidden, known only to God and those blessed with divine revelation. This perspective suggests that Sufi interpretation does not aim solely for a manifestable meaning within a specific context but rather beckons towards a transformative 'habit' of conduct, facilitating the unveiling of the soul's righteousness amidst profound emotional states.

In semiotics, they believe that language serves a bigger purpose than just expressing the thoughts of an individual. It doesn't merely tag things; it also extends our knowledge of the world, inventing new concepts outside of nature. When one writes or speaks, they're not merely imparting information; they're also drawing on a shared vocabulary of words. That means words aren't fixed; they're subject to the user and what they're thinking about. Hermeneutics, a part of semiotics, attempts to discover underlying meanings over surface descriptions. It looks for hidden layers of

understanding that go beyond straightforward interpretations. It's finding connections between language and idea that aren't immediately obvious, like metaphors, symbols, and other forms of imaginative representation.

In Peirce's theory of semiotics, it seems to encompass elements of semantic, communicative, and representational semiotics simultaneously. According to this framework, Peirce categorized evidence into three components that aren't isolated in their functions; rather, they interact with one another.

In Sufi hermeneutics, meaning is set free from usual contexts. It's about breaking words free from their usual meanings. This helps uncover the mystical self beyond what we see or understand in everyday life. So, Sufis create their own language, different from the usual one. Their way of living, talking, and even small actions are all part of this. It's a way to reach deep inspiration, absorbing everything into one truth. They say, "When everything disappears, only the truth remains."

So, Sufism is a lot like hermeneutics, which is all about understanding contexts. It's about getting to the core of what things mean, sort of like what early structuralists talked about when they said meaning comes to an end. This is like mastering the essence of the divine, from which everything else comes. When mystics interpret things, they're uncovering truths, not just getting ready to find them like semiotics does. Semiotics focuses on the process, but mysticism is all about diving deep into the essence of things.

The mystic aimed to understand the text deeply to find purity in everything - truth, goodness, honesty, and beauty. This meant seeking absolute positivity while being free from harmful influences in the soul and surroundings. To do this, the mystic confronted the negativity in nature and celebrated the light, which represents truth, clarity, serenity, purity, and clear vision in all situations.

However, this light isn't easily grasped. It requires digging through layers of surface meanings to uncover its essence - a truth that's exclusive to the Creator and beyond human reach. Essentially, the mystic's interpretation is necessary because surface meanings often fall short of capturing the true nature of existence. Those who can't directly perceive the world can't truly claim to possess knowledge of it.

Peirce introduced the idea of semiosis, a process where signs are created, shared, and understood. He believed semiosis was essential for creating meaning. Semiosis involves three key elements: the thing being represented (mathoul), the subject being represented (subject), and the concept that helps us understand it (interpreted). These elements work together to create and sustain meaning.

In simpler terms, creating a sign involves a careful process. Each step builds on the last, and any disruption could harm the whole system. This process, known as interpretation, is crucial in Peirce's idea of semiotics. In this maze of interpretation, meaning flows freely, without limits or

boundaries. Once interpretation is done, the original point becomes irrelevant, and any sign can connect to any other. As we move forward, previous signs fade away, and the joy comes from the journey between them. There's no goal in this journey except the pleasure it brings. Each new connection forms a new context, and the process keeps going, endlessly. While it may seem disconnected from reality, this semiotic pattern actually drives action to change the world. And every action, in turn, becomes a sign of a new beginning in the process.

Conclusion

The comparative examination of Sufi mysticism and semiotic theory, as studied through the interpretive techniques of Al-Qushayri and Peirce, gives profound insights into the nature of interpretation and its implications for understanding texts and the world at large. Al-Qushayri's emphasis on uncovering inner spiritual senses within texts is placed in contrast with Peirce's view of language as an active system of signs. Despite their differences, both perspectives lead to an appreciation of interpretation for its richness as well as for the plurality of meaning in textual involvement.

From the earliest Arabic interpretations of the Holy Quran to Ash'ari theory on interpretation, the research draws attention to the importance of interpretation in Arab-Islamic society and how it developed throughout the Islamic tradition. Likewise, semiotic theory, concerned with signs and symbols in texts, presents a complementary viewpoint of interpretation, as it highlights the fluidity of language and meaning-making.

The intersection of these findings is that interpretation is not a static activity but an energetic process of entering into texts, a sensitive scrutiny, contextual awareness, and an openness to accepting many levels of meaning. Sufi hermeneutics and semiotic theory alike illuminate the dynamism of human experience and the boundless nature of interpretation, uniting spirituality and linguistics in seeking greater understanding.

In conclusion, the comparative study between Sufi mysticism and semiotic theory enhances our comprehension of the richness of interpretation and its implications for interpretation studies. Through the works of Al-Qushayri and Peirce, we can create new lines of comprehension that illuminate the richness of human experience and the different ways in which meaning is constructed and interpreted in different cultural and intellectual traditions.

