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Rationalism in Islam: Jamīl Ṣidqī az-Zahāwī and his Revolt in Hell

Racionalismus v islámu: Džamīl Ṣidqī az-Zahāwī a jeho Vzpoura v pekle

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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

Abstract:

The present thesis examines two distinct semantic levels of the poem Revolt in Hell by Iraqi poet Jamīl Ṣidqī az-Zahāwī (1863-1936): satirical caricature of specific imagery in traditional Islamic eschatology and Zahāwī's polemic with Islamic theological determinism. While many of Zahāwī's contemporaries heavily criticised his polemic with determinism (and went as far as to declare him an infidel), the heavy irony and derisive parody of eschatological imagery remained lost on them. The thesis traces satirical elements in Zahāwī's verses and indicates means that Zahāwī employed to convey a sense of ridicule and irony. Furthermore, it places relevant verses of the poem in the context of the Quran, hadith and other authoritative texts of Islam. Comparing the two distinct motifs in light of Islamic scriptures then identifies factors that contributed to this disparate perception of the two motifs.

Keywords:

modern Arabic poetry, satire, rationalism, Islam, eschatology, predestination, perception

Abstrakt:

Tato práce zkoumá dvě odlišné sémantické roviny básně Vzpoura v pekle z pera irácképo básníka Džamīla Ṣidqī az-Zahāwīho (1863-1936): satirickou parodii specifických obrazů tradiční islámské eschatologie a Zahāwīho polemiku s islámským teologickým determinismem. Zatímco mnoho Zahāwīho současníků silně kritizovalo jeho polemiku s determinismem (a zašli mnohdy až tak daleko, že ho prohlásili za nevěřícího), těžká ironie a zesměšnění tradičních eschatologických obrazů jim zcela uniklo. Práce sleduje satirické prvky v Zahāwīho verších a naznačuje prostředky, které básník použil k vyjádření satirického úmyslu. Kromě toho zasazuje příslušné verše do kontextu Koránu, hadísů a dalších autoritativních textů islámu. Porovnáním dvou pojednávaných motivů ve světle islámských písem práce identifikuje faktory, které přispěly k jejich rozdílnému přijetí Zahāwīho současníky.

Klíčová slova:

moderní arabská poezie, satira, racionalismus, islám, eschatologie, predestinace, percepce

Contents

Introduction

When the Iraqi poet Jamil Sidqi az-Zahāwī published his Revolt in Hell (*Thawra fī al-jaḥīm*) in 1931, a philosophical and deeply personal poem, it sparked a wave of outrage among Muslim scholars as well as the general public. Provoking such a ruckus was not Zahāwī's first time; he was a natural when it came to causing trouble. He was the epitome of a provocateur, a modernist who espoused rationalism and progress in the most conservative circles.

Many of his previous endeavours had thus caused displeasure of the authorities or public uproar. To enumerate all of these instances would be a feat beyond these lines, but we cannot do without mentioning at least the most prominent affairs: Zahāwī served jail time upon criticising sultan Abdulhamid's despotism in one of his poems; he repeatedly disgruntled his students by deprecating modern Islamic thought; he penned an article In Defence of Woman, in which he decried gender inequality, the practice of veiling and Islamic divorce law and which was perceived to be sheer criticism of *sharīʿa*. This incident came to be the most notorious of his affairs. Such was the audacity with which he challenged customs, tradition and religious law that it incited a passionate debate on veiling among intellectuals in the Arab world, including Shumayil and Rashīd Riḍā. At the same time, a series of rebuttals appeared in the conservative Damascene newspaper *al-Ḥaqāʾiq*. Zahāwī, in fear for his life, was compelled not to leave his home, as an unruly crowd mobbed it at the instigation of conservative *ʿulamāʾ* for a whole week. As a result of this affair, he was dismissed from his post at the Baghdadi Imperial School of Law.[1]

In the case of Revolt in Hell, the events which ensued its publishment were similar. Traditionalists denounced Zahāwī, many literates reacted by critical pamphlets and slander, and in their sermons, some of the Baghdadi *khaṭībs* even accused Zahāwī of heresy (*ilḥād*), apostasy (*kufr*) and atheism (*zandaqa*).[2] To assuage the ruffled feelings of the public, king Faysal summoned the disgraced poet to his court and reprimanded him for his latest work.[3]

[1] Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss, eds., *Arabic Thought Beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 171–72.
[2] ʿAbd ar-Razzāq al-Hilālī, *Az-Zahāwī: Ash-Shāʿir al-Faylasūf Wa'l-Kātib al-Mufakkir* (al-Qāhira: al-Hayʾa al-miṣrīya al-ʿāmma li'l-kitāb, 1976), 86.
[3] Māhir Ḥasan Fahmī, *Az-Zahāwī* (al-Qāhira: al-Muʾassasa al-miṣrīja al-ʿāmma li't-taʾlīf wa'l-ʾanbāʾi wa'n-nashr, 1965), 224.

Notwithstanding, the brouhaha this particular poem incited stands out in the line of Zahāwī's affairs not so much by the events it entailed as by the content of the public acrimony.

In the plot of Revolt in Hell, two angels of death come to a deceased poet's grave to interrogate him about his faith; they condemn and torture him. They later allow the poor man a brief glimpse of Heaven, only to drag him down to Hell afterwards. There he finds, to his astonishment, the greatest thinkers, literates, philosophers, and scientists of humankind, while the blind followers of religious dogmas reside in Paradise. The damned souls later unite in a rebellion; they defy the Divine Decree and conquer Heaven. Seemingly, it was precisely this idea of revolting against one's damnation and the punishment in the Hereafter, all of which is in Islamic thought essentially predetermined by the Divine Will, which became the point of contention for many of Zahāwī's contemporaries. Their position is mirrored in Faysal's question, "how dare you to say they revolted against their destiny?"[4]

While his polemic against Islamic determinism is indeed one of the significant motifs of Zahāwī's epic, it is far from the only one. Most importantly, the poem is replete with sheer mockery of traditional eschatological believes - this is particularly apparent in ironical imagery, which Zahāwī employs in his description of Paradise, including, for instance, rather crude sexualisation of the Heavenly houris and derisive echoing of other Quranic eschatological images. Such satire, which amounts to borderline sacrilege, amazingly, appears to have escaped Zahāwī's audience.

Another prominent motif embedded in the verses is the praise of human reason (*ʿaql*) and its accorded precedence over tradition (*naql*), i.e. truths and tenets of faith passed on from one generation to another, along with reproval of popular superstitions. The author conveys this rationalist aspect in the general allegorical story of the poem, the intellectual elite of humanity triumphing over the "canonically virtuous". However, all evidence suggests that, apart from the polemic with theological determinism, other motifs went unnoticed by Zahāwī's critics.

[4] Fahmī, 224.

Literature Review

Curiously enough, the satirical and allegorical intentions of Zahāwī remained lost not only on his contemporaries but also on later Arab literary critics. Thus, for example, the only monograph devoted exclusively to the study of Revolt in Hell by Saʿīd (1968) entirely failed to notice the satiric intention of the poet. Such reading, missing on a significant aspect of authorial intent, made Said, for instance, qualify enumeration of paradisical meals as an awkward occurrence of literary ineptitude.[5]

Fahmī (1965) meanwhile suggests a political intention of Zahāwī, an attempt to stir up public spite against the current feudal system of that time. He argues that Zahāwī had been open about his atheism and apostasy in his previous works and, as such, had no reason to conceal it all of a sudden in an allegory.[6] Fahmī thus gives attention only to the image of revolting against one's destiny and the revolutionary motif, rather than the broader polemic with and satire on dogmatism, popular religiosity, and superstitions. Disregarding it, he understands the epic to be a political stunt.

Finally, somewhat controversial is the claim by ʿIzz ad-Dīn (1962). He identified Zahāwī's call for rationalism; however, he considered it (together with Zahāwī's appeal on the emancipation of women) to be a compulsive need for self-importance. According to ʿIzz ad-Dīn, Zahāwī's controversial message was motivated by the urge to outdo his peers; Zahāwī's intention was not to relate to the dogmatic beliefs or Islamic, rather than an attention-seeking attempt to be as provocative and outrageous as possible. ʿIzz ad-Dīn thus sees Zahāwī's work to be symptomatic of a mental collapse.[7]

While Zahāwī indeed seemed to have a penchant for complacency and self-importance, and he perhaps even enjoyed to stir trouble, it is hardly the basis for discarding a poem of such rich semantic content as Revolt in Hell. However much we may concede to any degree of Zahāwī's sense of self-righteousness, this fact does not inhibit his literary work from bearing particular, intended meaning, nor its relation to the existing set of cultural and religious beliefs.

