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# Eastern Flames In The Mind On Fire: A Study Of Eastern And Qur'anic Influences On Ralph Waldo Emerson

Mohammed Qays Khaleel AlQaisi

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**EASTERN FLAMES IN THE MIND ON FIRE: A STUDY OF EASTERN AND  
QUR'ANIC INFLUENCES ON RALPH WALDO EMERSON**

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts, English

By

Mohammed Qays Khaleel AlQaisi

December 2016

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AND QUR'ANIC INFLUENCES ON RALPH WALDO EMERSON**

English

Missouri State University, December 2016

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Mohammed Qays Khaleel AlQaisi

**ABSTRACT**

Ralph Waldo Emerson's interest in the east is evident throughout his essays, poems and lectures. He shows his fascination with the eastern cultures, religions and poetry when he quotes from eastern texts to strengthen his ideas, such as the notion of the Over-Soul, illumination, knowledge and nature. He regards the east as an ignored territory of knowledge that contains invaluable wisdom waiting to be explored by western thinkers. As the world witnesses an increasing gap between the east and the west, Emerson represents the universal way of thinking, as he believes in seeking knowledge in every part of the world and advocates for it. Besides the direct quotations from eastern texts, Emerson seems to integrate some of his knowledge of eastern writings, especially Islamic, into his texts. This work aims to explore the implicit references to Islamic philosophy and the Quran in Emerson's works. Through careful reading of Emerson's works, the Quran and Islamic philosophy, this work shows significant similarities between them. The similarities reflect Emerson's deep reading of Islamic texts, as he sees in them sources of new knowledge. This thesis unravels such implicit connections in Emerson works and shows that Emerson had read the Quran and other Islamic texts profoundly. I conclude that Emerson uses his in-depth knowledge of the Quran and Islamic texts to substantiate his ideas in his works.

**KEYWORDS:** Ralph Waldo Emerson, eastern, Islam, Quran, Hafiz, Mahomet, illumination, veil, poetry, wine

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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Dr. Matthew Calihman  
Chairperson, Advisory Committee  
Missouri State University

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Romantic and Indian Influences on Emerson’s Writing.....	9
Persian Charm in Emerson’s Works.....	19
The Quran Within Emerson.....	29
Conclusion.....	58
Works Cited.....	60

## INTRODUCTION

During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Ralph Waldo Emerson became one of the most read and respected writers of American Literature. His poems and essays were considered guidelines to live a proper life, which echoed the founding fathers' words. As Harold Bloom suggests, every American is an Emersonian, with or without realizing it (Bloom 11).

Emerson was an advocate of an open-minded society where opinions, no matter how different from each other, are valued. His views on the approach of the Civil War reflect his way of thinking. In 1851 he wrote in his journal "There can never be peace whilst this devilish seed of war is in our soil" (Neufeldt 502). The election of Abraham Lincoln restored his hope for a better future, after the dark days of hatred engulfed the American land. Emerson mentions the hope he had after the elections as a beginning of a new life: "A day which most of us dared not hope to see, seems now to be close before us" (Neufeldt 511). Yet, Emerson not only called for tolerance in America, but he also was ready to accept other cultures' views. He traveled around the globe to know more about the world, to seek other cultures and to understand the way they think. He was one of the few American scholars who were interested in the culture of the East. In the preface to *Gulistan* (1865), the American translation of the poem written originally by the Persian poet Saadi, Emerson writes:

We pass into a new landscape, new costume, new religion, new manners and customs, under which humanity nestles very comfortably at Shiraz and Mecca, with good appetite, and with moral and intellectual results that correspond, point for point, with ours at New York and London. It needs in every sense a free translation, just as, from geographical position, the Persians attribute to the east wind what we say of the west. (11)



These lines show the way Emerson perceived the eastern world. He saw it as similar to the west, Mecca as London of the eastern world and Shiraz as the New York of the east. Emerson regarded the east as a source of new knowledge and new poetry that could benefit the west, and that both the east and the west share the moral and intellectual features of humanity. In many of his journals, he refers to the east as “the mysterious east,” which for him was a land waiting to be explored and thoughts ready to be studied by the western thinkers (Carpenter 4). Emerson called his wife Lidian, “Mine Asia,” which is a fascinating example of his interest in the eastern world, as he loved his wife for her charms and mystery.

However, the lines above from the preface to *Gulistan* appear to have a contradiction. Emerson describes the east as a “new” place with a new religion and costumes. Yet a few lines later, Emerson mentions how humanity corresponds in both the east and the west by referring to New York and Mecca as examples. This contradiction of the east being the same as the west and yet new requires an understanding of Emerson’s mindset. For Emerson, the east offers new knowledge that can develop the American understanding. The east has a new religion and new traditions, but they still essentially share the universality of human thought that Emerson believes in. Hence, the differences in religion or traditions become shallow ones, as Emerson focuses on the way the east can illuminate more knowledge. Carpenter starts his book *Emerson and Asia* with a chapter titled “the undiscovered country,” which strengthens this interpretation (Carpenter 1). Once the east is discovered and explored, it sheds new light into humanity, hence adding new knowledge to the universal concept of humanity that Emerson believes in. In the light of this reading of the lines above, the contradiction ceases to be one, as the east adds

to the already foundational knowledge of universality rather than merely contradicting the west.

Scholarship on relationships between the east and the west mainly focused on the theory of Orientalism. Whenever the word 'Orientalist' is mentioned nowadays, one of the first names to come to mind is Edward Said. His book *Orientalism* stands out in its argument about the view of the east in literature. He states that the Orient is usually referred to in literature as something of a lesser quality than the Occident, and dependent on the Occident. The Orient cannot exist without the support of the Occident, and ironically, Said asserts that the support Orientalists mention comes from colonization. Hence, for Said "the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West" (Said 20). For Said, the western writers look at the east as a silent voice that needs to be represented through western writings in order to be heard.

On the other hand, Raymond Schwab in his *Oriental Renaissance* focuses on the influence of eastern thought on the west. His work expands on French and German Orientalism and how Orientalists developed their own literature with influences from the east. Schwab's positive view of Orientalism is mirrored clearly when he states that the Orient "not only enriched the index of knowledge, it determined lines of thought" (Schwab 15). Susan L. Dunston makes a similar point about Emerson when she claims that "Emerson's philosophy does not suggest that he thinks we ought to take up the lives of Orientals. Instead he thinks we ought to take up the newness that this poetry illuminates in our own sphere" (Dunston 126).

This work will be an example of Schwab's and Dunston's views rather than Said's, because Emerson examined the eastern works in order to show the west a new way of thinking that would elevate their knowledge. In fact, Emerson's enthusiasm with eastern works connotes a favorable perspective of Orientalism, mainly because eastern philosophy was a major source for Emerson's essays and poems. Hence, this study examines the influence of Islamic works on Emerson's thought, rather than criticizing Emerson for representing Islamic philosophy to American readers.

There are indeed many writers that focus on our differences rather than our similarities, but definitely Emerson is not one of them. He explicitly criticizes the mindset of "some men" who cannot see through the difference, as those men, he wrote, "have the perception of difference predominant, and are conversant with surfaces and trifles, with coats and watches, and faces and cities...And other men abide by the perception of identity. These are the Orientals, the philosophers, the men of faith and divinity" (Richardson 408). Richardson analyzes these lines by claiming that it is hard to understand Emerson's works unless we comprehend the fact that for Emerson, "Westerner and Easterner are profoundly alike, indeed identical," and if we do have differences, they are "shallow" ones (Richardson 408).

Emerson mentions the east many times in his journals and essays. Sometimes, referring to India, Persia or China. Other times he alludes to Arabs and Islam. He admired the splendor of expression in Persian Poetry, and wrote about Saadi and Hafiz and referred to their ideas in many of his works. As an example of Emerson's admiration of India, Emerson kept a copy of *Bhagavad Gita* and described it as an "empire" that "spoke to us" (Carpenter 19). As for Islam, Emerson quotes Ali Ibn Abi Talib, the cousin of

Mahomet, the last prophet in Islam and mentions him many times in his works. There are also references to the Quran, which Emerson bought in London and read. In Emerson's pocket diary, it says that he made the purchase in 1833, two generations after the end of the American Revolution, which can also refer to the importance of his reading of the Quran and other eastern sources on the way he became the proclaimed father of American Literature (Einboden 1).

Emerson's reading of the *Arabian Nights* is also evident in many of his works, where he combines religion and beauty. In his 1861 essay "Perpetual Forces," he refers to the *Arabian Nights* by using the character of Scheherazade as a symbol of the joy of youth, "Would you know where to find her? Listen for the laughter, follow the cheerful hum, see where is the rapt attention, and a pretty crowd all bright with one electricity; - there, in the centre of fellowship and joy, is Scheherazade again" (*The Later Lectures* 269). These lines show Emerson's reverence of the character Scheherazade, as a source of fun, energy and beauty. In his 1867 essay "Eloquence," Emerson states that Scheherazade has earned "the delight of young Europe and young America" (Carpenter 201). The *Arabian nights* offered exactly what Emerson looked for in eastern literature, the mysterious characters, splendor of themes and settings.

In an effort to promote eastern culture and literature, Emerson worked alongside Thoreau in 1842 in publishing "Ethnical Scriptures," which contained references to religious eastern books. The "Ethnical Scriptures" series was a part of the periodical *The Dial*. Emerson wrote to his friends to encourage them to explore the eastern culture. The majority of readers at his time ignored the east, and Emerson tried to let readers know

that they are missing an entirely new way of thinking that could benefit them in the long run. In one of the letters he wrote to make his thoughts about the east known, he writes:

The enterprise is very welcome to me, this brave sally into Orientalism, and the attempt to popularize some of its richest jewels. And yet I own some caprices or alteration of feeling on that subject. When it was proposed to me to reprint 'the Bhagvat' in Boston, I shrank back and asked time...It would however be as neglected a book, if the Harpers published it, as it is now in the libraries.  
(Carpenter 23)

These lines have some kind of bitterness from Emerson. He is disappointed that the east's culture and books are ignored by the majority. He believes that even if the east's books were printed by one of the most famous publishers in America, they will still be disregarded, or even looked down on. However, such mixed feelings did not stop Emerson from reading about the east and referring to it many times in his works, either explicitly, or implicitly to show the effect it had on his writings.

Throughout Emerson's works, there are many references to Islam, Arabs, Persians or the east in general. Emerson quotes famous Muslim philosophers or Imams, and he refers to Persian poets to strengthen the points he makes. He also makes references to Confucius, Chinese traditions and Indian religion and philosophy. While there is research that focused on the eastern references in Emerson's writings, it is very rare to find research that explores the hidden east in Emerson's writings. When Emerson starts an essay by a quote from the Quran, readers would expect references to the Quran in the essay, but instead, there are very similar passages or ways of thought between the Qur'anic verses and Emerson's writings.

