

## FOR THE LOVE OF THE BELOVED

### PETER MURPHY'S CREATIVE USE OF SUFI TROPES

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#### ABSTRACT

Rock artist Peter Murphy (Bauhaus, Dali's Car, solo) has drawn from Sufism in his lyrics since 1986. Throughout his career Murphy has been open about this but no one has analysed his lyrics before. This article illustrates and discusses how tropes from Sufi genres, such as poetry, hymns and tales, are reused and reformulated in the form of post-punk rock lyrics. Sufi tropes, combined with Murphy's dramatic rock songs, empower him as a writer and enable him to create unusual, ambiguous, and dramatic lyrics. The songs rarely propagate Sufism; they are not Sufi songs and, indeed, are communicating primarily with an audience that cares little about his Sufi attachment. Nonetheless, by exposing the underlying Sufi frame his lyrics becomes more comprehensible. Murphy's creatively carves out space for Sufism in a rock sub-culture otherwise know to flirt with nihilism. The article is accompanied by a Spotify playlist called "For the Love of the Beloved."<sup>1</sup>

#### KEYWORDS

Peter Murphy – Sufism – goth music – Bauhaus – lyrics

#### PETER MURPHY: GODFATHER OF GOTH AND DEVOUT SUFI

For more than three decades, Peter Murphy – iconic rock legend, solo artist, and singer of cult band Bauhaus – has written highly original lyrics saturated with Sufi tropes. In this case, tropes refer to recurrent motifs in the songs. Sufism is a spiritual tradition originating within Islam with the ultimate goal of teaching people how to align their souls with "the Truth" (with a capital T): that is, with God. Murphy has lived in Turkey since 1992. He is also known as the grand- or godfather of goth, a title he is proud

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1. <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1Bhm5kicHL6GF9ZHzzpYYy?si=dd359a18e2f74f93>

of, if somewhat ironic about (Louder than war, web, 2023). Goth music is generally associated with nihilism not with devote Sufism, but as we will see below, Murphy has managed to infuse Sufism into his creative oeuvre yet retaining credibility and status as a alternative rock artist.

Murphy is open about his attachment to Sufism in interviews and on stage as when greeting the audience with “*as-salam alaykum*” on the Bauhaus live album *Gotham* (2002) or when adding “Fuck the Son and Holy Ghost! One god, not three” when initiating “Nerves” on the live album *Peter Murphy Live in London* (2019). His Sufi attachment is even noted on Wikipedia. Yet, I have failed to find scholarly articles addressing this influence on his work. The most insightful comments are found on fan site indigoeyes.info and in some CD liner notes to *Bareboned and Sacred* and *Peter Murphy, 5 albums* by journalist Matt Hanson, who lives in Istanbul, writes on Sufism, among other things, and seems to have known Murphy since 2016. This article explores and interprets Murphy’s lyrics with reference to his biography and to Sufi tropes. The main material consists of the original versions of Murphy’s nine solo studio albums released between 1986–2014. All quoted lyrics are acknowledged to be the intellectual property of Peter Murphy if not otherwise indicated.

Sufism is the collective term used for a wide variety of spiritual practices, poetry and intellectual speculations that originate within Islam. Sufism has wielded, and wields, enormous influence across large areas of the globe (Raudvere and Stenberg 2009). Turkish Islam has been permeated by Sufism for a long time, although Sufis have a troubled relation with the Turkish state. In 1925, Sufi meetings were banned by government decree, forcing Sufi *tekkes* (lodges) to redefine themselves as folkloric troupes or dance companies. Tolerance has fluctuated over time, and currently Sufi meetings are openly held all over Turkey while still remaining banned (Feldman 2022). Sufi poetry, on the other hand, has a high culture status in Turkey. It continues to inspire work by film makers, novelists, performance artists and, not least, musicians. This means that quite a lot of Sufi-inspired art and speculation happens outside of the Sufi orders. Some Sufi inspired artists are not attached to Islam but, when scratching the surface, contacts with orders and Islam often appear. Sufism is, of course, not the only theme in Murphy’s many songs, but it is recurrent and, I would claim, very often part of the lyrics in one way or other. It is the Sufi elements and their embeddedness in rock music that fascinate me and that will be explored in this article.

Murphy frequently writes in a consciously ambiguous way, which is spelt out in the song “Things to Remember” from *Lion* (2014).

Thing to remember  
 when writing figures of speech and sound  
 The power of poetry comes from the ability to defy logic  
 Defy logic often  
 Use a metaphor and

tell us that your lover is the sky.  
When you do that  
We won't believe you,  
We won't believe you  
Because saying so makes no sense  
But we'll see a meaning.

The remaining lyrics celebrate the power and blessing of prayer. But even this part touches on Sufism with its allusion to God (the lover in the sky) and the prediction that it will not be understood, although it will make sense for the last “we” of the text. Further, remembrance of God (*dhikr*) is key among Sufis. The title may draw upon that association. I argue that the power of Murphy’s lyrics is connected with their ambiguity. With this initial declaration of poetic strategy, Murphy dares us to try to understand, a challenge I hereby accept.

First, I discuss the interpretation of lyrics theoretically. Next, Murphy’s biography is sketched with the help of the many interviews available with him in different media channels.<sup>2</sup> Then the article primarily analyses the lyrics from his, to date, nine solo albums and their ninety-one songs to demonstrate how Murphy recurrently and creatively merges references to Sufi tropes with his work. I start by introducing one very advanced example, then discuss how Murphy developed his relation to Sufism in his lyrics over time.<sup>3</sup> Finally, I discuss the originality of his use of these tropes – not least in his choice of words to express the tropes – and the unique expression that results when combining them with the music.

I have strived to corroborate my interpretations by finding parallels and grounding my readings in interviews, Murphy’s webpage, material on Sufism and the particular circles in which Murphy has moved in Turkey. I have practiced caution when drawing from journalism, as a great deal of rock journalism is rather formulaic. It is further quite clear from interviews that Murphy enjoys confounding journalists. That said, the foundation of the interpretations below rests on my background as a scholar of Islamic studies with a longstanding professional interest in Sufism and is part of my current research on creativity and Islam among European artists (Otterbeck 2021, 2022, 2023). It is also founded on my lifelong engagement in and love of rock music.