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[5] Unfortunately, Said's study was unavailable to the author of present text at time of writing. The report on Said's reading was borrowed from Muhammad Mustafa Badawi, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 55.

[6] Fahmī, *Az-Zahāwī*, 223.

[7] Yūsuf ʿIzz ad-dīn, *Az-Zahāwī: Ash-Shāʿir al-Qaliq* (Baghdād: Maṭbaʿa al-maʿārif, 1962), 30.

Similarly to the Arabic output, the only study of non-Arab provenance focusing exclusively on Revolt in Hell and its analysis (Leeuwen, 2016) has not included nor mentioned the poem's satirical aspect either, although it does in part give attention to the reason-tradition relation. Van Leeuwen explores the question of whether Revolt in Hell justifies the verdict of heresy pronounced upon Zahāwī or, in a broader sense, whether fictional literature can convey a truthful reflection of its author's religious and other convictions.[8] In his analysis, Leeuwen omits entirely the passages describing Paradise, although their analysis could be beneficial in his direction of study. This, of course, does not necessarily imply that the satirical aspect escaped him; nevertheless, it got no attention.

The first and only recognition[9] of Zahāwī's satirical intention was done by Badawi when he briefly emphasised this aspect in his introduction to modern Arabic poetry (1975).[10] Regrettably, the satirical motif of Revolt in Hell and its mockery of traditional eschatological beliefs has since been left unstudied, although the prominence of Revolt in Hell among the rest of Zahāwī's works had been noticed by literary critics and orientalists such as Amin Rihani, Ismail Adham, Kračkovskij and Widmer, who translated this work into German in 1935.[11]

Consideration of these satirical intentions raises further questions about the discrepancy between Zahāwī's authorial intent and the reactions of his contemporaries withal. For its nature, scope and fierce reactions it incited, Revolt in Hell serves as a perfect representation of Zahāwī's progressive efforts and his discourse with his audience. Its study may thus shed additional light on the debates of reformists, intellectuals, and traditional religious authorities of that time. Furthermore, Zahāwī's contributions to these debates attract increasing interest in academic literature, particularly in the question of women's emancipation in the Arab East.[12]

The present work seeks to address the gap in understanding Zahāwī's authorial intent embedded in the verses of Revolt in Hell and thus contribute to the existing research on Zahāwī's participation in the debates of his time. However, before we proceed to the precise specification

[8] Richard van Leeuwen, 'Literature and Religious Controversy: The Vision of Hell in Jamīl Ṣidqī Al-Zahāwī's Thawra Fī L-Jaḥīm', in *Locating Hell in Islamic Traditions*, ed. Christian Lange (Brill, 2016), 336–52.
[9] To the best of the author's knowledge.
[10] Badawi, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry*, 54–55.
[11] Badawi, 54; G. Widmer and G. Kampffmeyer, 'Übertragungen Aus Der Neuarabischen Literatur. II Der ʿirāqische Dichter Ǧamīl Ṣidqī Az-Zahāwī Aus Baghdād', *Die Welt Des Islams* 17, no. 1/2 (1935): 1–79.
[12] James L. Gelvin, '"Modernity", "Tradition", and the Battleground of Gender in Early 20th -Century Damascus', *Die Welt Des Islams* 52, no. 1 (2012): 1–22.

of research questions and employed methods, a conceptual framework of the following analysis needs to be clarified.

Conceptual Framework

This work examines the relation between Zahāwī's text and the angry reactions it evoked. It thus approaches the text from the perspective of reader-response criticism. To this end, the study operates with "interpretive communities" in a manner very close to the one introduced by Stanley Fish.[13] Individuals of interpretive community share strategies of reading a text that are dependent on that community's set of cultural assumptions (any interpreted meaning is defined and constructed by a particular set of cultural assumptions; there is no textual meaning outside a set of cultural assumptions). Here, those who reacted to the publishment of Revolt in Hell with pamphlets and *khutbas* pronouncing verdicts of heresy are understood as a particular interpretive community. They are mostly referred to throughout this work as Zahāwī's contemporaries for ease of reading, but it is certainly not to imply that all Zahāwī's contemporaries in general, that is people who lived at the time he did, belonged to this one particular interpretive community.

However, as this work is concerned with the comparison of and relation between the meaning of the poem as intended by Zahāwī and the meaning of the poem as read by a particular interpretive community, it necessarily deviates from Fish's concept of text. Instead, it treats it precisely as "a repository of properties and meaning corresponding to the intention of the author" and thus takes a view on the nature of the text, which is quite the opposite to the one adopted by Fish.

Research Questions and Methods

This paper does not examine the first-hand allegory previously explored by Leeuwen. Instead, it focuses exclusively on tracing the satirical content of the epic that seems to have escaped the attention of Zahāwī's contemporaries and tries to uncover the cause of such a one-sided interpretation. How was this particular interpretive community predisposed to focusing on the polemic with determinism while entirely missing the sheer ridicule of Islamic eschatology? Why did the blatant irony go unnoticed? What are the elements that indicate its presence? What are the means Zahāwī employs to build a satirical portrayal of the Islamic eschatological

[13] Bakhtiar Sadjadi, 'Reader-Response Approach: Critical Concepts and Methodology in Phenomenological Reading Theory', *Reading Research Journal* 1, no. 1 (2017): 95.

imagery? To answer these questions, this work first opens with an initial characterisation of Zahāwī's epic and its plot. Then, it contrasts the lost satirical motif and the polemic with determinism, the one motif that happened to be the subject of public scrutiny. Both these motifs are individually contextualised within the religious and cultural milieu in which the poem was created with the help of the Quran, hadith and other authoritative texts of Islam. Their comparison in light of Islamic scriptures then identifies factors that contributed to the disparate perception of the two motifs.

Two further introductory comments are in order; the first concerns the limits of present evidence, and the second the limits of the present analysis. First, in terms of the evidence of the poem's interpretations by Zahāwī's contemporaries, it is based solely on the one question asked by king Faysal. Apart from that, only the descriptions of the actions taken against Zahāwī remain. Admittedly, one could argue that this hardly constitutes sufficient evidence of what precisely provoked such an uproar amongst the public. However, there is a significant clue that suggests that this understanding of the event aim in the right direction: no literary critic subsequently reflected whatsoever on the provocative satire. If the mockery of Islamic eschatology had been a subject of the public disturbance, it would have been, with utmost probability, pointed out in at least some of the past analyses of Revolt in Hell.

Second, the defendant of this thesis, as well as any other reader, cannot escape the imposition of their own cultural predisposition to particular reading strategies and subjective understanding of the analysed text. To limit this factor to the largest extent possible, any contention regarding "the authorial intent embedded in the text" is, of course, substantiated by text-based evidence.

The original Arabic text of the poem here is borrowed from the website www.jadaliyya.com[14], which also published an English translation by Firas Massouh[15]. The present text generally opts for a literal translation of Zahāwī's verses for the sake of capturing the most precise meaning possible. Where the translation draws heavily on Massouh's rendition, the verse is marked with an asterisk (*). The poem's entire text is presented as a separate attachment alongside the main text of the thesis.

[14] Jamīl Ṣidqī az-Zahāwī, 'Thawra Fī Al-Jaḥīm', Jadaliyya, accessed 28 December 2021, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/25044.

[15] Firas Massouh, 'Al-Zahawi's Revolt in Hell (Part I)', Jadaliyya, accessed 28 December 2021, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/25038; Firas Massouh, 'Al-Zahawi's Revolt in Hell (Part II)', Jadaliyya, accessed 28 December 2021, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/25211.

1 Revolt in Hell

Revolt in Hell (*Thawra fī al-jaḥīm*) is a narrative poem consisting of more than 400 double-verses divided into 24 sections with sub-headings, making it one of the longest poems in Arabic.[16] Zahāwī penned this epic in 1929 and first published it in a Lebanese periodical called ad-Duhūr in 1931.[17] It belongs to the last period of his literary output, a period dominated by personal and metaphysical poetry. Zahāwī himself regarded 'Revolt in Hell' as his best work.[18]

Before delving deeper into the semantic layers of the poem, let us discuss in more detail the events that transpire therein.