It is widely known that Emerson did read the Quran, and he regarded it as a spiritual book which represents the religion of the mysterious Middle East. His reading of

Islam began in 1819 when he was sixteen, as he quotes George Sale's translation of the Quran in his journal that has the date of 1819 (Dimock 34).

Many studies determined where Emerson quotes from the Quran and why he does it, but this study aims to detect within the text of his essays and journals, very similar thoughts to that of the Quran. This study will focus on the passages that look highly similar between the Qur'anic verses and Emerson's works, which suggest that Emerson was highly influenced by the Islamic thought, especially the Qur'anic part of it, in a way that constituted a great part of his Transcendent theory. The major writers on the topic of the east in Emerson are mostly native English speakers, which might be a reason why it was hard to read the Qur'anic verses and see the great similarities. There is hardly an Emerson essay that does not have a reference to the East, whether it is directly quoting a figure or book, or whether it is, as this study suggests, hidden between the lines throughout the works. Critics described some of Emerson's poems as mysterious ones, which is a word Emerson liked to use to describe the eastern world. This suggests a striking similarity, which could be a result of the influence the east had on Emerson's thoughts, as he read and explored the eastern culture.

It is important to note that Emerson's interest in the Quran and Islam was not a quest for superior thoughts, neither was it a search for religious principles only. In fact, Emerson viewed the Quran and other Islamic books as sources of new philosophy that add to his knowledge. He searched for both spiritual and philosophical notions in Islamic texts. It is also essential to point to the fact that the term Islamic philosophy does not necessarily mean the religion of Islam. Many Persian poets, Hafiz for instance, were influenced by Islamic philosophy as a source of knowledge and parables for their poetry,

and not as a set of rules. The Arabic word *falsafah*, which comes from the Greek word *philosophia*, was sometimes substituted by the word *hikmah*, which means wisdom and originates from the Quran. Hence, Islamic philosophers made Quran their inspiration in their quest to find wisdom. In fact, one of the books that was an influence on Emerson's thought was *Akhlak-I-Jalaly*, which was translated from Persian by W.F. Thompson as *The Practical Philosophy of the Muhammedan People*. This book is a mixture of Quran, Sufism and Greek philosophy. Hence, Emerson's main point of interest in Islam was the philosophy it advocates.

In order to examine the influence of Islamic philosophy on Emerson's thoughts, it is important to give an account of the Transcendentalist movement, which is a philosophical movement that Emerson founded with other Transcendentalists such as Thoreau. The Transcendentalist movement started early in the Nineteenth century. It was mainly a religious and a philosophical movement that was inspired by Emerson and Thoreau, among other important Transcendentalists, such as, Amos Bronson Alcott and Frederic Henry Hedge. Transcendentalists believed in the ability to go beyond the physical form, to have a more spiritual experience with oneself. They also believed that a man or woman can grow better, intellectually and spiritually, when they rely on themselves, without the need of other people or society in general. Emerson criticized the influence of society on individuals, arguing that society imposes characteristics on individuals in a way that causes the person's unique character to fade and be replaced with outside influences. For Transcendentalists, the inner feelings, the instinct, are the essence for an individual to grow a healthy personality and live a true life.

Emerson's famous essay "Nature" clearly states his view of seeking a life that is true to oneself, when he asks "why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition?" (*Essays and Poems* 9). These lines call for an originality in thoughts, even in religion. These core elements of human life should stem from the individual's inner self. It resonates with Emerson's decision to step down from the Ministry of Second Church in Boston, as he believed in a universal Christianity which teaches that God is always there in all of us, and we do not need to go to church to pray. Emerson also argued that nature was essential in the development of individuals. He believed that inner peace comes with looking at the stars or walking in the woods while listening to the birds sing, rather than going to church (Ericson 11). His views were controversial at first, and resulted in banning him from lecturing at Harvard for thirty years. His Transcendentalist vision also attracted criticism, especially from Harvard Professor Andrews Norton, who called Emerson's view the "latest form of infidelity" (Richardson 325). However, his ideas about religion and the inner-self became essential to American thought. This Transcendentalist view is very similar to eastern thought, especially Qur'anic views. In Islam, one of God's names is "The Transcendent" and it is mentioned in the Quran in the context of God being in all individuals. It is the "Over-Soul" that Emerson believed in, or the universal God that exists in all.

### **Romantic and Indian Influences on Emerson's Writing**

Transcendentalism was not only influenced by the east. There were also other sources that inspired this line of thought, such as Romanticism and Kantian philosophy.



Hence, it is important to note how Transcendentalists were influenced by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. Kant argued that there is no knowledge of pure reason, he believed that we rely mainly on our modes of understanding something, our own sense, rather than what the material of the thing is. He was the first to speak of the Transcendental quality of the senses and he urged his reader to go beyond the physical form. American Transcendentalists were also influenced by the English Romantics. Coleridge was a significant source of inspiration, and Emerson met him when he visited England in 1833 to discuss his poetry and the philosophy behind it. Coleridge's concept of conscience as the primary source of action has Kantian resemblances and can be found in American Transcendentalists' writings.

In his essay "On Faith," Coleridge argues that the way we treat others, and the way we observe God, both have roots in our internal conscience. It is what separates people of conscience from brutes. Coleridge writes in his essay "I am conscious of something within me peremptorily commanding me to do unto others as I would they should do unto me" (Coleridge 341). For Emerson, to tell others what to do is a betrayal of the essence of humanity, because an individual has to rely on his inward pulse, which is in Coleridge's words 'conscience' to be true to himself. A minister should encourage people to find the universal mind and to follow their instincts, to admire nature and see God through it. Hence, any kind of preaching or advice must be to direct the listener to find the God within. It can be concluded that for both Emerson and Coleridge, a minister's main aim is to direct people to find the universal mind within each individual, and not to preach rules of sin and other traditional religious ways that could lead people away from their inner God and make them slaves to words imposed on them by others.

In the same essay, Coleridge examines the possibility of men/women being similar to God. When an individual believes in God, his belief gives him peace that can be felt by other people. The concept of humans being godlike is found in Emerson's "Nature," which is likely due to Coleridge's influence on Emerson, though Emerson uses the words "a man is a God in ruins" to describe people (*Essays and Poems* 46). An individual is a ruined god till they find their connection to nature, which will allow them to be self-reliant, acting on their conscience. Readers can sense the influence of Coleridge on Emerson's thoughts.

Critics argue that Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* had the most influence on Emerson's transcendental views. Matthiessen claims in his *American Renaissance* that *Aids to Reflection* made Coleridge "the most immediate force behind American Transcendentalism" (Keane 122). In *Aids of Reflection*, Coleridge tries to unify religion with philosophy in an effort to revive religious thinking. Both Coleridge and Emerson criticized the rigid religious thinking of their time and place, whether it is England or America. Coleridge wanted to revive religious thinking through encouraging reflection, while Emerson called for the use of imagination which helps an individual to recognize nature and the power of self in being in connection with the spiritual. The lack of imagination in religious thinking is one of the reasons why Emerson left the ministry in Boston.

Indian philosophy is another one of the primary sources that impacted Emerson's transcendental vision. The main inspiration came from the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Hindu scripture that is known for its focus on self-control and meditation. The concept of God being in everyone, and the concentration on the soul as the means to reach God rather

than the church or the temple is mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* and Emerson's writings. It is similar to the most important point of Emerson's Divinity School Address, which is to leave historical studies of religion and to realize that Christianity at that time was focused on the understanding of the person of Jesus rather than the soul (Goodman 628). The *Laws of Manu* is another Hindu source that Emerson took interest in. It is a religious and moral code of law and one of the oldest written law codes in the eastern world. The emphasis on individuality is found in the code, as it says "Single is each man born, single he dies, single he receives the reward of his good and single the punishment of his evil deeds" (Goodman 629). Emerson's writing is famous for its call to the individual to be responsible of his/her own fate and the responsibility to seek God from within. Another significant point of influence that can be read in Emerson's writing is his essay "The Over-Soul." Swami Paramananda writes "there can be little question that Emerson was strongly imbued with the spirit of the Upanishads when he wrote his essay on the "Over-Soul." The title itself indicates it, for 'Over-Soul' is almost a literal translation of the Sanskrit word 'ParamAtman' (Supreme Self) (Paramananda 65). The Upanishads is a collection of Hindu philosophy that studies the concept of reality and other philosophical issues.

The self-focused religion is a recurrent theme in the 1841 "Over-Soul" and the essay "Religion." In the "Over-Soul," Emerson claims that the "simplest person, who in his integrity worships god, becomes God" (*Essays and Poems* 198). This line could be an interpretation of the famous Upanishadic saying "that art thou," in the sense that 'God is you,' which reflects the individual spirit that realizes the inner connection with God. Emerson explains the process of realization, and how it should start with acknowledging

the fact that religious teaching is mostly wrong when it protects the traditional beliefs and ignores the spirit. Eventually, the individual will feel peace and begins to see God in himself and all other people, and in nature. Undoubtedly, this way of looking at religion is found in Indian philosophy, and the influence is clear on Emerson's writings that some critics argued that his writings would have been different if he had not read Indian philosophy (Riepe 122).

Emerson's fascination with Indian philosophy inspired him to write a poem titled "Maya." Maya in Indian philosophy refers to the way of observing the world as an illusion. It is a self-centered ideology in which everything that is irrelevant to one's life at a certain moment should be neglected, that is why people who practice Maya are usually hard to interest. They focus on what appeals to them at that moment, and anything else that disturbs self-focus is insignificant. Maya is very beneficial in times of crisis, and the individual can decide to ignore the chaos surrounding his/her life as irrelevant, because it is an ending illusion anyway. Emerson's poem "Maya" starts with the word 'illusion' and goes on to note that this illusion is for "man who thirsts to be deceived." The poem echoes the idea of the world as an illusion, and Emerson gives examples, such as the color of the sky in day and night and the colors of natural elements such as pearls which attract the human eye. Emerson argues that we wake up to the world as infants and observe appearances, and most of us remain infants by our naivety to the illusion of appearances (Riepe 119). However, "Maya" is not the only Emerson poem that points to Hindu teachings.

Emerson's *Brahma* is one of the poems that explain the Hindu philosophy, and it is regarded as one of the best explanations of Hinduism in the English language at that

time (Carpenter 112). The poem delivers a message of complete unity between man and nature, although the deceiving appearances make us think otherwise. The poem's title "Brahma" is the name of the Hindu God, and the poem is narrated through Brahma. The poem starts with a reference to the concept of immortality, yet Emerson conveys the concept in the following lines that undoubtedly refer to Hinduism:

If the red slayer think he slays,  
Or if the slain think he is slain,  
They know not well the subtle ways  
I keep, and pass, and turn again. (*Delphi Poets Series* 195)

According to Hinduism, Brahma's energy exists in every person, and even if a life reaches its end, Brahma's energy will still be there, it will just change form to that of the dead body. The lines above represent the everlasting Brahma energy and give an example of deceived people who think the act of slaying or being slayed means the end of life in that body. Emerson wrote the following more explicit reference about this belief in his journal in 1844, "Then I discovered the secret of the world; that all things subsist, and do not die, but only retire a little from sight and afterwards return again" (Carpenter 114). Carpenter notes that Emerson read the *Bhgavat Gita* at the time between 1836 and 1845, and he might have come across the lines that say "The man who believeth that it is the soul which killeth, and he who thinketh that the soul may be destroyed, are both alike deceived; for it neither killeth, nor is it killed" (Carpenter 115). The connection to these lines is clear in the opening lines of the poem "Brahma" discussed above.