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2. I have sifted through some fifty interviews with Murphy.

3. I have also looked at the twelve official music videos of Murphy and listen and looked at many live recordings and video clips of live performances to find clues or cues where Murphy expands on his attachment to Sufism, but to little avail.

### APPROACHING THE LYRICS

Above, I used the concept “Sufi tropes”, by which I mean motifs often embedded in metaphors and symbols that in their turn function as metonyms for the tropes for the benefit of the initiated. Sufi tropes are present in the celebrated Sufi poetry and prose tradition seen as high literature in any Muslim setting and at times outside of them. Jalal ud-din Rumi (d. 1273), for example, has an appeal reaching far beyond Muslim circles. Sufi tropes are also present in the *ilahi* tradition (the Turkish Sufi hymns, see Feldman 2022) and in Sufi lore, which has fantastic narratives about past and present Sufi masters and their ability to transcend time and space, but also their uproarious behaviour when challenging local tradition and normativity (Baldick 1989). Sufi poetry and *ilahi* chants are not, in terms of form, far apart, and frequently, as in the oeuvre of Yunus Emre (d. 1328), there is no meaningful difference between poetry and lyrics. There is an abundance of possible Sufi metaphors and tropes. But there are also those that are frequently recurring that form a core which I will focus on. Coincidentally, rock music lyrics are filled with metaphors overlapping with some of the evergreen themes of Sufism like love, pain, loss, longing, and transformation of the self. This provide Murphy with the possibility of expressing himself overtly as a Sufi yet being understood as writing opaque, cool sounding lyrics about love or longing.

Evidently, religious themes in rock music are not unusual. but the music generally draws from Christian or Jewish traditions. There is anti-Muslim rock in Muslim majority countries (Otterbeck et al. 2018) and some Muslim rock musicians express a positive relation to Islam like Indonesian dangdut rock singer and guitarist Rhoma Irama, but more often specifically to Sufism like Pakistani Junoon (LeVine and Otterbeck 2023). Murphy is neither the first UK musician to find Islam or Sufism and make use of it in his art. Cat Stevens/Yusuf Islam or Richard Thompson springs to mind, yet, as we shall see, Murphy’s contribution is highly original in its way of processing Sufi tropes into ambiguous lyrics.

In much rock music, the idea of authenticity in lyrics is taken for granted, and artists are often associated with the “I” of the narratives—in many cases, but far from always, with good reason (Brackett 2000). In this article I argue, at the risk of being off the mark, that Murphy writes surprisingly bluntly about his understanding and experience of Sufism. I strive to give priority to the expressed thoughts of Peter Murphy about his lyrics, to curb my interpreter’s enthusiasm. Ideally, my meaning making can be tested against his ambitions or should at least be acceptable. An example when I have restrained my analysis because of biographical details is when analyzing the song “I Spit Roses” from *Ninth* (2011). Lyrics made me think of the connection between roses and both Muhammad and the fragrance of the divine so prominent in Ottoman iconography. Thus, his poetic endeavour would be to spit roses at his audience, that is, spread the holy. However, the verses were hard to interpret as support for this. I found an interview with Murphy who claimed the phrase originated in a specific situation where he attempted

to defuse a quarrel with the rest of Bauhaus by filling his mouth with roses and, instead of making comments, spitting out roses. Bauhaus bass player David J. remarks that it happened in the studio with the band in 2006 (Exberliner 2011; Haskins 2014). It became apparent that the lyrics are a poetic rendering of the conflict. What about insisting on both interpretations? My academic eagerness to find meaning is no guarantee for its being anything other than a possible interpretation so I restrained myself.

### TRAVELLING TOWARDS THE FLAME

Peter Murphy was born in 1957 into an Irish Catholic working-class family in Northampton in England. He describes his closest family as having “a very wonderful, sophisticated orientation toward the spiritual aspect [of religion], rather than just the formal, dogmatic thing” (Westworld 2013). In interviews, Murphy portrays life in Northampton as dreary and in a way frightening, something to escape from. Sartorial style, appearance and drama became part of his first way of fleeing the trap of everyday work. Murphy recurrently claims that some of that drama was picked up from Catholic mass, which fascinated him as a youth.

In 1979, he emerged on the music scene as singer in the newly formed band Bauhaus and quickly gained a cult following. After four albums filled with theatrical, poetic, expressionist, beautiful but also funny and tongue-in-cheek music and lyrics, Bauhaus parted company in 1983 and Murphy explored new possibilities that included starting the group Dali’s Car with former Japan bass player Mick Karn (d. 2011).<sup>4</sup> In 1986, Murphy embarked on a solo career that has established him as an artist of high integrity, but in no way a top-selling act. Yet, among people interested in alternative rock, he is highly respected.

Since his youth, Murphy has had a great interest in the spiritual, and an intellectual curiosity in the history of religions and he has made references to personal spiritual development and searches throughout his career. Some of the early lyrics on Bauhaus’ first album, *In the Flat Field* (1980), draw on spiritual themes, like the references to Catholic ideas in “Stigmata Martyr”. However, tastes and moral limits change over time. According to Bauhaus member David J. Haskins (\*)Haskins2014, in later times, when playing some of the early Bauhaus songs, Murphy has modified lyrics he considers against his faith, for example, changing “the pangs of dark delight” to “no more pangs of dark delight” to signal his distance to the hedonism implied.<sup>5</sup>

During the mid-1980s, Murphy found and started to embrace Sufism or, as he would rather put it, the Truth that people in the West tend to call Sufism (Westworld 2013).

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4. At the time, only one album was issued, in 1984, but years later a second attempt was made resulting in a five-track EP (2012).