1.1 Summary of the Plot

The story is recounted through the eyes of the main character, a deceased poet. In the narrative's opening, the poet finds himself lying in his own grave, having just passed away. Munkar and Nakīr, two angels of death, appear in his grave to judge upon him and his faith. It is a horrific sight that the dead man sees: faces of the two angels glaring, wrath in their eyes, snakes slithering in their hands, massive noses and immense fangs protruding from their hideous mouths. The poet is petrified; the narrow grave suffocates him. The angels begin interrogating him to judge upon his faith and to decide whether he shall be rewarded in Paradise or punished by everlasting misery in Hell. The dead man is but a frail bird with two terrifying vultures towering over him. Nevertheless, he remains true to his heart's believes and holds to utmost sincerity and honesty, for true and free poets are unable to be deceitful and not speak the truth (V1-54).

After this descriptive opening, the poem details a dialogue between the dead man and the two angels. The interrogation is long and tedious; the angels enquire about his belief in every little detail and intricacy of the Islamic faith. They want to know whom the deceased worshipped while he lived, whether he believed in the Prophets and the word of God, angels, demons and jinns, and the Day of Judgement (V221-224). The questions go on and on in a similar vein. The

[16] Badawi, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry*, 54; van Leeuwen, 'Literature and Religious Controversy: The Vision of Hell in Jamīl Ṣidqī Al-Zahāwī's Thawra Fī L-Jaḥīm', 340.
[17] Badawi, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry*, 54.
[18] Badawi, 54.

angels seem to be concerned with nothing but his belief in the Islamic dogmas and obedience in religious duties and obligations (V55-172).

The poet professes his faith in Allāh and the Prophet and states that in his life, he persistently followed the obligations imposed upon Muslims. However, right at the beginning of his interrogation, he says that he had no choice or free will, for he was a mere slave in all his deeds (V78-83). In another place, the poet explains to the reader that it was fear and unease that compelled him to confirm his belief in the word of God and the Prophets (V102-106). This tension between professed faith and sincere belief is a recurring pattern throughout the poem: the late poet proclaims that he was a faithful and devoted Muslim while on earth, only to devaluate the statement immediately by adding that that is what he was taught and educated in, or that he has no choice but to profess Muslim beliefs under the pressure of his situation (V157-172). Very clearly, the poet despises the idea of following a creed in virtue of external motivation, whether it lies in obligation and fear or the prospect of a future reward. The deceased man also honestly admits that his faith was not always firm and unyielding – at times, he believed; at times, he was overcome with doubt (V154-172). When asked about the essence of God, the deceased man states that God is ether and that He indeed is existent (V289-300).

At one point, the poet grows weary and starts pleading for the mercy of his interrogators. He wants to be left in peace, for he is but an old man, and whatever they do, the poet cannot change what he thinks (V301-334). He was predestined to be what he was; how can he be judged now (V73-276)?

Furthermore, the interrogators enquire about the deceased man's views on sufūr and ḥijāb, women's unveiling and veiling. In his reply, the poet denounces the *ḥijāb* as harmful and presents women as the equal counterpart of men in society. Unveiling offers life and development, while veiling hinders any progress and welfare, he contends. Zahāwī remains true to his life's mission (V225-236).

Eventually, the poet becomes disgruntled with the pedantically fastidious, unending inquisition. Though terrified, he chastises his interrogators for the sheer extraneity and insignificance of their questions. Instead of enquiring about his beliefs, he demands that they ask about his deeds on earth, his fight against injustice and struggle for women's cause and human rights, his defence of the truth (V337-374). Despite his protests, the angels insist on examining his

religious convictions and obedience, delving ever deeper into the intricacies of the Quran and Islamic faith, as well as some popular mythology (V375-400).

Suddenly, the angels lose their patience with the sinner and ask him for his final word on who his God is, whom he worships and whom he professes as his Lord. The poet replies that he used to believe God to be ether and ether to be God, but now, in the terrors of the grave, the angel is his only Lord as he has power over his fate entirely[19] (V401-420).

After these words, which the angels perceive to show disrespect and ridicule, there is no salvation for the poet. He is condemned to be tormented and sent to Hell, and no further explanations or confession of faith may save him. The two angels proceed to torture the dead man in the most gruesome and cruel ways, which seems to bring them delight. The poet loses consciousness for some time, and when he regains it, he finds himself tied up with ropes (V412-462).

Only to taunt him, the angels briefly bring the poet to the gardens of Paradise (V463-550) before dragging him down to the depths of Hell (V557-605). Landscapes of the Afterlife are portrayed in a vein that distinctly resembles that of the Quran. While Heaven is filled with all the beauty and delights of the earthly world (whether in the form of a luscious dish or a luscious *houri*), Hell is fraught with everlasting misery and torture. It is a land of ash and dust, fire and lava, and the shrieks and cries of the damned are all that reaches the poet's ear.

The first person, the poet, meets is Layla, a beautiful young woman isolated from her lover Sameer. Both now are being punished for pursuing their forbidden love. Their estrangement in Hell pains her more than any punishment that may befall her in Hell. Layla is a recurrent figure in many of Zahāwī's previous poems[20] (V606-634).

Afterwards, the deceased poet wanders around the Infernal domain and notices many Arabic poets, namely al-Farazdaq and al-Akhtal, and scientists, artists, and philosophers (V635-646). He is greeted by al-Mutanabbi and al-Maʿarrī, he also sees Bashshār Ibn Burd, Abū Nuwās, Khayyām, Dante, Shakespeare, Imruʾ al-Qays, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Copernicus. Furthermore, there are Darwin, Hegel, Buchner, Gassendi, Spencer, Fichte and Thomas Huxley, Spinoza, Giordano Bruno, Newton, Holbach, Renan, Rousseau, Voltaire, Zarathustra,

[19] van Leeuwen, 'Literature and Religious Controversy: The Vision of Hell in Jamīl Ṣidqī Al-Zahāwī's Thawra Fī L-Jaḥīm', 348.
[20] Badawi, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry*, 53.

Cyril of Alexandria (*Abū Qīr*), al-Kindī, Ibn Sīnā, aṭ-Ṭūṣī (*Naṣīr*), Ibn Rushd, Abū Dulāma, and ar-Rāwandī (635-686). In other words, in Hell, he meets the best of humanity, prominent philosophers, intellectuals and free-thinkers. This thought is succinctly expressed in the following verses:

647	*lam ushāhid baʿda at-talaffuti fīhā*	when I looked around the fiery pit
648	*jāhilan laysa ʿindahu tafkīr*	I saw no imbecile without his wit
649	*innamā mathwā al-jāhilīn jinān*	instead, the abode of the imbecile lies in
	shāhiqātu al-quṣūr	heavens with towering palaces

Socrates is the one who first suggests that the condemned souls should rise to fight for their rights and not meekly comply with their damnation. The surrounding crowd is cheered by his words and gets to work. A scientist invents a contraption to quench the withering fires of Hell, and another one comes up with a weapon of sorts to destroy the abyss and their enemy. A young nameless rioter now addresses his fellow sufferers and incites their spite and anger evermore (687-807).

After this, a revolt flares up, a revolt that makes Hell tremble to its core. Maʿarrī talks to the rioters to incite their spite ever more and leads them in the rebellion against the Divine Decree and their damnation. They defeat az-Zabānīya, the angelic guardians of Hell,[21] and conquer the infernal realm. Demons (*as-shayāṭīn*) join the fight in support of the rebels and clash with the angels of Paradise over the abyss. The insurgents and demons eventually conquer Heaven, and therein they finally find relief and respite from the unbearable misery they formerly endured. The conquerors banish the witless and the unwise, and Riḍwān[22], the angelic guardian of the heavenly threshold flees as well (808-895).
Only in the final verses of the poem does the poet suddenly awaken and realise that it was all but a dream brought about by the consumption of watercress (896-900).