In Emerson's the "Over-Soul," the notion of the unity of Brahma and man is also evident. In this essay, he mentions that "within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE" (*Essays and Poems* 187). Though Emerson does not explicitly mention

Hinduism, the lines show the unity described by Hinduism which exists in all souls and objects in the world.

Carpenter is one of the critics that questions the Indian reference in the essay title the “Over-Soul.” He argues that the title is more likely inspired by Neoplatonism. On the other hand, William Torrey Harris and John Smith Harrison believe that the *Bhagavad Gita* is the source Emerson borrowed from to give the title “Over-Soul” to his essay. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the same concept is found with the name “Supreme Spirit” or “Superior Soul.” Kurt Leidecker asserts that, although Emerson did not know Sanskrit and thus could not have read the original text, he could have borrowed from one of the available translations of the *Bhagavad Gita*, such as Rammohun Roy’s or Sir William Jones’s, and could have gotten the idea of the Over-Soul from them (Leidecker 45). In sum, the majority of critics show the Hindu influence in the essay the “Over-Soul.”

Another poem by Emerson that bears the marks of Hinduism is “Hamatreya.” The poem centers around Maya, the philosophy of illusion discussed earlier in the thesis. The Hindu Goddess Maia is the creator of appearance and variety in the world. Thus, the illusions are caused by Maia. The poem “Hamatreya” reflects the power of illusion that could lead into arrogance. The words ‘I’ and ‘mine’ show the ignorance of the speaker. The idea comes originally from *Vishnu Purana*, one of the ancient Hindu texts that Emerson read. In the poem, landlords walk around their farms, claiming that they are their own and everything the earth produces is theirs. On the other hand, the Earth laughs and knows that it is not theirs, as the following lines note:

Earth laughs in flowers, to see her boastful boys  
Earth-proud, proud of the earth which is not theirs;  
Who steer the plough, but cannot steer their feet  
Clear of the grave. (*Delphi Poets Series 35*)

Readers can sense the battle between the Brahma, which advocates for the unity of the world, and Maya, as those farmers were under the illusion of owning the property. The image of the grave symbolizes the unity of the world, as all will be buried in the earth eventually. The arrogance that is a result of the illusion caused by Maya is showed when the narrator of the poem says, “Mine and yours; Mine, not yours. Earth endures...They called me theirs, who so controlled me.” Those lines are followed by a description of the consequences of this type of thinking.

Yet everyone  
Wished to stay, and is gone,  
How am I theirs  
If they cannot hold me,  
But I hold them? (*Delphi Poets Series 37*)

The earth speaks ironically of the landlords or anyone who thinks he/she owns a land from the earth. The wisdom of the Brahma takes place here. We get to see the power of the illusion of Maya that distracted the landlords from the real truth of Brahma. Yet, Emerson shows that the most powerful in this battle is the unity of Brahma.

The lines in the poem “Hamatreya” have nearly identical ideas in the *Vishnu Purana*, which suggests that Emerson was relying on the Hindu text to write the poem and explain to his readers the universal spirit of Brahma and its counterpart, the illusion of reality of Maya. The following lines from the *Vishnu Purana* reflect on the same idea.

“These and other kings who...have indulged the feeling that suggests “this earth is mine,- it is my son’s, it belongs to my dynasty,” have all passed away...Earth laughs, as if smiling with autumnal flowers... I will repeat to you, Maiterya, the stanzas that were chanted by Earth... How great is the folly of princes...They say, “will we conquer the ocean encircled Earth;” and intent upon their project, behold not death, which is not far off.” (Carpenter 126)

The lines in the Hindu text have ‘the Earth’ personified, just as the poem in Emerson. The Earth laughs at the kings’ ambitions to possess lands, just as the landlords in

“Hamatreya.” The Earth tries to wake them from the illusions of Maya and to manifest the reality of their mortality, and the fact that all the world has unity in one universal spirit, as the Hindu texts show.

Carpenter is one of the critics who finds it interesting to show the similarities between Hindu texts and Emerson’s essays and poems. He pointed out the lines which sometimes looked equivalent and claimed that they show the influence of the Hindu philosophy on Emerson. One of the poems he used to support his claim is “The Sphinx,” which is a long Emerson poem. The poem also raises the theme of the energy of life and the unity of all souls, such as “Through a thousand voices, spoke the universal Dame” (Carpenter 128). Carpenter quotes other lines from the poem such as,

She silvered in the moon  
She spired into yellow flame  
She flowered in blossoms red;  
She flowed into a foaming wave;  
She stood Monadnoc’s head. (Carpenter 128)

Carpenter points out lines from the *Bhagavad Gita* to highlight the Hindu influence in this poem, such as “I am the light of the sun and moon...fragrant smell in the earth, refulgence in fire: I am life in all beings.” The lines in the poem discuss the Sphinx’s rising from the dead and the feeling of independence that the Sphinx experiences, yet the words Emerson uses to describe the Sphinx echo the lines from the *Bhagavad Gita* mentioned above. Carpenter also mentions that when Thoreau read the poem, he wrote his opinion in his journals. In Thoreau’s journal, the analysis of the poem depended on *The Laws of Manu*, which could strengthen the notion that Emerson was using his Hindu ideas when he wrote “The Sphinx” (Carpenter 128).



There are other works by Emerson besides “The Sphinx” that hint at his interest in the Hindu texts. The notion of illusion in Emerson’s writings has its origins in Hindu philosophy. As mentioned earlier, Emerson writes about illusion as an obstacle in our way to get to truth. His essay “Illusions” was written in his later years, after he read many eastern works. In the essay, he mentions “Yoganidra,” a Hindu goddess of illusions, and he discusses the belief that we have to see through the illusions of reality, to reality itself. The following lines from his essay “Illusions” expand on this belief.

I find men victims of illusion in all parts of life. Children, youths, adults and old men, all are led by one bawble or another, Yoganidra, the goddess of illusion, Proteus, or Momus, or Gylfi’s mocking,- for the Power has many names, is stronger than the Titans, stronger than Apollo. Few have overheard the gods or surprised their secret. Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood. (*The Works of Emerson* 408)

The lines tell us that illusion is indeed powerful and capable of distracting all ages. Whether it is Yogindra, the goddess of illusion, or Proteus in Greek mythology, who has the ability to change his shape into anything he wished, or Momus, the god of satire and mockery in Greek mythology or Gylfi in Norse mythology, who disguises himself just like illusion, hiding reality, hence illusion can take over men’s minds easily, and it is only through experience that a man/woman can see through it. Emerson goes on to note that few people can detect illusions early in their lives, and most of people have to go through the pain of realizing that they were deceived in order to see reality.

Later in the essay, Emerson compares the Hindu philosophy’s analysis of illusion with other philosophies and affirms that the Hindu philosophy treats the theme of illusion in a more sophisticated way than other philosophies, such as the Greek. He discusses types of illusions, and focuses on possession as one of the most prominent types, as

mentioned earlier in the poem “Hamatreya.” Hence, Emerson prefers Hinduism when he deals with illusions, as he makes it clear in the following lines:

The early Greek philosophers Heraclitus and Xenophanes measured their force on this problem of identity...But the Hindoos, in their sacred writings, express the liveliest feeling, both of the essential identity and of that illusion which they conceive variety to be. “The notions, ‘I am’, and ‘this is mine’ which influence mankind are but the delusions of the mother of the world. (*Annotated Emerson* 413)

Hence, Emerson clearly states that Hinduism is one of his main sources to incorporate the theory of illusion in his works. The denunciation of arrogance in possession is a frequent theme in Emerson’s poems and essays, which is an example of the theory of illusion, as the arrogant thinks he/she possesses something while in reality he/she does not. Such an example has its origins in Hinduism, as discussed above, and also in Islamic philosophy.

### **Persian Charm in Emerson’s Works**

One of Emerson’s major eastern influences is Persian poetry. He quotes and refers to Persian poets frequently in his essays and poems. Carpenter makes reference to the translations of Von Hammer Purgstall and Chodzko’s *Specimens of Ancient Persian Poetry* as the sources that Emerson read when he first came across Persian poetry (Carpenter 161). The creativity of Persian poets, especially Hafiz, caught Emerson’s attention. In Emerson’s 1841 essay “History,” he asserts that a poet, whether he writes in English, Arabic, Persian or Latin, is a unique writer who can express historical facts with elegant style. Emerson states that a poet “comes up in his private adventures with every fable of Aesop, of Homer, of Hafiz, of Ariosto, of Chaucer, of Scott, and verifies them with his own head and hands” (*Essays and Lectures* 250). Placing Hafiz among the names of great poets determines the importance of Persian poets to Emerson. In his

notebook, Emerson offers a description of Hafiz's name, which "signifies one gifted with so good a memory that he knows the whole Koran by heart" (*The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* 450).

Emerson's admiration for Hafiz is even clearer when he addresses the concept of our connection with the natural world using Hafiz as an example to follow. The Emersonian idea of realizing our spiritual connection with the natural world is mentioned many times throughout his works, and it is one of the reasons he quit the Ministry in Boston as discussed earlier in this study. In his journals, Emerson alludes to the poetry of Hafiz to give an example of a spirit in recognition of nature, he writes,

You defy any body to have things as good as yours. Hafiz defies you to show him or put him in a condition inopportune and ignoble. Take all you will, and leave him but a corner of nature, lane, a den, a cowshed, out of cities, far from letters and taste and culture; he promises to win to that scorned spot, the light of moon and stars, the love of men, the smile of beauty, the homage of art. It shall be painted, and carved, and sung and celebrated and visited by pilgrimage in all time to come. (*The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* 457-8)

These lines indicate the practice of the Emersonian doctrine of self-reliance in connection with the natural world. A man/woman becomes content with the least property, and can make any inferior possession a great delight to the soul. Emerson uses Hafiz as an example of a man capable of transforming a lonesome place into a beauty that will be cherished by the poet and then by people who will visit also.

Paul Kane claims that Emerson's admiration for Hafiz originates from the poet's self-reliance. He supports his point by quoting Emerson's essay "Persian Poetry," in which Emerson writes, "that hardihood and self-equality of every sound nature, which result from the feeling that the spirit in him is entire and as good as the world, which entitle the poet to speak with authority, and to make him an object of interest and his

every phrase and syllable significant, are in Hafiz, and abundantly fortify and ennoble his tone” (Kane 120). The language in this passage resonates with the Emersonian notion of self-reliance. In addition to that, the words “the spirit in him is entire,” leads us to the concept of the universal soul discussed earlier in this work. However, Emerson points out that what he likes more in Hafiz’s poetry is his authority as a self-reliant poet capable of making poetry out of the most barren lands. Said would argue that western writers look at the deserts of the East and examine how their people are living in a primitive society. In Emerson we see the opposite, a reverence and admiration for the east and their writers as rich sources of new forms of knowledge that could be beneficial to the western poets.