5. Clearly audible on the Bauhaus live album *Gotham* (2002).

Some lyrics on the self-titled album *Dali's Car* (1984), directly address spiritual strivings. For example, the songs “His Box” and “The Judgement is the Mirror” are about the unwillingness, or inability, to understand a spiritual path. The latter song might contain the first direct reference to Sufism in Murphy’s lyrics. It could hint at the Sufi metaphor of polishing the heart to mirror the divine; thus, the ability to open the heart to the divine is the basis of the judgement. However, Sufis are far from alone in using the mirror as a metaphor (Shaw 2019: Chapter 5).

After regularly spending time in Turkey, Murphy moved to Ankara in 1992 with his partner, dancer and choreographer Beyhan Murphy, whom he met in 1982. Beyhan Murphy took up the role of the first director and choreographer of the dance company Modern Dans Topluluğu, formed in 1992. Since 2017, she has been Artistic Director of the Istanbul State Ballet. Murphy continually produces new material and tours with his solo act or with reunion versions of Bauhaus.

In Ankara, Murphy has been associated with the environment around the Sufi Ahmet Kayhan Dede (1898–1998),<sup>6</sup> and later with an avid proponent of Kayhan Dede called Faruk Dilaver (b. 1946) for whom he has expressed admiration on the Peter Murphy webpage (Murphy 2021). Dede means grandfather in Turkish but is here an honorific title given to a Sufi leader, a Sheikh. Murphy has also affiliated himself with open-minded, Sufi-inclusive environments such as Beshara<sup>7</sup> and the Chisholme Institute<sup>8</sup> (about the institutes, see Randall 2016: Chapter 5). On his webpages, he describes himself as a “close friend” (Murphy 2020b).

### HANG UP THE PHONE AND COME ON OVER

The first example is from Murphy’s latest full-length album with new material. It presents the complexity of his Sufi-infused lyrics when they have developed in full. “Hang Up” from *Lion* (2014) is shaped by a harsh electronic soundscape with crisp, distorted guitars created by Martin “Youth” Glover, Killing Joke bass player and experienced producer, and Murphy’s energetic singing, oscillating between soft, screamed and distorted. The song is forceful, rich in sounds and gives a rather chaotic first impression. The first verse is intriguing:

Come on over  
Said the tripper to the Gauth  
Ul-Azam was the Gauth  
Cotton Wool Dede

6. After the Dede’s demise, a foundation in Ahmet Kayhan Dede’s name was started. It runs a mosque just outside of Ankara, overseen by Diyanet, where the Dede is buried.

7. <https://beshara.org/>

8. <https://www.chisholme.org/>

Master of Masters  
 I tell you Dede  
 From the divers near  
 Down in deep  
 I clocked all of you  
 To a place so fond  
 Where there even angels are allowed  
 Where even angels are allowed  
 Hagia Sophia!

The first phrase, “come on over”, also ends the song after the lyrics encourage the listener (or the singer) to hang up the phone. The idea of crossing is common Sufi imagery. There is a distance between humans and God. It can be bridged, but doing so requires changed perspectives, preferably with the help of a Dede.

In *The Teachings of a Perfect Master*, Henry Bayman relates the following story about Ahmet Kayhan Dede, the master promoted by Bayman: “A brother...experimented with psychedelic drugs years ago. Whereupon the Master told him: ‘You picked up the phone, you got the message. Now hang up the phone and come here’” (Bayman 2012: 9). Bayman, who met Kayhan Dede in 1978 (Bayman 2003), is one of the main promoters of the Dede in English (Bayman, n.d.). As Bayman and Murphy know each other—Murphy is thanked by Bayman in the preface of three of his books<sup>9</sup> it is likely that Murphy’s inspiration for the lyrics originates in something they both consider their Dede had said.

Murphy consciously makes it tricky for an interpreter. “The tripper” (the man from the story above or a general seeker?) addresses “the Gauth” (the guide), which is a metaphor for a Sufi Dede. Then, Murphy declares that “Ul-Azam” (the greatest) was “the Gauth” which is a reference to *ghawth ul-azam* (Arabic), a phrase meaning the greatest helper, an honorific title for the utmost of spiritual leaders. It is particularly attributed to the Sufi Abdul Qadir Jilani (d. 1166). According to most of his followers, Ahmet Kayhan Dede has a lineage that connects him back to Jilani, among others, and the Dede felt an intellectual bond with Jilani (Avanoğlu 2012). It would not be strange for Murphy to intend to refer to both as they would be assumed to be of the same spiritual essence; additionally, he seemingly uses the phrase for Ahmet Kayhan Dede on his webpage (Murphy 2021).

Abdul Qadir Jilani and Ahmet Kayhan Dede can indeed each be described as a “cotton wool Dede”, “master of masters”. One of the possible etymologies for the word Sufi is the association with wool (*suf*), and the often claimed, early practice of Sufis to dress

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9. Bayman 1997, 2000, 2003.

in woollen clothes signalling their humility and their assumed detachment from worldly luxuries.

The next part is introduced by an addresser, an “I”, but one unknown. As the “I” appears in other parts of the lyrics and addresses the master, mastering him, I primarily understand the “I” as God. However, in Sufi prose, God is to be mirrored to the extent that the individual ceases to be. In that sense, there is actually only one true “I”. Sufi poetry is keen on metaphors that are slightly instable, word plays and shrewd reinterpretations of words that signal relationships or pronouns.

If God is “I”, then the “you” in “I clocked all of you” is the human race. The metaphors are not easily untangled in this passage, but the key is that paradise is addressed (“a place so fond where angels are allowed”) and that God has measured everyone’s life span. The ocean (divers, deep) is a common Sufi metaphor to symbolize the vastness of the creation.