[21] 'Al-Zabāniyya', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).
[22] This guardian of the gates of Paradise is not included in Quranic eschatology, nor hadith. He is nevertheless an established eschatological figure in the Islamic literatures at least since al-Maʿarrī. See W. Raven, 'Riḍwān', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

1.2 Setting

The story of Revolt in Hell unfolds in a setting that is deeply rooted in Islamic eschatological traditions. Because this is an impressively rich realm of various notions, sites, figures and beliefs, this analysis shall not digress by a comprehensive description of Islamic eschatology and its development. Instead, what follows is an explanation of the general eschatological setting of the poem and some of the depicted eschatological images therein.

The opening scene reflects the eschatological notion of *barzakh*, which is an interval between death and the Day of Resurrection. The concept of *barzakh*, originally a product of folk religiosity, was gradually transformed into one of the doctrinal tenets upheld by Muslim scholars. Similarly, the notion „torment of the grave" (*ʿadhāb al-qabr*) was soon exalted to a dogma by the most rigid of traditionalists.[23] Thus Hanbali theologian and jurist Ibn Taymīya in his treatise The Creed to the People of Wāsiṭ (*Al-ʿaqīdah al-wāsiṭīyah*) writes: "Part of faith in the Last Day is to have faith in everything reported by the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, of what comes after death, so they believe in the trials of the grave (*fitnat al-qabr*), in the torment of the grave (*ʿadhāb al-qabr*) and its blessings (*naʿīm*). As for the trial, people will be interrogated in their graves. It will be said to a man, 'Who is your Lord? What is your religion? Who is your Prophet?' Allāh will keep firm those who had faith in the unshakable word in this worldly life and in the Hereafter. The believer will say, 'My Lord is Allāh, Islam is my religion, and Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, is my prophet.' As for one who doubted, he will say, 'Oh oh! I do not know! I heard people saying something so I said it!' Then he will be struck with an iron bar and he will scream. It will be heard by everything except human beings, for if they heard it, they would faint. Then after this trial he will be either blessed or tormented until the Greater Resurrection (*al-qiyāma al-kubrā*) is established and the souls (*arwāḥ*; sg. *rūḥ*) return to their bodies."[24]

[23] Bronislav Ostřanský, 'Smrtí Nic Nekončí: Smrt, Pohřeb a Záhrobí v Díle Muslimského Učence al-Qurtubího', in *Smrt, Hroby a Záhrobí v Islámu: Poslední Věci Člověka Pohledem Muslimských Pramenů*, ed. Bronislav Ostřanský, Orient (Praha: Academia, 2014), 79.

[24] The English translation is borrowed from Abu Amina Elias with two exceptions: I translate 'ʿadhāb al-qabr' as 'torment in the grave' rather than 'punishment in the grave'. Secondly, the last sentence of the excerpt is altered according to the Czech translation of Al-ʿaqīdah al-wāsiṭyah by Pavel Ťupek, which I find to be more precise. Abu Amina Elias, 'Al-Aqidah al-Wasitiyyah by Ibn Taymiyyah', Faith in Allah, 25 January 2018, https://abuaminaelias.com/al-aqeedah-al-wasitiyyah-by-ibn-taymiyyah/ Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymīyah and Pavel Ťupek, *Wāsiṭské vyznání* (Praha: Academia, 2013), 146.

In Zahāwī's narrative, the poet is brought for a brief stroll to Paradise before he is dragged down to Hell. This, and the events that ensue, are obviously the creation of the author's imagination, a flight of fancy. In eschatological tradition, the whereabouts of the souls between death and the Day of Judgement are disputed, or rather, there is a wide variety of notions and ideas on that matter. However, the idea of a peek taken by the deceased is alluded to in tradition as well. Al-Qurtubī, in his In Remembrance of the Dead and Doomsday, reports the following hadith: "When a person is placed in his grave, and his friends turn their backs to him, he will hear the sound of their steps. Two angels will come to him and let him sit and say to him: "What do you think of this man who was sent to you? "The believer would answer: "I bear witness that he is the servant of Allāh and His Prophet. "They will comment then saying: "Look at your place in hellfire! You have been given a good place in Paradise instead of it. "So, he will see both places. As for the hypocrite and the unbeliever, they (the angels) will ask him: "What do you think of the man who was sent to thee? "and he will answer: "I do not know! I used to go along with people in what they say. "Then they will say to him: "Cursed you are! Never did you have the knowledge! "Then, he will be hit with iron hammers on his ears. He will cry loudly to the extent that all the dwellers of other graves will hear him. "[25]

1.3 Literary Inspiration

As has been described above, the core story of Revolt in Hell is a flight of fancy based on the traditional eschatological Islamic beliefs. Furthermore, Zahāwī most definitely drew inspiration in other works; the "eschatological tourism",[26] which the main character undergoes, is an element well known to the Arabic literature.

Most notable of such works is the Epistle of Forgiveness (*Risālat al-Ghufrān*) by the blind poet Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī (973-1057), a prominent Arab poet who espoused rationalism, scepticism and pessimism. For Maʿarrī, human reason was the only tool and means of acquiring the truth.[27] He wrote his Epistle of Forgiveness as a response to al-Qāriḥ, a complacent literate and a bigot.[28]In its story, al-Qāriḥ travels to the Afterlife and visits Heaven and Hell. He is

[25] Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Qurṭubī, Reda Bedeir, and Khadija Ford, *An authentic selection of Imam al-Qurṭubī's At-Tadhkirah fī aḥwālil-mawtá wal-ākhirah = in remembrance of the affairs of the dead and doomsday* (Egypt: Dar-Al Manarah, 2004), 71–72.

[26]I borrow this eloquent expression from Gelder and Schoeler. Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī and ʿAlī ibn Manṣūr Ibn al-Qāriḥ, *The Epistle of Forgiveness or: A Pardon to Enter the Garden*, trans. Geert Jan van Gelder and Gregor Schoeler, vol. 1, Library of Arabic Literature (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

[27] Jaroslav Oliverius, *Svět klasické arabské literatury*, Vyd. 1 (Brno: Atlantis, 1995), 275; al-Maʿarrī and Ibn al-Qāriḥ, *The Epistle of Forgiveness or: A Pardon to Enter the Garden*, 1:xix.

[28] Oliverius, *Svět klasické arabské literatury*, 280.

surprised to see that some „sinners“ whom he deemed deserving of damnation found their abode in Heaven and some whom he would expect to see in Heavens reside in Hell. The epistle ridicules Quranic imagery of the Afterlife, as well as superstitious beliefs.[29]

Many of Maʿarrīs images seem to reverberate throughout Zahāwī’s poem; most notably the graphic and ironical description of Heaven with its hyperbolic emphasis on carnal pleasures. However, the resemblance of Revolt in Hell and the Epistle of Forgiveness is more than just a coincidence. Zahāwī placed Maʿarrī on an infernal pedestal amongst those he perceived to be the intellectual elite of humankind. Moreover, Maʿarrī stood at the helm of Zahāwī’s rebellion. Revolt in Hell can thus be perceived as a tribute to Maʿarrī’s legacy rather than mere emulation of his extraordinary skill.

[29] Oliverius, 280.

2 Reader-Response

2.1 Polemic with Determinism

This chapter analyses the relation between Islamic theological determinism and Zahāwī's criticism thereof. First, it examines the Islamic concept of predestination by tracing its roots in the Islamic scriptures and briefly explores the evolution of this doctrine throughout history. Second, it contrasts Zahāwī's verses with this doctrine and its origins. Finally, from this perspective, it views the reception of Revolt in Hell by Zahāwī's critics.

Belief in predestination as a sort of fatalistic worldview is an intrinsic part of Islamic beliefs since *al-qaḍāʾ wa-l-qadar* is the sixth of the *arkān al-īmān*, the Pillars of Faith in which every Muslim must believe. Muslim theologians *(mutakallimūn)* use the term *al-qaḍāʾ wa' l-qadar* to denote the Decree of God; the term may refer to both the eternal Decree (usually the term *al-qaḍāʾ*) and the one existent in time[30]. In the most general of way, the notion decree of God (*al-qaḍāʾ wa' l-qadar)* is the idea that all the good and the bad come from God, and God had fixed the course of everything in the world before He created it. This idea faces an apparent paradox: if everything had been predetermined to happen before it does happen, including acts and thoughts of people, and thus one's doing is predetermined before one acts, how can one be held responsible for any deed? Can people ever bear any responsibility for their own doing? Can one be put before judgment for his action if one is predestined to carry out that action? Indeed, if God ultimately controls all there is, including the acts of men, and people are still held responsible for their deeds, God cannot be Just. Alternatively, if people are responsible for their deeds but God is most Just, He cannot be Omnipotent.