Hafiz is known to be a mystic. His poems have many forms of skeptic and religious imagery at the same time. In his journals, Emerson writes “Hafiz’s skepticism, is only that of a deep intellect” (Kane 120). Kane argues that the same statement can be made about Emerson’s religious and skeptic combination in his works. Emerson’s skepticism always served to reach a deeper part of truth, such as when he quit the Ministry and argued for a more spiritual teaching of Christianity.

Hafiz’s poetry contains religious and skeptic images, sometimes in the same poem. In his poem, “Since my Sulaima went to Irak” he mentions his love for wine, and how his beloved traveled to Iraq and left him, while asking God to protect her and arrange for them to meet one day. Hafiz uses both Persian and Arabic languages in this poem. However, readers can detect the mystic touches in the poem, as it serves an integration of the religious and bold love. A critic who is unfamiliar with Hafiz’s poetry will make the common mistake by assuming that Hafiz is not a Muslim, as Hafiz describes the pleasure of drinking wine in many of his poems, while he is in reality a

Muslim who challenges the traditional application of religion, the same way Emerson does. Emerson was criticized for his Divinity school address when he called to abandon traditional beliefs in Christianity. Hence, similarities were already there between Emerson and Hafiz (Hafiz 459).

Emerson kept many of Hafiz's poetry in his notebooks. The most notable part though is that Emerson kept some of Hafiz's ghazals. A ghazal is a form of poetry that has twelve bayts (verses) that work as two lines each. This kind of poetry is named ghazal for a charmingly romantic reason. The word ghazal refers to a gazelle, and critics argued that the poem is similar to a cornered gazelle which tried to run away from predators but to no avail, and it knows that death is near (Agha 3). Hence, ghazals reflect intense emotions of agony, or sometimes intense affection. Ghazals usually are poems about love, addressing the lover or lamenting the lover's absence. Elizabeth Gray points out that Emerson showed great interest in the ghazals because they "underwent a decisive alteration" from "a courtly love lyric" to "a vehicle to describe the mystic's loving relationship to God" (Kane 124). The change Gray refers to is in the reader's perspective. Readers can read the poem as a letter to the poet's beloved, or they can read it as a way of communicating with God. With the latter, Hafiz's genius becomes clearer, as many of his poems are organized this way.

The key to understanding Hafiz's poetry as a way of addressing the relationship with God is to comprehend Sufism; hence, Emerson dedicated a lot of effort to study Sufism. Sufism is a mystical Islamic school that teaches the concept of finding divine love through personal experience with God. Mystics developed a love relationship with God in which they do not fear being tormented, and do not base their relationship on a

hope for paradise. In other words, it is a love without expectations. The first Sufi school was founded in Iraq around 661, and it spread throughout the countries where Islam was practiced. Many of the mystic ideas are shared and influenced by interaction with Christian hermits. Sufism reached the *qussas*, or storytellers, who found it a captivating conviction that can flow into stories easily. Those storytellers influenced the spread of Sufism as they associated Qur'anic stories with other materials, such as Christian, Jewish, Gnostic and Zoroastrian (Dimock 25). The central belief of Sufism reminds us of Emerson's decision to quit the Ministry and try to realize the universal God in all. Hence, it was beyond doubt that Emerson would examine closely the poetry of Hafiz and seek the mystic in them, which sometimes correlates with Emerson's views on religion.

An example of Hafiz's poetry that attracted Emerson's attention is the poem "So long as there's a trace," which can be found in Emerson's notebooks. The poem has the mystic touch of realizing the universal soul discussed earlier.

So long as there's a trace  
Of wine and banquet house  
My head will lie in the dust  
Of the threshold of the winehouse  
Ask thou for grace hereafter  
At my gravestone  
That will be the pilgrim city. (*The Topical Notebooks* 480)

These lines invoke the mystic spirit of Hafiz's wine imagery. He states that his love for wine makes him graceful, and his grace will be the reason why people will visit his grave after his death as pilgrims. The poem can be interpreted as a bold statement confessing the love of life. Wine is sometimes used as a symbol of independence and liberty; hence, Hafiz challenges his readers to love their life even if they see their grave. The other interpretation which is closer to a mystic one is the love of God. Hafiz could be speaking

to his inner God, similar to Emerson's universal soul, asking God for more of his love which is symbolized by wine. The mention of pilgrimage at the end of the poem strongly supports this view, as Hafiz considers himself loved by God and can communicate with God, using Sufi concepts. His love for God makes him an example for people to follow, hence people will come to his grave as pilgrims seeking God, asking God to offer them the same grace he offered Hafiz. This is reflected in Emerson's words in his journal when he notes that Hafiz creates beauty out of nothing, and "It shall be painted, and carved, and sung and celebrated and visited by pilgrimage in all time to come" (*Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* 457-8). The reference to pilgrimage clearly correlates with this poem, in which Hafiz predicts the pilgrimage of people visiting his grave.

Gamard explained the wine imagery in the poem in a more sophisticated mystic view. He argued that the wine does not refer to an alcoholic drink in the poem, but has a spiritual connotation, like the inebriation caused by the love of God bestowed upon one's soul (Gamard 4). Hence, Hafiz will die but his grave will still be a source of the love of God, and that's why people will visit his grave the same way they visit Mecca, as a pilgrimage. Dimock suggests that, given Hafiz's reputation as someone who has learned the whole Quran by heart, he knows the earthly reality of this world, as everyone will turn to dust and hence must enjoy life (Dimock 48).

One of Hafiz's most important poems contains significant aspects that subsequently appear in Emerson's writings and are hard to miss when reading about Emerson's life. The poem deals with the notion of God's love in a more explicit way than the previous poem.

Cheer thy heart with wine:  
The earth is only

A house to which our bones  
Give the mortar.  
Seek not in thy friend, truth;  
Truth is dead;  
Holy fire comes not  
Out of church lamps.  
Blacken thou not my name  
For my riot;  
Who knows what the lot  
Inscribed on the brow?  
Turn not thy steps  
From the grave of Hafiz,  
Since though in sins sunken  
He waits for Heaven. (*Delphi Poets Series* 315)

The poem starts with a call of freedom and love of life. Hafiz addresses the fact that the present life will end inevitably and it is best to enjoy it. However, a mystic reading will argue that Hafiz is asking for the love of God, symbolized by wine. In the following lines, Hafiz tells his readers not to look for truth through friends or even the church, as “holy fire” is not there. These lines bear similarity to significant Emersonian ideas written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which shows Emerson’s admiration for Hafiz’s long-lasting literary genius. First, Hafiz is advocating individuality, he asks us not to depend on others when we look for the truth, but instead we should look for it within. It is hard not to think of Emerson’s “Self-Reliance” when we read these lines. “Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string” Emerson writes, and indeed his words resonate with that of Hafiz in the call for an independent soul (*Essays and Poems* 114). The words “holy fire” allude to God’s love, as the image of fire reflects passion. However, God’s love does not come from “church lamps,” and it is undoubtedly correct to say that it does not come from mosques’ lamps either. This doctrine is also similar to Emerson’s in principle, as Emerson left the teaching of the church in Boston and looked for a more spiritual belief



system. Emerson, just as Hafiz, mentions a friend who wanted to offer the truth to Emerson, and he said,

I remember an answer which when quite young I was prompted to make to a valued adviser who was wont to importune me with the dear old doctrines of the church. On my saying, What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions, if I live wholly from within? my friend suggested--'But these impulses may be from below, not from above.' I replied, 'They do not seem to me to be such; but if I am the devil's child, I will live then from the devil. (*Essays and Poems* 116)

These lines from “Self-Reliance” reveal Emerson’s resolution on living in individuality, even if his voice within maybe considered by some to be the mouthpiece of the devil. He describes how the “old doctrines of the church” cannot help him in his spirituality as he believed that God is within human reach without a church or a mosque. Hence, even if a friend offers his/her advice on spirituality, it is definitely best to “seek not in thy friend, truth” as Hafiz writes in his poem above.

When Hafiz writes “blacken thou not my name,” it is as if he is talking to the friend he shunned earlier. He tells him/her that even though I refused your call for truth, I have my own inner God. Hafiz asks his friend not to condemn him to a black hopelessness because no one knows what God thinks of him and what is the fate that is written for him, “inscribed on the brow.” Yet, we have to keep in mind that the “riot” of Hafiz was about traditional Islam, as he refused to look at religion as a set of rules practiced by people, and the same could be said about the “riot” of Emerson against traditional Christianity.

The last lines of Hafiz’s poem ask his readers, or the “pilgrimage” mentioned earlier not to abandon him when he lies in his grave. Even though he is likely to be looked at as a sinner, he “expects heaven,” which is an intriguing paradox to decipher. The mystic interpretation, or even Emerson himself, would interpret these lines as Hafiz

making an implicit attack on his critics, saying that they look at him as a sinner, when he knows that he is not sinful, and hence he expects to be in God's mercy. Emerson's reply to his friend that he is ready to live as the "devil's child" if he is destined to be so, resembles the implicit reply to Hafiz's critics, though Emerson states clearly to his friend that he believes that it is the God within that he follows.

In his essay "Manners" Emerson makes reference to both sins and self-reliance when they come together in a man's characteristics, when he notes "we are such lovers of self-reliance, that we excuse in a man many sins, if he will show us a complete satisfaction in his position, which asks no leave to be, of mine, or any man's good opinion" (*The Works of Emerson* 519). In these lines, Emerson could be referring to Hafiz, whom he applauds as an example of a self-reliant poet. Even though Hafiz is "in sins sunken," his self-reliance and his confidence in achieving God's acceptance is so appealing, that any man's opinion will not change the fact that Hafiz has walked the path he sees true and hence has the confidence to "expect heaven." Emerson's admiration of Hafiz's self-reliance is mentioned earlier, as he lauds his ability to make beauty out of nothingness. Hence, the last two lines in Hafiz's poem will be heeded by readers, as Emerson suggests, because Hafiz's self-reliance is a greater characteristic than his seeming sins. The "pilgrimage" of people will still come to his grave regardless of the way they look at him, sinful or not.

The influence of this poem becomes clearer when we examine one of Emerson's poems in his notebook, in which he writes,

Pour the wine! pour the wine!  
As it changes to foam,  
So flashes the day-god  
Rushing abroad,

Every new & unlooked for,  
In furthest & smallest  
Comes royally home. (*Delphi Poets Series 403*)

Emerson, like Hafiz, starts the poem with a celebration of drinking wine. However, the wine is followed by a reference to God, which again links wine to a mystic interpretation of the love of God. When the wine is ready and foaming, a flash of genius comes to mind, as God brings anything that is new and unique to the person drinking to God's love. God will even bring unique and "unlooked for" poetry from abroad, just like the poetry of Hafiz, and this poetry will "come royally home," in other words, this poetry will be understood by the person drinking to God's love, even if it was written abroad because the person who wrote it, Hafiz, also practiced the love of God within. This method of interpretation is similar to Dimock's analysis mentioned earlier.