Further stressing the Sufi understanding is the interpolated “Hagia Sophia” (holy wisdom), following the verse, sung almost as a refrain. Murphy stresses that the words are holy wisdom, the most important message from God to humans. The meaning of “Hagia Sophia” is not esoteric knowledge; still, some might need to look it up to know that Hagia Sophia also transmits an idea. To some, the first association may be with Hagia Sophia, the landmark museum, mosque (again since 2020) and former church in Istanbul. After the first “Hagia Sophia” iteration, the lyrics continue:

And you are the Ahmad too  
 And you are the Jesus, The Moses,  
 The Ahmad too  
 “Yeah,” says the Gauth  
 “True,” says the Hu  
 “Hang up –  
 – Hang up the phone and come on over”

Even though concepts, metaphors and exact conceptualisations vary between Sufi orders and authors, a shared understanding is that if you successfully manage to reflect yourself in the manifest God, you will ideally inhabit the position of *al-insan al-kamil*, the complete human. This is the position of prophets and the greatest Sufis. Thus, the Dede and also every single one of us are potentially the Ahmad—the most praised one—that is Muhammad, the Jesus and the Moses as well. It is attested in Bayman’s *The Teachings of a Perfect Master* (Bayman 2012: 11) that people used the named prophets to describe Ahmet Kayhan Dede, whose name was also Ahmet. Further, Jesus is a Sufi favourite while Moses is not ignored but is more commonly mentioned in theology when *al-rusul*, the messenger prophets, are named. Of course, Jesus and Moses also signal Christianity and Judaism. Why “the” Jesus, “the” Moses? I see two possibilities: symmetry and the



estrangement effect. The Ahmad stresses the meaning of the word *ahmad*, not merely the name. I doubt that it is the etymology of the names Jesus (from Hebrew, Yah saves) and Moses (from the Greek rendering of the ancient Egyptian word for born) to which Murphy is alluding; rather, it is the role of *al-insan al-kamil*. Yet, the people around Ahmet Kayhan Dede stressed the idea of *al-insan al-kamil* according to Avanoğlu (Avanoğlu 2012), and the disciple Bayman (Bayman 2003: lxiii) claims that almost everyone who met the Dede saw him as *al-insan al-kamil*. By adding the definite article (“the”) the names are rendered in an unfamiliar way to the ear which forces you to wonder about the choice. Murphy likes to keep his audiences on their toes.

“The Gauth” accepts the description as *al-insan al-kamil* with a “yeah”, and “the Hu” confirms by offering “true” as an affirmative. In Sufi meditation and rituals, hu is a commonly used word for God. It is based on *huwa*, he, broken down to just the aspirate “hu”, which also means he. Thus, God and “the Gauth” confirm and are also the “I” of the lyrics, encouraging people to come over. After a repetition of a previous part, the following is added:

If the truth be told  
 What the tripper saw  
 His lessons was [sic] to meet  
 To withdraw the devils [sic] gun there<sup>10</sup>  
 “You’ve been dragging yourself //: through a thorn  
 bush with no clothes on”:// (repeated)

The tripper is a Sufi dervish that is asked to learn to control the devil and prepare to be able to meet God. The last part is intriguing. Is it a metaphor for suffering? Is it alluding to the well-known story of the Catholic St. Benedict of Nursia (d. 547) who reputedly threw himself naked into thorn bushes to impede sexual temptation? Is it also biographical? Murphy was well known to appear with at least bared chest during performances with Bauhaus and singing about pain. The final part repeats versions of “Hanging up the phone” but also commands the “master” to do so.

While details of the lyrics are difficult to explicate, the overall message is quite clear if one is familiar with Sufism: give up your individuality, abandon yourself to the sheikh who is already in tune with the divine creator. Intriguingly, Murphy is creating a world, using age-old Sufi imageries but crafting his very personal version in a way that much modern Sufi poetry does not. Combined with the music and performance it becomes feverish, chaotic and in-your-face. Murphy screams, sputters and sings, uses different voices. He does not fall into the trap of representing the different positions in the lyrics

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10. This and the following line are rendered like this in the CD folder. Personally, I think Murphy sings “to withdraw the devil’s gun there”.

differently. While lyrical content and performance clash, the lyrics are coherent and contribute to the powerful, chaotic piece.

Below, I provide examples of how Murphy has developed his way of interlacing Sufi tropes over time. Therefore, the presentation is chronological, following the release of Murphy's albums.

### SHOULD THE WORLD FAIL TO FALL APART (1986)

Murphy's earliest, unmistakable, Sufi-associated lyrics are from his first solo album, *Should the World Fail to Fall Apart*. It features "Jemal", composed in a cinematic style with a prominent ney flute (or a synth) colouring the soundscape, setting it apart from the rest of the album. The Turkish words, whispered in the background by Beyhan Murphy (acknowledged by the liner note "praying for us"), are a Sufi *du'a* (supplication) by Ahmet Kayhan Dede. The first part is provided in English translation in the booklet to the compilation *Peter Murphy, 5 albums* gathering Murphy's five first solo albums:

My God, grant that we may sow peace wherever we go.  
Let us be reconcilers and unifiers, not sowers of dissent.  
Allow us to disseminate love where there is hate,  
forgiveness where there is injury,  
faith where there is doubt,  
hope where there is despair,  
light where there is darkness,  
and joy where there is sorrow.

An intriguing aspect of this *du'a* is that it is one of the few texts by Ahmet Kayhan Dede which does not draw on Islamic sources. Instead he was inspired by the so-called peace prayer attributed to St Francis of Assisi (d. 1226). Bayman (2012: 23) translated it into Turkish sometime before 1980 and the Dede was impressed with it and made a Sufi version that he then spread, calling it the essence of democracy and an essential part of any religion. It was a typical trait of the Dede to consider all religions as manifestations of Truth.

On the debut album, at times between the lines, Murphy addresses the confrontation with the new, old truth. If considered from a Sufi angle, these lyrics from "God Sends", "Tell my friends they're all potential, they're all potential Godsend. I feel that this is me coming, you'll never meet me", make sense. "Me" can be God but also the reformed "me" seeking God while "I" then becomes Murphy himself. Here, "friends" are either referred to as having the potential to enter into a relation with the Truth (with a capital T) or as instruments of God (Godsends) who usher the "I" forward towards the Truth. The final phrase yet again plays with positionality. When the Sufi associates with himself he can never meet the divine aspect, the "me", as is used in the well-known Sufi poem by Rumi (d. 1273):

There came one and knocked at the door of the Beloved.  
 And a voice answered and said, “Who is there?”  
 The lover replied, “It is I.”  
 “Go hence”, returned the voice,  
 “there is no room within for you and me.”  
 Then came the lover a second time and knocked and again the voice de-  
 manded,  
 “Who is there?”  
 He answered: “It is you.”  
 “Enter”, said the voice, “for I am within”.