The question of predestination and man's free will has been an intricate problem of Islam since its inception and a point of contention in Islamic theological discourse. Many Quranic verses give basis to the belief in the existence of Divine Decree that has ordained all that will happen (9:51, 57:22-24, 87:2-3, passim). Moreover, some verses outright establish the preordination of one's faith. "Had your Lord willed, everyone on earth would have believed. Will you compel people to become believers?" (10:99); "We never sent any messenger except in the language of

[30] 'Al-Ḳaḍāʾ Wa 'l-Ḳadar', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

his people, to make things clear for them. God leads astray whom He wills, and guides whom He wills. He is the Mighty, the Wise." (14:4); "God gives firmness to those who believe, with the firm word, in this life, and in the Hereafter. And God leads the wicked astray. God does whatever He wills." (14:27); "No soul can believe except by God's leave; and He lays disgrace upon those who refuse to understand." (10:100)

Such revelations leave men "the victims of an unrighteous God"[31]. However, some verses outright confirm that man has his own free will and, as such, is responsible for his own doing: "Do those who perpetrate the evil deeds assume that We will regard them as equal to those who believe and do righteous deeds, whether in their life or their death? Evil is their judgment!" (45:21) Also, God is the just and righteous *(al-ʿadl*) and will not wrong a soul, everyone will get what one deserves: "God created the heavens and the earth with justice, so that every soul will be repaid for what it has earned. And they will not be wronged." (45:22) "But as for those who believe and do righteous deeds, We will admit them into gardens beneath which rivers flow, where they will abide forever. The promise of God is true—and who is more truthful in speech than God?" (4:122) "But whoever works righteousness, whether male or female, and is a believer—those will enter Paradise, and will not be wronged a whit." (4:124) It is also worth noting that, according to some verses, even if one commits evil deeds and perpetrates evil, one can be saved by faith. "While those who believe, and work righteousness, and believe in what was sent down to Muhammad—and it is the truth from their Lord—He remits their sins, and relieves their concerns." (47:2) "Those who disbelieve and repel from the path of God—He nullifies their works." (47:1)

However, then again, more verses suggest that God chooses whom he wills to believe, and thus has man's fate firmly in His hand: "This is a reminder; so whoever wills, let him take a path to his Lord. Yet you cannot will, unless God wills. God is Knowing and Wise." (76:29-30) "Do you not know that to God belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth? He punishes whom He wills, and He forgives whom He wills. And God is Capable of everything." (4:40)

From the listed verses and many others, only one firm conclusion can be drawn: the Quran neither unequivocally confirms nor unequivocally disproves the concept of Divine Decree. As

[31] Arent J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development*, Routledge Library Editions: Islam, vol. 39 (London: Routledge, 2008), 44–45.

Guillaume puts it, Muhammad "made no attempt to grapple with the difficulty of his self-contradictory revelations." [32] Quran thus provides a scriptural basis to both sides of the theological argument, those who preach absolute predestination and those who argue for liberum arbitrium.

Original popular proto-theology adopted utter and complete predestination of people's thoughts and actions.[33] Still, the first opposition to this doctrine arose as early as the end of the seventh century.[34] At that time, a small sect, soon dubbed Qadarīya, started to teach that man possesses his own free will and power (*qudra*).[35]Their teaching came to be the basis of the movement of *Muʿtazila*, which arose before the first authoritative collection of traditions was published circa 245.[36]

The Muʿtazilite thought was firmly based on strict rationalism and, in many regards, remained unparalleled in the whole course of Islamic theology.[37] Regarding the topic at hand, Muʿtazilites proclaimed that the doctrine of predestination could not be reconciled with the concept of Divine Justice; hence man had free will and thus was responsible for his acts. For the Muʿtazilites, man was the ultimate master of his fate and the creator of his deeds, an idea that orthodox Islam strongly criticised.[38] Muʿtazilites called themselves *ahl al-ʿadl wa-t-tawḥīd,* indicating what lay in the focus of their teachings: that God is ultimately Just (and man, therefore, possesses free will) and *tawḥīd*, Islamic monotheism, the indivisibility and oneness of God.

After the Mutazilite movement was repudiated and suppressed by caliph al-Mutawakkil, it lost its influence to *ahl al-hadith*, a movement led by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, which unquestioningly laid emphasis on the authority of tradition and unquestioning reading of the Quran. This had bearing also on the question of predestination, as evidenced by the fact that tradition has not

[32] Alfred Guillaume, 'Some Remarks on Free Will and Predestination in Islam, Together with a Translation of the Kitabu-l Qadar from the Sahih of al-Bukhari', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 56, no. 1 (1924): 43.
[33] Egon Bondy, *Středověká islámská a židovská filosofie: Filosofie renesance a reformace*, Poznámky k dějinám filosofie 5 (Praha: Vokno, 1995), 17.
[34] Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, 53; Guillaume, 'Some Remarks on Free Will and Predestination in Islam, Together with a Translation of the Kitabu-l Qadar from the Sahih of al-Bukhari', 45.
[35] Guillaume, 'Some Remarks on Free Will and Predestination in Islam, Together with a Translation of the Kitabu-l Qadar from the Sahih of al-Bukhari', 45. More on the name *qadarīa* and its derivation see wesnick 53
[36] Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, 52; Guillaume, 'Some Remarks on Free Will and Predestination in Islam, Together with a Translation of the Kitabu-l Qadar from the Sahih of al-Bukhari', 45.
[37] Guillaume, 'Some Remarks on Free Will and Predestination in Islam, Together with a Translation of the Kitabu-l Qadar from the Sahih of al-Bukhari', 45.
[38] Bondy, *Středověká islámská a židovská filosofie: Filosofie renesance a reformace*, 17.

preserved a single ḥadīth that would argue for man's free will and against predestination.[39] The overall inclination of authoritative compilations towards strict predestination of one's fate is best illustrated by many hadiths in the Book of Qadar, a part of the Sahih of Bukhari:

"Each one of you is put together in the womb of his mother for forty days, and then turns into a clot for an equal period (of forty days) and then turns into a piece of flesh for a similar period (of forty days) and then Allāh sends an angel and orders him to write four things, i.e., his provision, his stated term to die (age), and whether he will be of the wretched or the blessed (in the Hereafter). Then the soul is breathed into him. And by Allāh, a person among you (or a man) may do deeds of the people of the (Hell) Fire till there is only a cubit or an armlength distance between him and the (Hell) Fire, but then that writing (which Allāh has ordered the angel to write) precedes, and he does the deeds of the people of Paradise and enters it; and a man may do the deeds of the people of Paradise till there is only a cubit or two between him and Paradise, and then that writing precedes and he does the deeds of the people of the Fire and enters it." [Sahih Bukhari, Book 82, hadith no. 65904][40]

"A man said, "O Allāh's Messenger! Can the people of Paradise be known (differentiated) from the people of the (Hell) Fire?"The Prophet replied. "Yes." The man said, "Why do people (try to) do (good) deeds?! The Prophet said, "Everyone will do the deeds for which he has been created to do or he will do those deeds which will be made easy for him to do (i.e. everybody will find easy to do such deeds as will lead him to his destined place for which he has been created)." [Sahih Bukhari, Book 82, hadith no. 6596][41]

6614. The Prophet said, "Ādam and Mūsa (Moses) argued with each other. Mūsa said to Ādam, 'O Ādam! You are our father who disappointed us and turned us out of Paradise.' Then Ādam said to him, 'O Mūsa! Allāh favoured you with His Talk (talked to you directly) and He wrote [the Taurāt (Torah)] for you with His Own Hand. Do you blame me for action which Allāh had preordained for me forty years before my creation?' So Ādam confuted Mūsa, Ādam confuted

[39] Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, 51.
[40] Muhammad ibn Isma`il Bukhari, *Sahīh Al-Bukhâri: The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari : Arabic-English*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, vol. 8 (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), 51.
[41] Bukhari, 8:317.