## THE QURAN WITHIN EMERSON

Emerson's reading of the Quran provided him with a unique insight into the spiritual part of the Middle East. He quotes the Quran in many of his essays to strengthen his points and to inspire American readers to explore the eastern culture. He considered the Quran and Islam as lands which are left ignorantly uncharted by most learners.

In order to start pointing out Qur'anic insights in Emerson's works, it is necessary to refer back to Emerson's poem "Pour the wine," as it contains Qur'anic allusions. In the last lines of the poem, Emerson writes "Aphides like emperors / Sprawl & play their pair of hours" (*Delphi Poets Series* 403). The analogy looks puzzling at first, but the message behind it apparently is to warn against greed or power. Emperors revel in their powers after expanding their empires, while they forget the fact that their role in the world could end in any moment. Emerson compares them to small insects to emphasize the superficiality of power and the dangers of greed, as those emperors will expire just like aphids that ate too many plants. The analogy of insects and humans or kings is found in the Quran. First, there is a whole Surah in the Quran that is titled "Al-Naml," which translates into 'ants', in which there is the story of King Solomon, who was advancing with his troops towards ants, and the Quran describes how ants feared danger and escaped as a group to avoid being crushed. Another instance is more easily relatable to Emerson, as the sign 'ayah' states a clear resemblance in creation between humans and insects or animals, when it says "there is no kind of beast on earth, nor fowl which flieth with its wings, but the same is a people like unto you" (Sale 94). Hence, this sign could be used as an interpretation to the two lines of Emerson's poem mentioned above.

More proof of this interpretation and the Islamic influence on Emerson is the fact that Emerson's knowledge of the Quran and its references to insects is salient in Emerson's essays. Emerson mentions the story of king Solomon and the ant in a very similar way to the Islamic account. In his essay "Persian Poetry," Emerson notes, "on the occasion of Solomon's marriage, all the beasts, laden with presents, appeared before his throne. Behind them all came the ant with a blade of grass: Solomon did not despise the gift of the ant" (*Essays and Lectures* 126). Emerson brings this story of king Solomon as an example of eastern mythology. In one of his most prominent essays "Nature," Emerson writes,

But is there no intent of an analogy between man's life and the seasons? And do the seasons gain no grandeur or pathos from that analogy? The instincts of the ant are very unimportant considered as the ant's; but the moment a ray of relation is seen to extend from it to man, and the little drudge is seen to be a monitor, a little body with a mighty heart, then all its habits, even that said to be recently observed, that it never sleeps, become sublime. (*Essays and Poems* 22)

Again, Emerson's eloquence is so unique to the extent that these words could work as a decipherer of the Qur'anic reference to ants. Emerson shows how an ant can gain significance when compared to a man, as the ant's hard work, cooperation with other ants and the lack of sleep become unique characteristics of the species. Hence, Emerson uses this Qur'anic analogy in his essays and the poem "Pour the wine," though in the poem he employs the imagery to reflect on the greed of emperors. In his later essay "Memory" Emerson brings on the correlation again, when he writes "the sparrow, the ant, the worm, have the same memory as we. If you bar their path, or offer them somewhat disagreeable to their senses, they make one or two trials, and then once for all avoid it" (*Essays and Lectures* 101). Hence, an ant or a sparrow will remember a blocked path, or food that does not appeal to them, just as men and women do.

Another fascinating example of Qur'anic and Emersonian analogies is found in Emerson's book *English Traits*. In this book, he examines the pros and cons of the capitalist industrial world. He argues that the division of labor and the repetitive life style of hand work reduces humanity to machines. "A man should not be a silk-worm" as the "incessant repetition of the same hand-work dwarfs the man, robs him of his strength, wit, and versatility" for the sake of the upper-class people (*The Later Lectures* 857). This capitalist system will hinder development, because "whole towns are sacrificed like ant-hills," and "all are ruined." Hence, the working class, who are as hardworking as ants, will be deprived of culture due to the system imposed upon them by the factory owners and upper class people. However, the choice of the "ant-hills" to portray the suffering of the working class could be an influence of Emerson's reading of Islamic philosophy. A Hadith, which is a saying by the Muslim prophet Muhammad, uses the same image. The Hadith says "an ant bit a prophet, and he ordered the ant-hill burned. God revealed unto him, 'did you, because a single ant bit you, destroy a community?'" (Nasr 931). The Hadith can be interpreted as a call for the protection of animal or insects' lives. However, the description of the destruction of a whole community at the hands of individuals resonates with Emerson's analysis of the factory owners contributing to the downfall of a whole society by exploiting the diligent working class. The specific use of "ant-hills" indicates that Emerson, while reading Islamic philosophy, might have come across the Hadith mentioned above.

The eastern references are not limited to Emerson's essays only, as many of his poems also hint at eastern figures, philosophies or religions. The last lines of Emerson's poem "pour the wine" contain more references to eastern philosophy.

Making free with time & size,  
Dwindles here, there magnifies  
Crowds in a day the sum of ages,  
And blushing Love outwits the sages. (*Delphi Poets Series 403*)

In these lines, Emerson plays with the concepts of time and space. To “dwindle” and then get bigger is a spatial paradox, while the next line, to “crowd in a day the sum of ages” is clearly defying time. Sufism in Islam is known to have a unique view of time and space. It discusses the mystic way a soul experiences the love of God in a way that makes it defy time. Al-Razi, a famous Sufi Muslim philosopher and physician, believed that there are two types of miracles. The first type is the well-known one, in which God bestows miracles on his prophets as a sign of their prophecy, such as Moses splitting the sea into two halves and surviving his encounters with Pharaoh. The second type is when God bestows his miracles on those who are exceptionally close to him, which refer to Sufis and mystics experiencing the love of God (Nasr 732). Hafiz is an example of a receiver of that divine love, hence he drinks from the holy wine and imagines the pilgrims visiting his grave. Another example of the divine love defying time can be found in the Quran. In Surat “Al-Kahaf” there is a story of young men who escaped the persecution of their tribe and hid in a cave. The Surah discusses how those young men loved God and felt his love in return, and the consequence of that love was that their tribe did not accept it, as they practiced different beliefs and tried to force those beliefs on the whole tribe. The young men hid in the cave and slept in the bliss of God. The Quran discusses how God made them sleep for more than three hundred years in order to protect them from their tribe. When the young men woke up, they thought they slept for a day or two, but then they realized that everything is different when they exited the cave. In his *Study Quran*,

Seyyed Hossein Nasr describes the Sufi's mystical view of time in a sophisticated manner, when he notes,

from a mystical perspective, the cave represents the heart. According to some reports, the youths spent their time in the cave praying and praising God and devoting themselves fully to him. Thus for some, their plea for mercy was a plea for God to preserve them in or through the remembrance of Him. Insofar as one who is fully engaged in the remembrance or invocation of God can be said to be outside the experience of ordinary time, the extended life of the youths of the cave can be seen as symbolic of the experience. (Nasr 733)

These lines reflect on the Sufi view on time being irrelevant to the mystic experience.

Hence, the young men in the cave did not feel the passage of time due to that divine love.

In Surah "Al-Bakarah," there is another allusion to the Sufi philosophy of the insensibility of time, which states the story as follows,

Hast thou not considered him how he behaved who passed by a city which had been destroyed, even to her foundations? He said, how shall God awaken this city, after she hath been dead? And God caused him to die for a hundred years, and afterwards raised him to life. And God said, how long hast thou tarried here? He answered, a day or part of a day. God said, nay, thou hast tarried here for a hundred years. (Sale 31)

Some critics argued that the miracle here is a punishment to the man because he doubted resurrection. Other critics claimed that the fact that God spoke to the man indicates that he is a man, using Sufi vocabulary, close to God. Those critics supported their argument by referring to Abraham's question to God to "show how thou givest life to the dead" which they claimed to be a question that asks for more knowledge rather than a hesitation about the resurrection. Hence, God's love to the man made him insensible of time, as Sufis would argue. God's love for the man, referring back to Emerson's poem, "crowds in a day the sum of ages / and blushing love outwits the sages" (*Delphi Poets Series* 403). The love that a mystic or a man who has realized the God within feels, is an unworldly love that cannot be understood by Hafiz's critics who find fault with his love and his



wine drinking. The love that Emerson feels cannot be comprehended by the people who criticized him for leaving the Ministry and calling for a new set of principles for Christianity.

In Emerson's "The Over-soul," he explains his belief system thoroughly. He makes his argument of a God belonging to each of us and inhabiting our hearts. This belief system is almost identical to Sufi Islamic principles. There are passages in "The Over-Soul" that backs the argument of Sufi Islamic influence on Emerson when he wrote this essay. As discussed above the Qur'anic and Islamic legends of the insensibility of time and space, Emerson states the same notion clearly in this essay, when he writes,

The soul circumscribes all things. As I have said, it contradicts all experience. In like manner it abolishes time and space. The influence of the senses has, in most men, overpowered the mind to that degree, that the walls of time and space have come to look real and insurmountable; and to speak with levity of these limits is, in the world, the sign of insanity. Yet time and space are but inverse measures of the force of the soul. The spirit sports with time, can crowd eternity into an hour or stretch an hour to eternity. (*Essays and Poems* 189)

Emerson glorifies the powerful soul and argues that in his age, anyone who dared to scrutinize the limits of time and space is thought to be insane. Emerson makes it clear that "most men" do not have the capacity to acknowledge these limitations because their minds are not strong enough to control their senses. Time and space act against the force of the soul, yet to the individual who is able to achieve the higher spiritual quality that Emerson calls for, time and space are playthings for the soul. Hence, just like the Qur'anic verse claims, an eternity of a hundred years can be reduced to an experience of an hour. Emerson also states the notion in a more obvious manner later in the essay when he writes, "before the revelations of the soul, Time, Space, and Nature shrink away." (*Essays and Poems* 189)

Another example of the Qur'anic notion of time and space appears in one of Emerson's most influential essays. In "Self-Reliance," he instructs his readers on the values of abandoning old beliefs and depending on one's own intuition, or, using an Emersonian language, listening to one's own heart. However, after one decides to go on that path, Emerson provides readers of more details of the state of the self-reliant soul. A self-reliant soul "absorbs past and future into the present hour" and the one who is at this state of self-reliance knows that "time and space are but physiological colors which the eye makes, but the soul is light; where it is, is day; where it was, is night" (*Essays and Poems* 124). Emerson alludes again to the notion of the illusion of time and space. Hence, using a combination of Qur'anic and Emersonian concepts, a self-reliant soul that has been able to reach the God within recognizes that time and space are mere illusions, "colors" that eventually show their true reality. Consequently, the reference to the belief of the insensibility of time and space in Emerson's most famous essays is further proof of the deep Qur'anic and Sufi influence on Emerson.