References

1. Al-Bajuri, I. (2002). *Tuhfat al-Murid 'ala Jawharat al-Tawhid* [The novice's gift on the jewel of monotheism]. Dar Al-Salam for Printing, Publishing, and Distribution.
2. Ad-Damashqi, H. (2003). *At-Tafseel Fi Al-Farq Bayna At-Tafsir Wal-Ta'weel* [Detailed distinction between interpretation and explanation]. *Al-Ahmedia Journal*, 15, 40.

3. Al-Ghazali, A. H. (1992). *Al-Mustasfa fi 'Ilm al-Usul* [The Mustasfa in the Science of Principles] (Vol. 1). Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah.
4. Al-Hâkim. (405h). *Al-Mustadrak 'Ala As-Sahihayn* [The Mustadrak upon the Two Authentic Books]. (9 volumes). Edited by Al-Risalah Al-Alamiyyah.
5. Al-Qushayri, A. (2001). *Al-Risalah al-Qushayriyah* [Al-Qushayri's Message]. Dar Sader.
6. Al-Subki, T. (n.d.). *Jam'u al-Jawami'* [The collection of summaries]. Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah.
7. Barthes, R. (1967). *The Death of the Author*. (S. Heath, Trans.). Aspen, 5-6, 146-148.
8. Eco, U. (1992). *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*. Cambridge University Press.
9. Hamdawi, J. (2005). *Al-Atijahat al-Simiyutiyyah* [Semiotic Trends]. [Electronic Version].
10. Harb, A. (1995). *Al-Ta'wil wal-Haqiqah, (Qira'at Ta'wiliyah fi al-Thaqafah al-Arabiyyah)*. [Interpretation and truth (Interpretive readings in Arab culture)] (2nd ed.). Dar Al-Tanweer.
11. Ibn Arabi. (1972). *Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyah* [The Meccan Revelations] (Vol. 1). General Egyptian Book Authority.
12. Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya. (1997). *Mukhtasar al-Sawa'iq al-Mursalat 'ala al-Jahmiyya al-Mu'attila* [The Summary of Thunderbolts Sent on the Disabled Jahmiyya] (Vol. 1). Dar Al-Fikr.
13. Ibrahim, A., Ghanimi, S., & Ali, A. (1996). *Ma'rifat al-Akhar, Madkhal ila al-Manahij al-Naqdiyyah al-Hadithah* [Knowing the Other: An Introduction to Modern Critical Approaches]. Arab Cultural Center.
14. Zaddiq, S. (2008). *Truth and Mirage: A Reading of the Sufi Dimension in Adonis as a Reference and Practice*. Dar Al Arabiyya Lil Ulum Publishers, Publications of Al-Ikhtilaf.
15. 'Ali b. Muḥammad al-Jurjānī. (1994). *Kitāb al-Ta'rīfāt*. [Dictionary of Definitions]. In M. Gloton (Trans., Ed.), *Kitāb al-Ta'rīfāt* (Preface by P. Lory). Tehran, Iran: Presses universitaires d'Iran.
16. Krade, S. (2005). *Al-Simayatiyat wal-Ta'wil: Mudakhil li-Saymiyat S. Peirce* [Semiotics and Interpretation: An Introduction to Peirce's Semiotics]. Arab Cultural Center.
17. Greimas, A. J. (1976). *Maupassant, La sémiotique du texte : exercices pratiques*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1976, p/19.
18. Peirce, C. S. (1902). *Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs*. In *Philosophical Writings* (pp. 98-119). Dover Publications.

19. Suyuti, J. (2009). Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Quran [Perfection in the Sciences of the Quran] (Vol. 4). [Electronic Version]. Retrieved from B078NHF39Q

Authors' biographies

Mhamed Boudia, Associate Professor at Moulay Taher Saida University's Department of Arabic Language. He obtained his Bachelor's degree in Arabic Literature from the University of Sania, Oran, in 1999. Subsequently, he pursued his academic journey and earned a Master's degree in Popular Literature from Abi Bakr Belkaid University, Tlemcen, in 2011. He received his PhD in Popular Literature from the University of Tlemcen in 2015. His PhD thesis, titled "The Semiotics of Algerian Popular Poetry," examined the rich tapestry of Algerian popular poetry through a semiotic lense.

Abdelkader Makhoulf, Associate Professor at Nour El Bachir University Center-El Bayadh, Algeria, received his PhD in 'English Discourse Studies and Applied Linguistics' in 2019 from Sidi Bel abbes University, Algeria. He taught English for Training PhD students of Civil engineering, Telecommunications, and Arabic disciplines. He also taught a number of English modules and English language for BA and Master Students: English, Economics and Managing companies at Saida University, Algeria.

© 2025 The Author(s). This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license