Mūsa.“ The Prophet repeated the statement three times. [Sahih Bukhari, Book 82, hadith no. 6614][42]

Of course, the shift from the Muʿtazilites towards the prevalence of *ahl al-hadith* transpired in the eighth and ninth century, and since then, many Islamic scholars have expressed diverse views on this matter. The most influential of these was al-ʿAsharī (873-935), who attempted to find a middle ground between Mutazilites and *ahl al-hadith* by introducing the term *kasb,* i.e. acquirement, obtainment. According to al-ʿAsharī, the ultimate Creator of all events is God, including man's deeds; however, these deeds have no moral value, they retain total neutrality. Only after man freely decides to act or not to act (i.e. to assume or not to assume these created deeds) do they receive moral value, making man morally responsible for his acts.[43]
To do justice to the complex evolution of Islamic thought on predestination and those who contributed to the discourse is beyond the scope of these lines. However, the quoted hadiths and *al-qaḍāʾ wa-l-qadar* as one of the pillars of faith are indicative of the overall approach of Islam towards predestination. Furthermore, as Wensinck points out, The Arabian Nights are replete with allusions to man's destiny and thus also stand witness to the *"to the enormous influence predestination exercised on Muslim minds.*"[44]
When considered in the context of Islamic thought, Zahāwī's verses expressing doubts about predestination are more than merely a provocative stunt:

77	*qultu: lā tasʾalnī ʿan ḥayātin*	I said: do not ask me about life
78	*lam yakun fī ghuḍūnihā lī ḥubūr*	I had no joy in it
79	*kuntu ʿabdan*	I was a slave
80	*musayyaran ghayra ḥurrin*	set in motion/ordained without freedom

[42] Bukhari, 8:325.
[43] Bondy, *Středověká islámská a židovská filosofie: Filosofie renesance a reformace*, 26.
[44] Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, 61.

81	*lā khiyāra lahu wa lā takhyīr*	without a will or a choice
82	*mā ḥabawnī shayʾan min al-ḥawli wa-l-qudrati*	they did not give me an ounce of might/power or ability
83	*ḥattā udīru mā lā yadūr*	to do what cannot be done/to twist what cannot twist
84	*kāna khayran minnī al-ḥijāra tathwā*	even stone was better than I was, firm and unyielding
85	*ḥaythu lā āmirun wa lā maʾmūr*	where there is no master nor servant
100	*yattabiʿu al-jāhilu al-hawā akhāhu*	ignorant follows the path of his kind*
101	*mithlamā yattabiʿu aḍ-ḍarīra aḍ-ḍarīru*	like the blind man follows the blind*
269	*wa-arā fī aṣ-ṣifāt mā huwa Allāh*	in describing God
270	*taʿālat šuʾūnuhu taṣyīgh*	exalting His matters is belittling Him
271	*mā ʿiqābī min baʿdi mā ṣaḥḥa naqlan*	what then is the punishment I deserve
272	*in mā qad ataytuhu maqdūr*	if what I did had been preordained
273	*laysa fī mā jiʾtuhu min khiyārin*	there was no choice in what I did
274	*innanī ....fī jamīʿihi majbūr*	in all that I was predestined
275	*wa idhā kāna minhu kufrī wa īmānī*	and if my infidelity and my faith
276	*fa-inna al-jazāʾa shayʾun nakīrun*	punishment is not right
277	*a-li-lahwin?*	for mirth?

278	*wa-Allāhu laysa bilāhin*	God is not mirthful
279	*am li-jawrin*	or for tyranny?
280	*wa-Allāhu laysa yajūr*	God does not tyrannise
281	*a-min al-ḥaqqi khalqu iblīs?*	is it righteous to spawn Satan?*
282	*wa huwa al-mustabidd al-muḍallil ash-sharīr!*	if he is a despotic evil deceiver
283	*innahu yulqī fī ʹn-nufūs šukūkan dhāta azfārin*	with claws he spawns doubts in souls
284	*nazʿuhunna ʿasīr*	their refusal is difficult
285	*innamā fī apostrofd-daárayni ʿusfun wa-ḥayfun*	but rather, in both abodes, there is tyranny and injustice
286	*ghayra anna as-samāʾa laysat tamūr*	nevertheless, Heaven does not move from side to side
287	*fa-li-nāsin taʿāsat wa-shiqāʾun*	for some misery and suffering
288	*wa-li-nāsin saʿādatun wa-ḥubūrun*	and for some happiness and joy
762	*wa-min an-nās man qaḍā Allāhu an yakfura*	there are those who God had destined not to believe in him
763	*wa-al-mawtu minhu dānin yazūru*	death is approaching them
764	*fa-hal al-ḥaqqu an yukhallida fī an-nār*	is it fair then for Him to condemn to eternal fire
765	*ʿalā al-kufr sāʿatan*	those who were forced to be infidels, albeit for an hour
766	*majbūr*	

In the face of this definite sense of predestination deeply rooted in the Islamic collective thought, Zahawi's explicit protest against the Divine Decree and proclamation of Divine injustice is rather daring. The fact that he let the epic's story transpire within traditional eschatological beliefs of Islam only adds to that.

Unsurprisingly, Zahāwī's critics reacted with utmost indignance:

"Jamil, you are the son of Muhammad Faydhī az-Zahāwī, the Kurdish muftī who came to Baghdād without a penny to his name and now your houses are vast, and your fame is immense, and it all is fame through Islam and by Islam, how dare you say "they revolted against their destiny"?[45]

[45] Fahmī, *Az-Zahāwī*, 224.

2.2 Escaped Satire

This chapter examines the descriptive passages of Paradise and the intricate elements that Zahāwī employs to build a satirical impression. First, it explores the verses in detail and then compares them with corresponding images in traditional Islamic eschatology (and their Quranic origins). Then, based on this comparison, the text attempts to identify critical satirical elements in Zahāwī's employ, which convey mocking, derisive undertones of the epic.

Zahāwī's descriptive passages of Heaven are vividly graphic and detailed. Interestingly, heavenly gardens are overflowing with rather worldly pleasures. The first verses of the passage bring about a lighter tone, only to gradually build towards ever more absurd images.

Upon entering the heavenly realm, the deceased poet is tantalised by the most delightful sensations one may conceive. A sublime scent touches his nose while he hears the sweet chirping of birds. Filled with awe and wonder, the poet strolls through Paradise. He finds all that one might desire there, and every wish of believers is granted. Zahāwī's verses enumerate all the succulent dishes and drinks served: fried fish, grilled quail, wine and ail, rivers of honey and sweet milk. Also, the poet takes notice of bountiful amounts of all that is precious on earth; gold, silver, rubies, diamonds and pearls; the believers wear beautiful and expensive garments, intricate jewellery. Young and handsome servants roam amongst the believers and serve them. No resource is scarce, and no action is forbidden. Paradise provides unending, ultimate bliss; death, pain, struggle, and misery are non-existent.

One may notice that many of the verses are repetitive, almost monotone - delicious roasts, the abundance of alcohol and other drinks, and every wish being granted:

473	*fa-ṭaʿāmun li-l-ʾākilīn ladhīdh*	delicious food for those who eat
474	*wa-sharābun li-sh-shāribīna ṭahūr*	crystal clear drink for those who sip
475	*samak maqlīyun wa-ṭayrun shawīy*	fried is the fish and roasted is the fowl*
476	*wa-ladhīdh min shiwāʾ aṭ-ṭuyūr*	and ever more fowl roasted
477	*wa-bihā buʿdun dhullukum thamarāt*	lands so vast you feel insignificant

478	*wa-kuʾūs malīʾa*	overflowing cups
479	*wa-khumūr*	and alcohol
480	*wa-bihā dawḥa yuqālu lahā aṭ-ṭūbā*	and a lofty tree called *aṭ-ṭūbā*
481	*lahā ẓill ḥaythu sirta yasīran*	shadowing with felicity*
482	*tatadallā ġuṣūnuhā fawqa ʾarḍ*	its branches swaying and swinging*
483	*ʿarḍuhā min kulli ʹn-nawāḥī shuhūr*	a tree that one can see from every corner of those lands
484	*wa-jarrat taḥtahā min al-ʿasal al-mushtār ʾanhārun mā ʿalayhā khafīr*	and beneath it run rivers of honey
485	*wa-min al-khamrati al-ʿatīqa uḫrā*	vintage wines streaming*
486	*ṭaʿmuhā az-zanjabīl wa-l-kāfūr*	tasting of ginger and camphor
487	*wa-min al-ʾalbāni ʹl-laḏīḏa mā yashrabuhu khalq*	delicious kinds of milk that all Creation drinks
488	*wa-huwa baʿda al-ghazīr*	in abundance