Emerson laid the foundation of Transcendentalism in his essay "Nature," which attracted a great deal of interest. Emerson makes his point for this new belief system comprehensively in "Nature" and the Qur'anic reference is evident there. In the part where Emerson discusses how intellectual science affects our understanding of the world, as we begin to marvel in the creation and look at nature as the "appendix" of the soul. Emerson describes the journey to the realization of the God within as an ascension into the thoughts of the "Supreme Being." When we get to what Emerson and Sufis call "the moment of revelation," Emerson refers again to time and space.

No man touches these divine natures, without becoming, in some degree, himself divine. Like a new soul, they renew the body. We become physically nimble and

lightsome; we tread on air; life is no longer irksome, and we think it will never be so. No man fears age or misfortune or death, in their serene company, for he is transported out of the district of change. Whilst we behold unveiled the nature of Justice and Truth, we learn the difference between the absolute and the conditional or relative. We apprehend the absolute. As it were, for the first time, we exist. We become immortal, for we learn that time and space are relations of matter; that, with a perception of truth, or a virtuous will, they have no affinity. (*Essays and Poems* 38)

These lines mirror the soul after realizing the God within. Emerson clarifies the notion of revelation by pointing out that the men/women who are able to reach that high spiritual status will be divine themselves. In order to show how this notion of divine individuals is connected to Sufi Islam, it is notable to refer to William C. Chittick's essay "The Quran and Sufism." In this essay, Chittick refers to the "transformation of the soul, that is, achieving inner conformity with the Supreme Truth and Absolute Reality that is God himself ... Assimilating the soul to the Divine" (Chittick 1738). There is a significant correlation between the lines from Emerson's "Nature" above and the Sufi Islamic beliefs examined by Chittick. Both Emerson and the Sufis believe in a "Supreme Truth or Being" as the aim for the individual seeking the high spiritual status of recognizing the God within. An individual who achieves the God within becomes divine himself / herself according to the Emersonian system because this status is when the soul is purified into a new soul that sees things differently. In this high status, a soul does not fear old age or misfortune, as they are recognized as a part of the system in which God's love has the lasting effect. The soul has "transported" into the new soul, which is the "Supreme Being." Again, Emerson states how time and space become irrelevant to the soul in its high form.

However, the notion of the insensibility of time and space is not the only Islamic influence on Emerson evident in the passage above from his essay "Nature." Emerson

refers to a soul that “transported out of the district of change.” This could be related to the Sufi Islamic concept of “the Path of Transformation.” The Sufi’s aim in Islam is realization, which is derived from one of the divine names of God , *al-Haqq*, the Real. Hence, a Sufi Muslim has to go on a path to God which ends in realization. Chittick explains it when he writes “to achieve realization means to reach the Real, to see and understand all things in light of the Real, and to act rightly and appropriately in all situations. This demands the transformation of the very being of the seeker” (Nasr 1738). The concept of the path is essential to Sufi Islam. The words “path” and “road” occur many times in the Quran to denote this process of transformation of the soul, such as in the first Surah, al-Fatihah, which says “Guide us upon the straight path” (Sale 2). This works as a prayer to help Muslims go in the path to God and transform their souls. Hence, the path of transformation in Sufism indicates the process towards the Real, “the Supreme Being” as Emerson calls the end result of the process of transformation. Sufis give the example of Mahomet as a person who was capable of reaching the high spiritual status after transforming his soul by adopting the traits of God. The Quran describes Mahomet as “exalted” in character, having reached the divine status. Sufis explain the word “exalted” here as someone who has reached the highest spiritual status; the “exalted” has recognized the God within and hence feels the happiness of God’s love. These concepts remind us of Emerson’s life becoming “no longer irksome” as he reaches the high status of a “new soul” (*Essays and Poems* 38).

Another proof of the Sufi Islamic influence on Emerson in the passage above is the notion of the veil. For Sufis, the world is full of signs that are veiled to the human eye. Those signs serve in the path of transformation, and need to be deciphered to reach

the complete unveiling. In Surah “Fussilat,” the Quran challenges people to decipher those signs in the world around them and in their souls, when it says “we shall show them our signs upon the horizons and within themselves till it becomes clear to them that it is the truth” (Sale 361). Hence the Quran indicates that though there are signs around and inward, people fail to see them and will see them when they go through the transformation to the higher spirit. Sufis believe that everything has two components, the thing’s self, and the divine spirit in it. Hence when the Quran says “all things perish, save his face,” which discusses the mortality of all things except the divine spirit, or God’s face, Sufis analyze the verse in a deeper way as they see it saying “each thing perishes except its face” (Nasr 1742). Chittock analyzes this way of looking at the verse by referring back to the original verse which says that everything will perish except God’s face. The Sufi’s belief of a God within and in everything is evident in their way of reading the verse. They believe that the verse is meant to describe how everything will perish except that thing’s divine being, the God within it. However, while the God within is veiled initially, the end result of the transformation of the soul is the unveiling of the divine.

Hence, Sufis embark on the path in order to unveil the God within themselves and around them. Suhrawardi, one of the most important Islamic philosophers, makes the point clearer when he calls Sufis “people of unveiling.” However, what is more interesting is that when Sufis reach the status of unveiling, they recognize the mortality of everything. At the same time, they revel in their discovery that they are immortal due to the God within. Chittick refers to this notion when he writes “veils must be lifted so that the face of God may appear,” and when Sufis reach the status of unveiling, they

recognize “the transitory nature of the world” and realize that they are immortal in the God within them, which the Quran refers to above as “God’s face” (Chittick 1744). The striking similarity between this Sufi concept and Emerson’s lines points to Emerson’s readings of the Quran and Sufi mystic texts. In the quote above from “Nature,” Emerson notes “Whilst we behold unveiled the nature of Justice and Truth, we learn the difference between the absolute and the conditional or relative. We apprehend the absolute. As it were, for the first time, we exist. We become immortal” (*Essays and Poems* 38). Emerson refers to the Sufi status of unveiling, and how his view of the world changes after reaching that higher spirit. After the unveiling, we learn the difference between the absolute reality, and the transitory world. Hence, we become immortal, as we realize the God within. These lines indicate further proof of the Sufi Islamic influence on Emerson’s transcendental worldview, as those few lines contained essential Sufi Islamic concepts.

It is noteworthy to point how Emerson’s reading of the Quran connects to the idea of unveiling. Emerson starts his essay “Love,” with a Qur’anic epigraph which says, “I was as a gem concealed / me my burning ray revealed” (*The Works of Emerson* 327). Emerson cites the epigraph as from the “Koran.” Using the Quran to begin an essay about love signifies how important the Quran was for Emerson’s understanding. It is also common knowledge that one of Sufism’s main ideas is the concept of universal love that originates from the love of God, and these Qur’anic and Sufi ideas were integral in Emerson’s understanding of love to the extent that he starts his “Love” with a Qur’anic reference. However, the verse that Emerson cites contains reference to the Sufi notion of veiling. Emerson gives us a challenge at the beginning of his essay to decipher this Qur’anic verse. The Qur’anic verse refers to all, and hence everyone is a gem that is

veiled, with no clear view of the world. Once one goes through the transformation of the soul to the higher spirit, the divine within is realized like a burning ray. The worldview becomes clearer as it is “revealed” by the “burning rays” of the divine within. Emerson alludes to the divine in the first paragraph of the essay “Love,” a few sentences after the Qur’anic epigraph, when he notes that love comes “like a certain divine rage and enthusiasm, seizes on man at one period, and works a revolution in his mind and body” (*The Works of Emerson* 327). The revolution of the mind and body is the Sufi’s realization of the divine spirit that changes the worldview entirely.

Emerson explains the realization of the divine when he writes,

The relations of the soul to the divine spirit are so pure, that it is profane to seek to interpose help. It must be that when God speaketh he should communicate, not one thing, but all things; should fill the world with his voice; should scatter forth light, nature, time, souls, from the centre of the present thought; and new date and new create the whole. Whenever a mind is simple, and receives a divine wisdom, old things pass away, — means, teachers, texts, temples fall; it lives now, and absorbs past and future into the present hour. All things are made sacred by relation to it. (*Essays and Lectures* 124)

These lines shed light on the transformation of the soul to the extent that it is safe to say Emerson’s words here explain the Sufi Qur’anic realization of the divine within. Emerson describes the state after realizing the divine within as a state of confidence, because the man/woman listens to the God within, which is the utmost authority. There is no need for help to explain anything, as God reveals and unveils everything. Hence, after realizing the God within, everything is seen in a “new” light. Connecting this thought to Emerson’s quotation of the Quran, God’s “burning rays” unveil the true reality of nature, time, souls and everything around us. Emerson refers to another Sufi Islamic concept discussed earlier when he explains how the divine within eradicates old beliefs and makes the soul

aware of the illusion of time. I will explain the last line “all things are sacred” in the light of another Qur’anic theory.

In “Nature,” Emerson devotes a part of the essay to analyze how language is connected to the natural world. He explains the way we use language to refer to nature and how nature is connected to our spirit. However, Emerson goes on to note that everything in the material world has a soul when he writes,

There sits the Sphinx at the road-side, and from age to age, as each prophet comes by, he tries his fortune at reading her riddle. There seems to be a necessity in spirit to manifest itself in material forms; and day and night, river and storm, beast and bird, acid and alkali, preexist in necessary Ideas in the mind of God, and are what they are by virtue of preceding affections, in the world of spirit. (*Essays and Poems* 25)

This conviction though, is like a Sphinx, a riddle that cannot be solved or read by anyone.

This Emersonian riddle has its other piece in a Qur’anic verse which says, “the seven heavens, and the earth, and whosoever is in them glorify him. And there is no thing, save that it hymns his praise, though you do not understand their praise” (Sale 213). The mention of God and the material world having a spirit correlates with Emerson’s words. In *The Study Quran*, Seyyed Hossein Nasr explains the verse by indicating how “God is worshipped by all creatures, angels as well as beasts, and even inanimate creatures,” however, “this universal praise for God transcends human understanding” (Nasr 707). Using Emerson’s words to explain the Qur’anic verse, the language of beasts, birds, rivers and storms are riddles to mankind, and cannot be understood by mankind. Both the Qur’anic verse and the Emersonian lines refer to our inability to comprehend the material world’s relation to God. Emerson describes it as a “necessity” for the material world to have a spirit, such as rivers or beasts or storms. These exist in the “mind of God” who gives them their proper roles. It is also striking to see how Nasr explains the verse using a



favorite Emersonian word, “transcend.” The language of the material world is a challenge that even prophets tried to solve, and Emerson states that only people who could reach the “mind of God” would know the language and solve the riddle. Hence, this Emersonian riddle finds its clue in the Quran.