No doubt, Murphy has for long been well aware of Rumi’s poetry and there is a quote from Rumi on Petermurphy.info (Murphy 2020a, see also Westworld 1995).

### LOVE HYSTERIA (1988)

The next album, *Love Hysteria*, already features the clearer use of Sufis tropes. Thematically, the lyrics seems to be mainly a dialogue between Murphy and his wife about embarking on a journey into mysticism. In “His Circle and Hers Meet” he declares “She killed his past // with her kiss // All past was but a lie // She killed his head // she killed his mouth // and opened up the sky”. If “she” is God or Beyhan Murphy or both makes little difference. In my reading, I think both are intended. I perceive “his” as Peter Murphy who realizes that his past, head and mouth – that is his worldview, mind and previous enunciations – have been based on a flawed understanding of the world. In his lyrics, Murphy regularly alternates between addressing himself in the first, second and third person. This is not merely a clever way of obtaining variety, but frequently related to a Sufi worldview.

At the time, Murphy was reading widely and, typically, “Socrates the Python” contains a repeated shout-out to “Bennett, Gurdjieff, Jesus” referring to John G. Bennett (d. 1974), a disciple of George Gurdjieff (d. 1949), and the prophet Jesus, important to both Christianity and Islam, not least to Sufis. In interviews, Murphy states that he relates to Truth (a recurrent word in lyrics too) and Truth can be found anywhere in any tradition, even though he mainly approaches it through Sufism. Thus, some phrases might fit most mystic traditions, like the twice repeated line “The illusion is the pain” from “Time Has Got Nothing to Do with It”, or “hell is not the fire // hell is your belief // in yourself as the higher” from “Dragnet Drag”. Still, much is specifically meaningful through a Sufi prism, for example this section from “My Last Two Weeks”:

Am I untruthful?  
 As a result of being?  
 Maybe

Maybe it was too soon  
 The red rose  
 I liken it to the flicker of the pure  
 Fleeting moments  
 Precede our actions  
 Light that's not burning  
 Light that's not burning  
 No more lost sinking feeling  
 Tethered to your shoe  
 Tethered to you

Some of the metaphors used are very common. The red rose, a well-established symbol, is a glimpse of the pure, that is, the divine essence. Light is a symbol of the same. “Tethered” is more important than shoe, the latter is witty and unexpected. Tethered, on the other hand, indicates the relation with both the Dede and the divine, as one cannot be real without leaving the untruthfulness of being and accepting the relation to the divine, according to a Sufi approach. The final stanza adds that the “we” in the song are tethered to the red rose as well, further emphasising the dependence on the divine. Yet, some of the strength of poetic language and lyrics stems from not being tied to one specific interpretation but, rather, remaining open. That Murphy is aware of the importance of this is clear from the first quote of this article.

### DEEP (1989)

In his third album, *Deep*, Murphy continues to explore his relation to the divine and the Truth. In “Shy”, Murphy reflects about his past in the third person.

He was thought of as strange... a good, good looking man  
 And shallow eyes like two hidden from view and empty puddles of hue  
 His views on death spread like two anecdotal tales  
 Although he, reclining, declining, to disclose in public...  
 These opinions in public, the tales held the key.

Murphy was, and is, often described as handsome, and in interviews he frequently still refers, in an ironic yet self-conscious manner, to being good-looking. Many photos show him with deep set eyes and that, coupled with singing about death (albeit among other things), earned him the aforementioned moniker, the godfather of goth. But, even in the Bauhaus lyrics, he was reflecting on spiritual matters so the “tales held the key” to his future quest. In the same song he rather straightforwardly declares his metamorphosis.

One day you will be the one  
 To say I'm sick of empty fun

It means if your faith is strong  
 It means  
 You are no longer astray...  
 See I see all the light, it comes straight from the sun  
 And I want to get near, so I can be clear  
 Soon I will  
 Merge with the one  
 Soon I will  
 Be with the love  
 One day  
 When the lights turn green  
 There is no time... this love I thirst.

Apart from rehearsing the common merging and light metaphors, the lyrics also convey a sense of an awaited, soon to be complete transformation, yet, as always, it is possible to understand them in different ways. Is the anticipated meeting the one with other dervishes, and the green light a nod to the green, fluorescent lamps so common in mosques and Sufi lodge settings? Or is it mainly the meeting with the divine, where time lacks meaning, for which he thirsts, with the green light simply being a reference to the colour of Islam and a signal of his acceptance of Sufism?

Another clear theme on *Deep* is doubt and the questioning of the ability to experience closeness to God fully, combined with the realisation that it takes hard work. “The Line Between the Devil’s Teeth (and that which Cannot be Repeat)” is a song about inner jihad, with the chorus “war, work” repeated over and over. In Islamic theology, it is common to discern between the greater and lesser jihad. Jihad means striving, struggle. The greater jihad is the inner battle against sin, and the lesser jihad is the outward struggle against threats against Islam. I have chosen inner jihad rather than greater, as I think it better conveys Murphy’s understanding of jihad. In a particularly clear passage, Murphy sings:

Push me in, take me t’ward  
 The subject in the subject taught  
 A war without a war within  
 Join head and heart for to begin

In Sufi thinking, the ability to understand the divine dwells in the heart. To learn to align the head and heart requires discipline and conscious striving towards the “subject”. The war requires work.

Yet another nod to Sufism is calling the recording band on *Deep* “The hundred men”, a name also used on the next album, *Holy Smoke* (1992). It is claimed that Farid al-Din Attar (d. 1221) described legendary Sufi saint Rabia al-Adawiyya (d. around 801) in the

following manner: “No she wasn’t a single woman but a hundred men over.”<sup>11</sup> Murphy also uses the expression “hundred men” in a song, “All Night Long” on *Love Hysteria*. This is likely not a coincidence.