519	*fa-idhā mā shtahayta ṭayran*	if you crave a bird
520	*hawā min ghuṣnihi mashwīyan..wa jāʾa yazūr*	it falls from its branch roasted and comes over to pay you a visit
521	*ṭīnuhā min fālūdhaj*	its soil is sweet like honey (*fālūdhaj* is a type of Persian sweets)
522	*lā yamallu al-marʾu minhu...fahuwa al-ladhīdhu al-ghazīr*	one does not grow tired of it…so succulent and abundant it is

523	*wa-idhā rumta an yuḥāla laka at-tínu dajājān…atāka yaṭír*	if you desired a fig to become a chicken…it comes fluttering to you
524	*aw innaka idhā shiʾta an taṣīra laka al-ḥaṣbāʾ durran*	or if you wanted gravel to become pearls
525	*fa-innahá lataṣīr*	it will become so
526	*inna fīhā mashīʾat al-marʾi taʾtiya ʿajaban*	in there, one's wish becomes one's amazement
527	*ʿanhu yaʿjazu al-ʾiksīr*	in there, drink becomes weak, loses its power (meaning alcohol loses its intoxicating effects)
528	*laysa fīhā mawtun wa-lā mūbiqāt*	there is no death nor mortal sins
529	*laysa fīhā shamsun wa-lā zamharīr*	there is no sun nor bitter cold
530	*lā shitāʾun wa-lā kharīfun wa ṣayfun*	no winter, no autumn nor summer

Furthermore, there are Houris present, nubile women wherever one gazes, youthful girls of bewitching, angelic beauty, ornamented with jewellery and precious garments, chastely restraining their glances.

501	*wa-niʿma al-ḥūr*	how wonderful are the maidens!
502	*laysa yakhshayna fī al-majānati ʿāran*	for they do fear no disgrace
503	*wa-in ihtazza taḥtahunna as-sarīr*	even if the bed trembled and shook beneath them
504	*kullu man ṣallā qāʾiman wa-tazakkā*	everyone who had prayed and given alms
505	*fa-min al-ḥūr ḥaẓẓuhu mawfūr*	shall become fortunate with the maidens (his luck with the maidens shall be abundant)
506	*wa-laqad yuʿṭā al-marʾ sabʿīna ḥawrāʾa ʿalayhinna sundus wa-ḥarīr*	and he shall be given seventy virgins clad in silk and brocade

507	*yatahādayna ka-l-jumān ḥisānan*	like beautiful pearls, they sway to and fro
508	*fawqa ṣarḥin ka-anna-hu al-billawr*	on a crystal pedestal
509	*ḥabbadhā ajyādun taliʿna wa anẓārun bihā kullu mubaṣṣirin mashūr*	how beautiful are their erect necks! who gazes upon them remains bewitched and mystified
510	*wa-khuṣūrun bihā ḍumūr*	their waists are slender
511	*wa-aʿjāzun thiqāl…taʿyā bihinna al-khuṣūr*	and their derrieres are thick…so thick that they break at the waist
518	*inna fīhā jamīʿa mā tashtahīhi an-nufūs wa-al-ʿayn wa-al-lahā wa-al-ḥujūr*	there is everything the souls desire and the eyes, uvulae and groins

Zahāwī layers subtle irony one by one. In one of the final verses, the poet seems to be addressing the reader with the following question:

531	*atarā anna al-arḍa laysat tadūr?*	cannot you see that the Earth does not rotate?
532	*janna fawqa janna fawqa ukhrā*	levels of Paradise one upon another
533	*darajāt*	

Interestingly enough, Zahāwī does not depict in his Paradise anything that would not be described or alluded to in the Holy Book or Islamic eschatological writings. As for the Quran, the texts are replete with references to the Hereafter. About a tenth of the total length of the Quran is deeply concerned with eschatological matters.[46]

[46] Christian Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 37.

According to the Holy Book, Paradise is a place of utter security and safety (78:31), where every wish is granted (36:57). The scenery of Paradise is composed of luscious green meadows (30:15) and a refreshing shade (77:41), gardens and vineyards (78:32). Springs and rivers flow through the landscape (16:31). There are rivers of pure water, fresh milk that never spoils, delightful wine and strained honey (47:15). There are *two fountains of gushing water* (55:65), fruits, palm trees and pomegranates (55:68). The believers have such fruits they choose (47:15, 52:22, 56:20) and such flesh of fowl they desire (52:22, 56:21). The believers recline upon couches; they see neither sun [too harsh] nor bitter cold (76:13), clusters of succulent fruits hung meekly down over their heads (76:14). There shall be an abundance of everything one may desire while on earth, including precious rock and metal: vessels of silver, goblets of crystal (76:15). Their cups shall be overflowing (78:34) with fresh spring (56:18) or excellent wine (83:25) whose seal is musk (83:26) and which has no effect on their body, therefore they may drink it without limit and with no fear of throbbing brows or excessive inebriation (56:19). All in all, the food and drink shall be plentiful, and the believers shall enjoy a wholesome appetite as a reward for their work (52:19).

There are Houris, doe-eyed beings (44:54, 56:22), good and beautiful (55:70), cloistered in their pavilions (55:72). These beings are maidens of unuttered beauty; they resemble hidden pearls (56:23, 37:49). They are spotless virgins (56:36) with swelling breasts (78:33), who "before them" (before the believers) remained untouched by any man or jinn (55:56,74). Though there is a great emphasis on their virginity (55:56, 55:74, 56:36, passim) and captivating beauty, which together seem to allude to the sexual allure of the Houris, they are of modest gaze, restraining their glances (*qāṣirāt ṭarfʿīn* 37:48-49; 38:52, 55:56) and chastely amorous (56:37). Quran does not explicitly imply sexual congress between houris and the believers, although it specifies that buxom houris were created for the Companions of the Right (56:38), who shall be espoused to them (44:54, 52:20).

Moreover, late Medieval traditionalists took these imaginings one step further. Based on these Quranic allusions, the vivid imagination of Late Medieval traditionalists brought Houris to be no less than ideal courtesans.[47] Their writings describe Houris as young, nubile female creatures of submissive behaviour, willing to satisfy believers' every wish. Again, their visual features mirror all the ideals of classical Arabic feminine beauty.[48] The houris are portrayed as waiting

[47] Lange, 143.
[48] that is heavy posteriors. See Geert Jan van Gelder and Gregor Schoeler, p. 354

for the pious souls to visit them in their tents, sitting with "their large posteriors rising over the edges of their seats."[49] Another prominent aspect of Late Medieval eschatological notions is that believers in Paradise can experience an unending pleasure. All the delights one may yearn for here on earth are boundless in Heaven, and desire for food and sex is thus, somewhat paradoxically, both endless and immediately satiated. The graphic descriptions of everlasting pleasure go as far as to detail that a banquet of delicious foods and dishes in Paradise lasts "as long as the earth exists"[50] and that "the male inhabitants of Paradise have the potency of a hundred young men and coitus in Paradise, therefore, lasts for forty or even one hundred years, without genitals tiring or becoming sore from the effort."[51]

The above-cited texts shed quite a different light on the discussed passages of Revolt in Hell. One must see that in the context of Quranic eschatological images, let alone Mediaeval Islamic writings on eschatology, Zahāwī's verses somewhat lose their previously perceived potency. Yet a distinct sense of intentional derision and irreverence can still be traced in Zahāwī's words. Why is that so? There are multiple tools that Zahāwī employs to convey this impression.
First, considered in the context of the whole poem and its story, the verses on Heaven carry in a distinctly different tone than the rest of the epic. The terror of the grave, the angst and fear of the deceased poet facing Munkar and Nakir, and the misery of the condemned souls in Hell all convey a believable feeling of dread; in comparison, the descriptive passage of Heaven has a lighter tone. Of course, imagined lives in Islamic Heaven and Hell are very different, and these different contents by themselves lend the verses a different feel. Nevertheless, certain details in the delivery of the verses on Heaven stand out: repetitive enumeration of various dishes served, hyperbolic emphasis on the bravery of the Houris in the face of potential disgrace ("even if the beds shook beneath them"), or suggestive depiction of the Houris' slender waists breaking under the weight of their thick derriéres. While the style of repetitive monotone, interwoven with a hyperbola here and there, is very strong in the passage about Paradise, it practically disappears in the verses describing Hell and gives way to an allegorical storyline.