The evidence supporting a Sufi reading of this text is found in the very next verse, which says that when the Islamic prophet wanted to guide those who do not believe, he couldn't because “we place a hidden veil between thee and those who believe not in the Hereafter” (Sale 213). The pronoun “we” here refers to God as a stylistic method of exaltation. The verse addresses Mahomet to console him for not being able to deliver his message to those who mocked him. However, the verse alludes to the Sufi concept of the veil and explains that those who do mock Mahomet and accuse him of lunacy are veiled to the truth, they cannot understand what he says due to that “hidden veil” (Nasr 707). In “Circles” Emerson sheds light on the notion of the veil and provides an account of God lifting the veil when he asserts,

We all stand waiting, empty, — knowing, possibly, that we can be full,  
surrounded by mighty symbols which are not symbols to us, but prose and trivial  
toys. Then cometh the god, and converts the statues into fiery men, and by a flash  
of his eye burns up the veil which shrouded all things, and the meaning of the  
very furniture, of cup and saucer, of chair and clock and tester, is manifest.  
(*Essays and Poems* 206-207)

It seems like Emerson uses these strange materials “furniture, cup and saucer” intentionally, as to challenge our view of him, whether we are going to judge him to be insane, the same way Mahomet was judged by people of lower spiritual status. We see things lesser than they really are, we cannot find the symbolic meaning behind the material world if we do not see beyond the veil. As mentioned earlier, the Qur'anic veil creates the problem of the lack of understanding between Mahomet and the people who

accused him of insanity. Hence, both the Qur'anic and the Emersonian veils reflect a problem of the lack of understanding by the inability to see through them. However, Emerson accounts for the way to unveil the reality by a "flash" of the eye of God. Emerson is referring to the God within, which an individual can realize through the transformation to the higher spirit. When the individual reaches that spiritual level, he/she will see through the eyes of the God within, and hence everything loses its veil.

Through Emerson's reading of the Quran, he must have come across a vague Surah titled Al-Ma'un, which is translated literally into "the dish." A literal reading of this Surah does not provide enough meaning to understand the message behind it. Almost all of the writers who analyzed the Surah translated ma'un into "small kindness." Hence the verse is "so woe unto the praying. Who are heedless of their prayers, those who strive to be seen, yet refuse (al ma'un) small kindness" (Sale 460). The verse clearly attacks hypocrisy and gives the example of people praying out loud or merely praying to be seen and to increase their reputation. The last sign in the verse is the vague one, as a literal translation would say 'those who refuse or avoid dishes or the giving of dishes. Nasr explains the verse in his *Study Quran* by saying

this verse is understood to indicate those who perform their devotions well but do not act kindly toward others. *Small kindness* translates ma'un (dish) in accord with a widespread interpretation that sees it an allusion to utensils or tools that people would share and lend to one another, such as a pickax, a pot, a bucket, or other items of this nature. It can also be seen as an allusion to anything in which there is benefit. Others say the verse means to refuse guests. (Nasr 1567)

In order to show the hypocrisy of some people, the verse refers to those who pray but refuse to give food or charity. The translation above shows what the word ma'un, which means dish, connote. It does not refer to the material itself, but rather the act of giving it as a gift or lending it, or providing food in it for the poor or other people. It can also

connote the refusal of accepting guests and offering them kindness. Hence, a small object cannot be taken for its literal meaning only, as its deeper meaning connotes important themes, such as in this verse a dish connotes kindness. As a result, Emerson's use of the "cup and saucer" to explain a deeper topic is not accidental. Such "trivial toys" are only trivial when we see them as mere materials. Emerson tells us in the quote mentioned above how the God within makes us see through the veil of the material objects. "With a flash of his eye," the God within allows us to see the real "meaning of the very furniture, of cup and saucer." This is a strong indication that Emerson might be alluding to the ma'un Surah discussed above. Emerson tries to convey the message that everything before us, even the smallest and seemingly unimportant objects, will change in meaning when we are able to see through the veil. We can easily replace Emerson's words above, "mighty symbol" with the Quranic word "sign," and the meaning will not change, as the Quran says in many verses that the world is full of signs that allude to God. Hence, the other objects Emerson mentions, such as the clock and chair, also have deeper meanings than that we see.

Knowledge of the reality of things occupied a big part of Emerson's mind. He advocated for a pursuit of knowledge that defies the norms of the time. A study of the eastern works is an example of Emerson's endeavor to rejuvenate knowledge by adding from every part of the world. Emerson called for love and support for scholars in their efforts in research. In his collection of essays "Society and Solitude," Emerson gives a lively account of scholars' influence on society when he notes "a scholar is a candle which the love and desire of all men will light. Never his lands or his rents, but the power to charm the disguised soul that sits veiled under this bearded and that rosy visage is his

rent and ration” (*The Later Lectures* 221). Hence, the followers and supporters of a scholar are the essence he/she needs to elevate their work. The scholar’s work will brighten the darkness of ignorance like the light of a candle. The analogy of knowledge and light is also found in Islamic texts. The Islamic prophet Mahomet advocated for learning as a way to reach a higher level of intellect and spirit, hence recognizing God. This view is clear when he writes “The merit of the scholar over the follower is like the merit of the moon over the stars on a full-moon night. The learned are the heirs of the prophets.” The Hadith suggests a sense of superiority at first, as the scholars shine with their knowledge brighter than their followers. However, the moon cannot shine without the light of stars such as the sun. Similarly, a scholar cannot nurture his thoughts and learning without support from people around him. Mahomet urges people to follow the path of knowledge by signifying the importance of scholars in society as “heirs of the prophets.” Hence, Emerson’s knowledge of Islamic texts is not limited to the Quran or the Sufi poetry, but it also includes the Hadith.

It is also noteworthy to point to Emerson’s direct references to Hadith. In his collection of essays “The Conduct of Life,” Emerson quotes Mahomet to strengthen his argument of the importance of science in religion when he notes “The religion which is to guide and fulfil the present and coming ages, whatever else it be, must be intellectual. The scientific mind must have a faith which is science. "There are two things," said Mahomet, "which I abhor, the learned in his infidelities, and the fool in his devotions." Our times are impatient of both, and specially of the last” (*The Works of Emerson* 1076). Quoting the Muslim Prophet to demonstrate a learner’s path or a “Conduct of life” reflects the importance of Islamic texts and Muslim figures for Emerson. Science and

religion do not usually go together, as many have argued for one side against the other. However, Emerson' mind is capable of containing such contradictions, and he advocates for more learned religious men. He refers to the Hadith in which Mahomet describes two types of men that he does not think are beneficial to society. The first type is men who seek knowledge and reach the level of being learned, yet they do not believe in God. Sufis would interpret this Hadith as referring to men who reach a high status of learning, yet they give up on reaching the God within while they were on the right path. However, the second type of men is the one that Emerson places more emphasis on while quoting the Hadith. The second type that Mahomet criticizes is the kind of man who refuses to go on the path of knowledge, and decides to seek God only. Mahomet calls this type of man a fool, strengthening the Sufi concept of God being the end result of the path of knowledge. Emerson stresses the fact that the second type, the unlearned religious man, is the most dangerous in doing harm to society. Emerson seems to have an idea similar to that of Sufism, that both learning and recognizing God are important. However, when the unlearned man seeks God, he will be just another cog in the system of traditional religion that Emerson keeps denouncing. A few lines after quoting Mahomet, Emerson implicitly disparages his critics when he states that he believes that "there will be a new church founded on moral science" (*The Works of Emerson* 1076). Hence, the type of men Mahomet refers to as the unlearned religious men are the type that criticized Emerson's call for a new way of religion. Throughout his life, he has been denounced for his vocal criticism of the traditional practice of Christianity, and he asserts his conviction here.

As mentioned above, Emerson likens learners to a candle that spreads its light everywhere. Hence, knowledge is comparable to light. This obliges readers to look back

at the Qur'anic quote mentioned earlier, which Emerson uses to start his essay "Love," "I was as a gem concealed / me my burning ray revealed" (*The Works of Emerson* 327). In fact, the notion of light that reveals the truth of oneself is recurrent in Emerson's texts. Notably, the same notion of light constitutes an essential part of Islamic philosophy. In fact, there is a school of Islamic philosophy that is called the School of Illumination. Suhrawardi (1154-1191), a Muslim mystic, is the founder of the School of Illumination. *Akhlak-I-Jalaly*, the book which was read by Emerson, contains a commentary on the School of Illumination. Suhrawardi's Illumination theory centers on intuition and self-consciousness. These two are described as lights, as they illuminate any object or person we talk to or see. Once we become self-conscious of something, and our intuition reveals to us certain feelings about the object or the person we are dealing with, then both intuition and self-consciousness light the darkness that hid the thing we are experiencing (Ziai 448). Ziai sheds light on this intricate school of thought when he writes,

According to Illuminationist theory, the essence of man, which is the truth underlying the symbol "man", is recoverable only in the subject. This act of recovery is the translation of the symbol to its equivalent in the consciousness or the self of the subject. Since the soul is the origin of the thing by which the idea of humanity is ascertained, and since the soul is the closest thing to humans, it is therefore through the soul that one may first realize the essence of the human being and ultimately of all things. (449)

These lines point to the soul as the source of ultimate light. However, the "symbol man" is the man prior to realizing the God within, before going in the path of transformation mentioned earlier in both Emerson and Sufism. The Illumination theory states that once we go through this process of transformation, we transform from the symbol to the truth. Hence, the soul sheds light on oneself, and through that all things become clear.

Another detail of the Illumination philosophy that is worth mentioning is that it consists of three stages of knowledge, as mentioned in Suhrawardi's works. The first stage is the preparation for the experience, the second stage is the stage of illumination, in which the person receives Divine Light (al-nur al-ilahi). The third stage is when the person acquires the Illuminationist knowledge (al-ilm al-ishraqi), which reveals the reality of oneself and all things (Ziai 450).

Ziai analyzes a very interesting point in Suhrawardi's Illumination theory. Some individuals experience knowledge by presence (al-ilm al-huduri), which originates from strong intuitive knowledge. This kind of knowledge is associated with speculative mysticism, which results from a combination of this strong intuitive knowledge and the Divine Light. The individual who reaches this does not only know the reality of all things, but able to describe things in poetry. Ziai gives the example of Persian poetry as a result of the influence of the Illumination philosophy, when he writes "Persian poetic wisdom seeks to unravel even the mysteries of nature...by looking into the metaphysical world and the realms of myth, archetypes, dream, fantasy and sentiment. This type of knowledge forms the basis of Suhrawardi's views of Illuminationist knowledge" (451).