#### A STRANGE KIND OF HIT

Murphy does not have any huge hits, but one of the songs that has reached a larger audience is “A Strange Kind of Love” from *Deep*. The song can be described as a dark ballad in A minor, built largely around Murphy’s vocals, mostly in his lower register, a guitar and a few additional instruments. Nothing in the song indicates any influences from any other tradition than Anglo-American pop. The minor key and the texture of the voice has a dark tone, some might even consider it a bit ominous, although I do not.

Browsing through a few internet forums, many suggest the song is a conventional love song of a sort. I only found one comment suggesting it is about religion but framing it as a conversion narrative (from Catholicism to Islam). However, to me the lyrics are anchored in a Sufi worldview, Murphy’s biography and in the overall topic of *Deep*: the difficulty of fully and unconditionally committing.

I. A strange kind of love  
 A strange kind of feeling  
 Swims through your eyes  
 And like the doors  
 To a wide vast dominion  
 They open to your prize  
 II. This is no terror ground  
 Or place for the rage  
 No broken hearts  
 White wash lies  
 Just a taste for the truth  
 Perfect taste choice and meaning  
 A look into your eyes  
 III. Blind to the gemstone alone  
 A smile from a frown circles round  
 Should he stay or should he go  
 Let him shout a rage so strong  
 A rage that knows no right or wrong

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11. This oft-times repeated quote (in books, articles, internet posts) is claimed to be from the masterpiece *The Conference of the Birds*. Not that it matters for my argument, the popular belief that it is from the book is more significant, but I find it puzzling that I cannot find the quote despite having consulted two different translations of the book and searched an online version with keywords.

And take a little piece of you  
 IV. There is no middle ground  
 Or that's how it seems  
 For us to walk or to take  
 Instead we tumble down  
 Either side left or right  
 To love or to hate.

The first section uses rather regular Sufi tropes put into rock lyrics form. God is symbolized by love in two ways: God is the reality of love and the object of love of the lover, that is, the Sufi. This is easier to comprehend given that a) God is thought to be outside the human perceptual apparatus, and b) Sufi metaphors are in line with Hellenist philosophers in that they assume that the trained Sufi (or philosopher) can experience (or think) beyond the immanent reality when approaching God (or the ideal, true idea). God is the only real reality and is the direction towards which the Sufi must turn in love to be able to mirror the true idea of love, thus “a strange kind of love”. Important in this context is also the role of the Dede Ahmet Kayhan in manifesting God's love and presence.

The lyrics describe a change of perception, like doors opening to “a wide vast dominion”. The recurring use of the second person connects to the constant role play with pronouns that are typical not least for Rumi's and Yunus Emre's (d. 1320) poetry. Thus, “you” has a double meaning. A Sufi trope is that God has hidden a secret (*sirr*) in our hearts—not the muscle pumping blood but a metaphor for the soul, which has the faculty of reasoning and thus can also be called our consciousness. It is the task of the Sufis to find that secret and, with the help of it, redirect themselves towards God. Thus, finding the secret is a “prize”. But as the prize is God's, “your” likely also refers to God or the Dede.

The second stanza starts with four lines describing what the experience is not. There is no room for terror, rage, broken hearts or excuses (“white wash lies”). Instead, the experience offers a “taste for the truth” and “a look into your [God's or the Dede's] eyes” and that is symbolized by perfection. Sufi poets love playing around with *eros* and *agape*, erotic love versus the unconditional love of God. By using metaphors evoking *eros* but pointing at *agape*, a language of love and eroticism permeates Sufi poetry.

I interpret the first lines of the third part as expressions of doubt. “Blind to the gemstone alone” voices the frustration of someone who has caught a glimpse of the divine but who cannot hang on to it like the others assembled. Here the gemstone is the prize referred to above, while blind is a well-used metaphor for inability. The others are the Sufis that meet regularly in a circle (not necessarily in that form but it is referred to as such in Sufi contexts). But they share an inviting smile, or perhaps that comes from the Dede. They, or the Dede, know these things take time and they can see Murphy's frustration and wonder whether he should stay or go. Yet, in the midst of frustration,

a glimpse of God (through the Dede) in the form of “a little piece of you”, has been perceived.

The fourth stanza declares that there is no middle ground and that the choice is between love of God or hate and rage caused by shortcomings and the inability to let love in. It is fully possible that the song is meant to be a rather straightforward love song to Ahmet Kayhan Dede. It does not really affect any of the intellectualisation of the lyrics but, undoubtedly, love was intensely felt by many of Ahmet Kayhan Dede’s visitors and followers (Avanoğlu 2012).

*Deep* is particularly interesting for its treatment of the oscillation between commitment and doubt in the personal ability, not in the truth on offer. I would claim that there is a clear autobiographical trait in the lyrics but cleverly embedded in the rock lyrics format, keeping the ambiguity.

### HOLY SMOKE (1992) AND CASCADE (1995)

On the following two albums—*Holy Smoke* and *Cascade*—similar lyrics are rehearsed. If anything, the certainty that the path is the right one increases. These albums also coincide with Murphy increasingly relocating to Turkey, eventually moving to Ankara allowing him and his partner to be close to Ahmet Kayhan Dede during the last years of his life (d. 1998). Several trends in these five first albums culminate in the lyrics to “Mirror to My Woman’s Mind”, whose lyrics consciously interlace God with “my woman”.

It was time to kick the façade  
Walk into the room  
Disappear without a trace  
O’ then I recognised you

It was bright  
It was dark  
You could say  
I couldn’t start  
I couldn’t feel  
If the words were right

You were right  
I was gone  
When you said that the fight was on  
With one look I was yours  
The things you gave  
The things I took



See that star?  
 In the sky  
 It's the mirror to my woman's mind  
 Let me burn in her fire  
 In that mirror to my woman's mind.