Also, Zahāwī concludes this passage with the question "*atarā anna al-arḍa laysat tadūr?* Cannot you see that the Earth does not rotate?" To fully appreciate the meaning and significance of this verse, it is necessary to realise the context of Zahāwī's period. Throughout

[49] Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions*, 143.
[50] Lange, 151.
[51] Lange, 151.

the 19th century, there was a growing awareness of the conflict between the "new sciences" (ʿ*ilm*) and religious truths, which only intensified in the second half of the century and continued well into the following one.[52] Zahāwī participated in the heated debates and contributed with numerous articles and poems on astronomy, Darwinism and other scientific discoveries.[53]. These debates took on various shapes and forms, including, among others, explicit attempts to disprove scientific facts such as the rotation of the planet Earth with religious arguments[54], attempts of which Zahāwī must have been well aware.

Zahāwī dedicated his life to the pursuit of knowledge and fighting against ignorance. He coveted knowledge with the passion characteristic of his fight for women's rights or against popular superstitions. There is no doubt that for Zahāwī, the question "cannot you see that the Earth does not rotate?" is loaded with irony, conveys a sense of ludicrousness and places the preceding passage in light of absurdity, childish superstition and blind folly.

Finally, and perhaps most notably, there is the apparent and direct reference to Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, as Zahāwī places him at the helm of the condemned souls' revolt against their fate. With this allusion to Maʿarrī's poetry present in the epic as a whole, it is clear that Zahāwī undoubtedly attempted to emulate some of Maʿarrī's ridicule of traditional eschatology. Maʿarrī "s portrayal of Paradise is distinctly similar to the one by Zahāwī; however, when compared, Maʿarrī is much more apt at satire than Zahāwī could ever hope to be. Let us illustrate both the similarity of parodical depictions and the difference of skill between Epistle of Forgiveness and Revolt in Hell with the following scene from Maʿarrī's work:

Ibn al-Qāriḥ notices a beautiful girl in Paradise but finds her rather thin for his taste. As he raises his head again, he sees that his unspoken wish has been immediately granted, and now she owns a posterior as vast as ad-Dahna desert, quite literally. Al-Qāriḥ, filled with wonder upon witnessing the Divine omnipotence, manifested in that girl's magnificent behind, addresses the Almighty in these words*: "Thou who givest rays to the shining sun, Thou who fulfillest the desires of everyone, Thou whose awe-inspiring deeds make us feel impotent, and summon to wisdom the ignorant: I ask Thee to reduce the bum of this damsel to one square mile, for Thou hast surpassed my expectations with Thy measure!"* To these words al-Qāriḥ

[52] Samer Akkach, 'Polarising ʿilm: Science and Religion in Early Modern Islam', in *Ilm: Science, Religion and Art in Islam*, ed. Samer Akkach (University of Adelaide Press, 2019), 5.
[53] Sadok Masliyah, 'Zahāwī's Philosophy and His Views on Islam', *Middle Eastern Studies* 12, no. 2 (1976): 180.
[54] E.g. *al-Barāhīn al-qaṭʿiyya ʿalā ʿadam dawarān al-kurā al-arḍiyya* (The Definitive Proofs against the Circular Motion of the Planet Earth) by Salīm Ilyās al-Ḥamawī published in 1875. See Akkach, 'Polarising ʿilm', 5.

hears in reply: *You may choose: the shape of this girl will be as you wish. And the desired reduction is effected",* concludes al-Maʿarrī.[55]

When all of the above is considered, Zahāwī's verses on Islamic Heaven emanate parody and satire even in the context of traditional Islamic eschatology, albeit not as skilfully as Epistle of Fogrviness does. However, when one considers the cultural and religious background of Zahāwī's critics, there is no wonder that his irony remained lost on them. While the graphic descriptions and vivid imaginings of some of the Late Medieval Muslim scholars might seem absurd and highly controversial to a non-Muslim reader (and in the 21st century especially), they are very much present in the Muslim collective imagination of eschatology. This fact made Zahāwī's caricature of the Islamic Afterlife so subtle for the eyes of his contemporaries that they were, apparently, never the wiser.

[55] al-Maʿarrī and Ibn al-Qāriḥ, *The Epistle of Forgiveness or: A Pardon to Enter the Garden*, 1:225.

Conclusion

The present thesis attempted to identify factors that made Zahāwī's critics predisposed to focusing on the polemic with determinism, which Zahāwī included in his Revolt in Hell, while entirely missing his ridiculing, ironical depiction of Islamic eschatological believes. Generally speaking, as evidenced by the Six Pillars of Faith, the belief in predestination is one of the core values of Islam and a tenet in which a true Muslim must believe. Furthermore, despite specific theological movements in the history of Islamic thought that decried the belief in predestination, presented evidence has shown that the notion has remained overwhelmingly existent in general Islamic thought. Open revolt against the divine Decree, both figurative and literal, is thus very provocative.

Moreover, collective eschatological imagination is rich in graphic, vividly explicit, and seemingly lascivious imagery. Therefore, to most readers familiar with the heritage of Islamic eschatology, whether consciously or unconsciously, Zahāwī's irony becomes elusive or even perhaps non-existent. Next to the blatant irreverence towards the divine Decree, Zahāwī's critics could hardly take notice of such abstruse satire.

If one doubts the presence of Zahāwī's irony, the present findings may offer detected cues the poet hid in between his lines, which help reveal his intent.

First of these cues is a noticeable change in the overall tone of the verses as one compares the passages about Paradise and Hell. The passage about paradise displays almost monotonous repetitiveness, evocating the same images over and over, interwoven here and there with various hyperboles like roasted birds flying to the believers' open mouths or the Houris breaking at the waist under the weight of their plump buttocks. These satirical elements recede in the passage about Hell and give way to an allegorical storyline (the condemned reason revolts and conquers Heaven inhabited by blind faith), thus resulting in a different tone of the verses.

The second cue which betrays satirical intentions is the moment when Zahāwī figuratively shakes the reader by shoulders and asks him, "Cannot you see that the Earth does not rotate?" The context of Zahāwī's life-long interests and efforts is proof enough of the heavy irony embedded in this verse.

Finally, another essential sign of satirical intention is the use of al-Maʿarrī as a plot character, one of the rebellion's leaders. Zahāwī aims to display a strong bond with Maʿarrī and build on

his rationalist, satirical legacy. This fact is evidenced by the similarity of the means they employ to develop a satirical portrayal of the Islamic Paradise.

The present analysis contributes to the research previously undertaken in the study of Revolt in Hell and Zahāwī's influence. Above all, it has filled the gap in the academic literature by submitting the satirical, ironical aspect of Zahāwī's epic to detailed scrutiny, which had previously not been done.

Additionally, in his study, Leeuwen explored whether Revolt in Hell justifies the verdict of heresy pronounced upon Zahāwī. Present findings could benefit his analysis since the satirical depiction of Islamic Paradise speaks volumes about Zahāwī's personal views and attitudes. The satirical elements he employs aim at literal, superfluous ideas of traditional eschatology, not at God - just as the revolt of the condemned souls overthrows Heavens and its inhabitants, not the throne of God. This emphasis is congruent with the deceased poet's interrogation in the grave; he does not denounce religiousness or the concept of transcendental God as such, but instead, he speaks against religious dogmas and blind, superstitious religiosity.

At his time, Zahāwī was a prominent public figure. He had a flair for kindling public debates, and he undoubtedly loved to be a provocateur, which a certain degree of his unlikeable arrogance only reinforced. Due to all this, he was a visible figure of public and intellectual life in Baghdad and the Arab East. Nonetheless, we still know only little about his impact on the intellectual milieu of this region, whereas his influence on Iraqi poetry has been well-known for decades. The present thesis explored a small part of the relation between him as an author and his critics as his readers; there remains a lot to be done in research of his influence on the Islamic society of his time. To what extent was he influential in reality? Which of the Arab intellectuals of later periods has he significantly influenced? These questions are yet to be sufficiently answered.

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