Murphy declares his commitment and love for God, using the image of the ego being consumed by divine flames as a repeated key passage in the lyrics. At the same time, the song is also a love song to his wife who opened this path to him, thus using the *eros* versus *agape* formula in a very conscious way. Murphy never describes the features of his love or love making in his take on *eros*. Rather, his lyrics evoke images of completion, union, submission and even annihilation (of the ego). Another dimension is that the song can also be understood as Murphy recounting his first meeting with Ahmet Kayhan Dede. The lines before the cited lyrics above run:

I took your hand, felt the heat of a different fate  
 Took some time to tell you my name  
 I could smell the sense of fear  
 Had been lifted from your face

God, Beyhan Murphy and the Dede constantly become interlaced. At the time, Murphy had an active relation with Ahmet Kayhan Dede, who is celebrated in phrases such as “We call to stillness, as we kiss the water king's hand” (from the song “Cascade”). The Dede is said to have recurrently urged his listeners to follow the ethics of the water, soil, sun and night, which never complain no matter what is done to them (Avanoğlu 2012), hence the water king. Kissing the Dede's hand is part of the ritual of greeting and parting.<sup>12</sup> Hanson's liner notes to *Bareboned and Sacred* (2016) support such an interpretation.

### DUST (2002)

*Dust* introduces a new element in Murphy's music. It is the only Murphy album to date that can be called world music. On it, he collaborates with Mercan Dede, a celebrated Turkish Sufi musician who had earlier provided the music to the show “Syahatname 2001,” directed and choreographed by Beyhan Murphy and her dance company. He is internationally known and has received prizes for, among other things, the best world music album of 2008 by Womex (his album *800*). *Dust* is co-produced by Murphy and

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12. See. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yglRkf-wI4k>. Accessed 10 January 2022.

Mercan Dede and much of the instrumental atmosphere on the album can be attributed to him. Murphy singing is at its absolute prime, varied and adaptive yet challenging the musical texture.

Even the title of the album is probably a Sufi reference. Dust (*habā`a*) is described, in *A Glossary of Sufi Technical Terms* by ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Qashani (d. 1130), as “the substance in which God first imbued the form of the world. It is that intangible material which is known as Primordial Matter” (al-Qashani 1991: 17). The title could thus be a reference to the created world which, according to Sufi thought, forms the basis of our connection to God but also makes up the very foundation of human exile. On the track “Fake Sparkle or Golden Dust?” Murphy uses “Golden Dust” as a metaphor for the divine signs in the world.

The first track “Things to Remember” is an ambient world music tune, at times softly spoken, at times sung. The music first features moody synthesisers, nay (Turkish reed flute), and a prominent santur. When Murphy starts singing against this very contemporary Turkish background with clear hints to Sufism, a bass and drums burst into the music. The lyrics offer an almost matter of fact acceptance of the majesty and mystery of God (I have for the sake of brevity not indicated repeated phrases).

Floating  
 I’m facing me down  
 Prostrate to the ground  
 Understand  
 Prostrate to the ground  
 Mystery  
 Rain down on my life  
 Maybe there is nothing to say  
 Breathing  
 The future is gone  
 The strain of the past  
 Sometimes nothing often means  
 The beauty of the human experience  
 Healing  
 Rain down on my life  
 Down on my life  
 Wasted  
 Now, breaking free  
 It’s no longer me

The lyrics emphasize the assumed meditative calm of prayer and the transformative power of the acceptance of God. Ritual, daily prayers were frequently stressed as the foundation of practice by Ahmet Kayhan Dede (Avanoğlu 2012; Bayman 2012). The

recurrent “rain” is a common metaphor within Sufi lyrics for God’s benevolence but also for the specific act of blessing humanity with Muhammad.

Several of the other songs are rather indirect in their Sufi referencing. “Just for Love” toys around with love as his love for his muse, her connection with Sufism, the Dede and the love of God, as does “Your Face”. “Jungle Haze” is unusual. It has an accusatory tone directed to religious people that do not follow “the silent sway [i.e. Sufism]” and instead build “temples made of sand” and flaunt their power with gold that is “just cold, cold steel”. Together with “Fake Sparkle or Golden Dust?”, my impression is that Murphy is actually propagating his faith to an unknown other. Generally, songs about doubt have involved Murphy himself, but that is not the case in these songs. Unexpectedly, this is not Murphy’s Sufi album. It is neither a start of a new career steered towards Turkey or spiritual world music, which is a huge genre.

### UNSHATTERED (2004), NINTH (2011) AND LION (2014)

On his later albums, Murphy takes on Sufism in ways he has already established. He skilfully develops his own means of addressing Sufi tropes, continues his playfulness with the notions of *eros* and *agape* and contributes some of his most intricate lyrics. “Emergency Unit” from *Unshattered* positions humanity as in an emergency unit turning to God to be saved.

Save me, save me, make me true  
 Turn, turn, let me through  
 Nothing’s hard and nothing’s to be gained  
 Without you.  
 Leave us always looking in the now  
 Guide is always  
 Save me, save me, say “you do”  
 Even as the bird flies  
 Out in the blue  
 Out of the blue  
 Nothing’s hard and nothing’s gained  
 Without you.

The idea of trying to be in the now, connected to God, is a recurrent trope in Murphy’s Sufi-laced lyrics. This is then contrasted with being swept away by the ego, conflicts and the everyday, a struggle that is further developed in “The First Stone” from the same album:

Check the day out  
 The human race is doing time

Locked in some flimsy cage  
 Made of the stuff of the free will kind  
 Hear my heart smash  
 My self-made throne  
 Hoping not to cast  
 That first stone.

The idea of having accepted the “Sufi Truth” but still not being able to avoid anger, mistakes and the ego is an important topic on this and the upcoming records. There is also the observation about the others, the ones that have not understood. They are imprisoned by the illusion of their own free will instead of embracing the omnipotency of God. Still, the “I” of the lyrics should be aware not to cast the first stone even if that “I” has destroyed its ego with its heart. The Biblical stone metaphor just is one example of how not all lyrics draw from Sufi tropes. Then again, that trope in itself is well-spread and commented on by Sufis too.

*Ninth* is an album full of hints alluding to possible Sufi ideas. One of the most original is “Memory Go”.

Fade away.  
 Is that not,  
 What was what...  
 What you thought?  
 Drop that cause.  
 Now is all!  
 Memory go.  
 Junk the pause!  
 Let it go.  
 Left behind.  
 Discreate sentimental blind.  
 Then is gone.  
 If debunk.  
 Memory go.  
 Reject the junk!  
 Memory go.  
 Memory.

Murphy dwells on the idea of freeing one’s mind from the constraints of the past. The idea of leaving the past behind and living in the now, content with being in love with God, is an important topic for Murphy. While Sufi poetry is often marked by flowery prose, these lyrics are minimalist, marked by short, uncomplicated words and yet harbor complex ideas.

Another example of this recurrent topic is “Never Fall Out”, about the love of God formulated from the position of God, although it could also be understood as Murphy bragging about his attraction for his fans, again creating conscious ambiguity.

If you fall in love with me,  
 You’ll never fall out!  
 If you take me in,  
 There’ll be no way out. Without.  
 You’ll never fall out.  
 Effulgate,<sup>13</sup> and you’ll see the divine;  
 The pouring of love’s wine.  
 My iridescent, iridescent blue.  
 I’ll be, I’ll be all over you.  
 If you catch my glance,  
 You’ll swim the swan sea.  
 Dissolve into ether dreams.  
 The truth of you and me.

Murphy uses the idea of the *unio mystica*—the union of the believer’s soul with God—reformulated as rock lyrics. In Islamic prose two prominent words express this, *fana’* and *baqa’*, the difference being that *fana’* is temporary and *baqa’* not. The lyrics imply a permanent union. By now, we recognise the play with pronouns and the references to love and light (effulgate, iridescent). Another song, “Secret Silk Society”, spells out how difficult the union is: “Who is wise? Why our hearts! Made for passing the lote tree, it is very, very far, very far indeed!” The heart is the centre of gnosis (enlightened wisdom) predisposed to enable us to find God who, in Islamic mythology, resides in the domain past the lote tree (*sidrat al-muntaha*) of the seventh heaven.

In “Holy Clown” from *Lion*, Murphy addresses the insight that being a Sufi is not an achievement that requires – or should be used to gain – the respect of others: “Some part of you is fooled// some heart of you is fooled// this is no crown// find your holy clown.” The idea of the Sufi as breaking conventions and becoming a fool in the eyes of others permeates Sufi poetry and lore. Further, Murphy (Orcasound 2004) comments in an interview, with reference to the contemporary Sufi Idries Shah (d. 1996), that if people call themselves a Sufi, they are not. The act of taking pride in the role (wearing a crown) is proof that one is not what one claims.

Initially, I discussed “Hang up” from *Lion* extensively. We have now come full circle. Murphy’s lyrics keep developing and the Sufi topics are recurrent. However most of the lyrics on *Lion* are generally rather impressionistic lacking that clear autobiographical

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13. As far as I can tell this is a made-up word based on effulgent, luminous, radiant.

Sufi narrative that I have traced. It is there on “Hang up”. He declares who he is no longer in “I am My Own Name”: “No jaded shock star // Or blackened thorn // No heathen cynic // No lover scorned”. But generally, only a few of the tracks draws clearly from Sufism.

#### ADDING MUSIC AND SOME SORT OF CONCLUSION

As of now, I have not analysed the music, merely indicated a few forms. Music-wise, Murphy has continued to compose songs along the lines he had already established prior to introducing Sufism into his lyrics. His most daring turns have been when he has collaborated with other musicians who have their own established profiles such as Mick Karn (Dali’s Car), Mercan Dede on *Dust* and Youth on *Lion*. Murphy has a broad vocal register and he may sing a straightforward melody with few tones, or scream, whisper, be operatic or use odd, theatrical voices. His voice has a distinct timbre, making it instantly recognizable, which is a bit odd as he sings using many different techniques. This is a trait already found on the first recordings with Bauhaus even though he is now a far more experienced singer. As far as I can tell, there are no aesthetic choices or considerations made in consequence of singing about God, Sufism, Sufi dervishes or Dedes. Murphy draws inspiration from Sufi ideas, almost completely detached from the expectations of what that may mean for the musical form with the soul except of *Dust*. On the contrary, Murphy seems to enjoy his audience’s celebrating him as a cult figure in rock, an audience that seems to be somewhat unaware of how much his lyrics are permeated by his Sufi worldview.

Then again, Murphy is not making “Sufi music” or writing Sufi poetry that is then sung. Rather, he draws inspiration from Sufi lore, Sufi thinking, Sufi poetic tropes and his experience of Sufism, which makes up one enabling frame for Murphy’s writing. Ambiguity, surprising metaphors, drastic formulations and hyperbolic claims form an oeuvre of songs filled with associations and mystical ideas. Despite exposing one of his key frames of reference as Sufism, the lyrics are still hard to explain, which is likely the very idea behind them. They are not didactic verses or meant to be rendered as Sufi prose. Music and lyrics form a unit. The fact that the musical form does not support the potential Sufi meaning is entirely on purpose; indeed, the reverse is true. The Sufism-drenched lyrics support musical expressions that often aim to create atmosphere, drama and powerful emotional expressions.

As exemplified above, Murphy has developed novel ways to express recurrent Sufi tropes, which are removed from the conventional genres and merged with another genre (rock lyrics), with its own forms, conventions and tropes, some of the latter overlapping with Sufi tropes. That meeting produces some new metaphors for expressing Sufi tropes, but most importantly, it enables Murphy—who is not a Sufi artist, but a rock artist who finds inspiration and trajectories in his Sufi attachment—to create. From an Islamic studies point of view, here lies his most original contribution.

Ahmet Kayhan Dede claimed that everyone should express Islam or Sufism, which he used interchangeably, by exploring their own expressions, thus encouraging musicians, dancers and other artists to create within their form and training (Avanoğlu 2012). There is no single, fixed way. I cannot confirm that Murphy is specifically under the influence of Ahmet Kayhan Dede in this, but he certainly follows the advice. Through his songs, he has created an original way to draw from Sufism.

#### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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