The philosophy of Illumination is obviously an Islamic philosophy; hence it is significant to identify the origin it emerged from. The source of the philosophy comes from the Quran, in which there is a whole Surah titled al-Nur, which translates into (light). The Divine Light is stated in the Surah as follows,

God is the light of heaven and earth: the similitude of his light is as a niche in a wall, wherein a lamp is placed, and the lamp enclosed in a case of glass; the glass appears as it were a shining star. It is lighted with the oil of a blessed tree, an olive neither of the east, nor of the west.: it wanteth little but that the oil thereof would give light, although no fire touched it. This is light added unto light: God will direct unto his light whom he pleaseth. (Sale 270)

This verse is one of the most famous verses of the Quran and it is the origin of many Islamic works. The parable of Light in this verse is explained to be the heart that receives the Divine Light, as represented by the philosophy of Illumination. Once the Divine Light reaches the heart, the Light is so strong that the person feels as if his/her heart is encompassing all things. This is also where the philosophy of Illumination gets its notion of the Divine Light that enables an individual to see the reality of oneself and all things. The verse focuses on the strength of the light and compares its source to an olive tree. In Nasr's *Study Quran*, he explains this to be a "heavenly tree, since any earthly tree would necessarily be eastern or western" (Nasr 878). He goes on to state "the imagery created by the first part of this verse is of a light radiating from a lamp fueled by oil, shining through a glass that covers the niche holding the lamp (alternatively, the light simply radiates through the glass that is part of the lamp body). These phrases which symbolize the Light of God have been interpreted as a symbolic account of human spiritual realization" (Nasr 879). The Sufis interpret this verse in relation to ontology, as they say that all creation are characteristics of the Light of God, and that every creation is a niche that receives the Light of God. Such a view interprets Light as the inner reality of the cosmos (Nasr 879).

Nasr provides further proof that this verse influenced schools of thought when he states that the verse was "the basis for an entire current of Islamic philosophy called the School of Illumination" (Nasr 880). Light is visible in itself, so it illuminates the person who realizes the God within, and it also grants visibility to everything else, hence it reflects the truth that God is the evident reality in oneself and by which all other things are known.



Emerson's reading of *Akhlak-I-Jalaly* and the George Sale translation of the Quran makes it very likely that he was familiar with the philosophy of Illumination and the verse of Light in the Quran. In his essay "Experience," Emerson does not only allude to the philosophy of Illumination, but he also points to Mecca as a place where he could experience such an illumination.

Underneath the inharmonious and trivial particulars, is a musical perfection, the Ideal journeying always with us, the heaven without rent or seam. Do but observe the mode of our illumination. When I converse with a profound mind, or if at any time being alone I have good thoughts, I do not at once arrive at satisfactions, as when, being thirsty, I drink water, or go to the fire, being cold: no! but I am at first apprised of my vicinity to a new and excellent region of life. By persisting to read or to think, this region gives further sign of itself, as it were in flashes of light, in sudden discoveries of its profound beauty and repose. (*Essays and Poems* 247)

These lines contain both implicit and explicit references to the verse of Light and the philosophy of Illumination. Emerson touches on the notion of "the heaven" within us and being "always with us." He advises readers to study his "mode of illumination." He then explains that his illumination does not come at once, like quenching a thirst for water or getting warm after feeling cold, but it comes in stages. The light enables him to see things in a new and "excellent" way. The view develops as the "flashes of light" grow stronger, allowing Emerson to make "sudden discoveries of its profound beauty." The concept of illumination and its stages are both evident here in these lines. It is as if the title of the essay, "Experience," points to this experience of Illumination in stages which has its roots in Islamic texts as discussed above. In the next few sentences after the passage above from "Experience" Emerson removes all doubts about the source of influence on his account of illumination when he writes "but every insight from this realm of thought is felt as initial, and promises a sequel. I do not make it; I arrive there... old with the love

and homage of innumerable ages, young with the life of life, the sun bright Mecca of the desert” (*Essays and Poems* 247). These lines assert the illumination happening in stages, and not a sudden one-stage experience. Emerson emphasizes the feeling of love and youth, as the Illumination sheds light on all things besides oneself, and hence Emerson invokes the feelings of love, youth and novelty. He compares the light of illumination to the sun of Mecca, giving readers further clues to follow that lead to the Islamic texts, such as the Quran or Suhrawardi’s Illumination, which Emerson read in *Akhlak-I-Jalaly*.

Emerson continues to revel in the experience of illumination in the next few lines, alluding again to the newness of things after the illumination when he states “what a future it opens! I feel a new heart beating with the love of the new beauty. I am ready to die out of nature, and be born again into this new yet unapproachable America I have found in the West” (*Essays and Poems* 247). Emerson uses the word “west” to refer to America to correlate with the east’s Mecca. The new heart is the result of the Divine Light illuminating the heart of the individual, according to Suhrawardi’s philosophy of illumination. The new beauty of nature and other things is due to the Divine Light being reflected on all things, according to the same philosophy which originated from the Quran. The next lines attribute newness to America, hinting at the changed status of all things, even the country as a whole. However, the word “unapproachable” suggests other interpretations for the lines. One interpretation is that Emerson refers to the reality of America, as he sees it now after the illumination, and he advocates for change by stating that it is unapproachable to him. Emerson has called for change as early as Transcendentalism began as a movement; hence it is not improbable that he is calling for change here. Emerson also criticized the lack of studies of the eastern world, and he

might be calling for a stronger interest in the eastern culture, especially if we take into account the mention of Mecca a few sentences earlier. Emerson suggests that his reading of the eastern culture did not only illuminate his own mind, but illuminated even the way he sees America as a whole, which is a concept of striking similarity to that of the Quran in the verse of Light, as the Divine Light encompasses oneself and then all things, hence things begin to be seen differently through the Divine Light.

In Emerson's essay "Swedenborg; or, the Mystic," he begins the essay with a portrayal of poets as an essential part of society. He stresses their importance by comparing them to workers or producers in the society, and argues that poets do not contribute to society by material production, but they give something far more important depicted in poetry. Philosophers also rank high in the Emersonian system as they advocate moral standards for society. Emerson highlights the influence of moral sentiments on creating a strong society when he writes "The atmosphere of moral sentiment is a region of grandeur which reduces all material magnificence to toys" (*The Works of Emerson* 661). However, it is intriguing to read the next lines in which Emerson quotes a verse from the Quran to support his point of the importance of moral sentiments. He writes "In the language of the Koran, "God said, The heaven and the earth and all that is between them, think ye that we created them in jest, and that ye shall not return to us?" It is the kingdom of the will, and by inspiring the will, which is the seat of personality, seems to convert the universe into a person" (*The Works of Emerson* 662). This verse connotes in the form of a question the responsibility placed on humanity. It is evident that Emerson alludes to the emphasis on moral responsibility by choosing this verse, as it asserts the notion that the creating of the world is not "in jest." What is more fascinating

is the fact that Emerson seems to be interpreting the verse after quoting it. The verse mentions the creation of heaven and earth and all that is between them, yet the verse asks the reader about the creation. It is clear that Emerson has connected the creation of heaven and earth with the addressee of the verse, hence heaven and earth and all that is between them is a cosmos within man. Emerson does not only read the verse with its surface meaning, but finds a way to understand it and build his intellectual treasure with it. This verse for him is an inspiration to take responsibility and move the will.

The inspiration that Emerson gets from the verse “seems to convert the universe into a person” (*The Works of Emerson* 662). Hence, the verse becomes a call for man to realize that the creation of the cosmos is small in proportion to the creation of man, who has the ability to encompass the whole cosmos within him through Divine Light. As discussed earlier in the philosophy of Illumination, the Divine Light enables the individual to see the reality of all things in a new light. If readers had doubt that Emerson is not quoting the verse in light of the Illumination theory, his writing removes all doubt again in further lines of the same essay. When Emerson describes Swedenborg, he narrates Swedenborg’s early interests, such as the study of minerals, mathematics, physiology, and astronomy. Emerson also gives an account of Swedenborg’s travels through Europe to study minerals. However, the real genius of Swedenborg erupted when he took a different path. Emerson writes “With the like force he threw himself into theology. In 1743, when he was fifty-four years old, what is called his illumination began. All his metallurgy and transportation of ships overland was absorbed into this ecstasy” (*The Works of Emerson* 664). In these lines, Emerson describes Swedenborg’s interest in theology as an illumination. Hence, quoting the Qur’anic verse mentioned

above and invoking the philosophy of illumination, both in the essay “Swedenborg; or, the Mystic” are further clues that point to Emerson’s reading of the Quran and the Islamic philosophy in *Akhlak-I-Jalaly* and their influence on him.

In “Society and Solitude,” Emerson sets some of the essential principles of Transcendentalism, such as the reliance on intuition. When he describes eloquence, he gives examples of efficient and eloquent speeches. He states that an eloquent speech has to advocate a noble sentiment. However, the eloquence of the orator depends on the listeners. Emerson warns of arrogance as an obstacle that stands in the way of recognizing eloquent speech and learning from it. He makes an interesting point about humility when he writes “Humble persons are conscious of new illumination; narrow brows expand with enlarged affections; delicate spirits, long unknown to themselves, masked and muffled in coarsest fortunes, who now hear their own native language for the first time, and leap to hear it” (*The Later Lectures* 26). These lines seem to depict eloquence and oration in light of the illumination theory. Emerson specifies humble persons as the receivers of this kind of oration. However, the oration Emerson mentions here can be interpreted as the orator and listener being the same person. Using the Qur’anic illumination theory discussed earlier, these lines can be made clear. Before the person reaches illumination, everything around them is “masked and muffled,” even themselves. When they are illuminated by Divine Light, the things around them begin to be unmasked. Illumination serves as the orator, and they listen to the Divine Light as it unmask their own souls, or using Emerson’s words, they “now hear their own native language for the first time.” Emerson confirms the notion of a combination of the orator and listener in the same person in the lines that follow, which say “all these several

audiences, each above each, which successively appear to greet the variety of style and topic, are really composed out of the same persons; nay, sometimes the same individual will take active part in them all, in turn” (*The Later Lectures* 26). Hence, Emerson explains oration in terms of the illumination theory, and analyzes oration and listening as parts of the process of illumination happening with one individual.

It is no coincidence that the Quran has a Surah titled Al-Nahl (the Bee) and Emerson wrote a poem titled “The Humble-bee.” Emerson devotes the poem to the intelligence of the bee and the way it reacts to nature. He starts the poem addressing the bee when he writes “burly, dozing humble-bee / where thou art is clime for me” (*Essays and Poems* 444). Emerson’s admiration for the insect continues throughout the poem, listing the bee’s features, such as “insect lover of the sun” that “tints the human countenance with a color of romance” (444). Emerson even compares the bee to man when he writes,

Wiser far than human seer  
Yellow-breeched philosopher!  
Seeing only what is fair  
Sipping only what is sweet  
Thou dost mock at fate and care (*Essays and Poems* 445)

The bee is pictured as a wise creature that is able to live through the dark realities of life in a superior way than man. Attributing wisdom to bees is salient in the George Sale translation of the Quran, as he adds comments on the verse by saying “the apartments which the bee builds are here called, because of their beautiful workmanship, and admirable contrivance, which no geometrician can excel” (Sale 201). Hence, Emerson must have come across this commentary of the Quran which inspired him to write about the bee. The commentary describes the way the bees build intricate hives that reflect their

intelligence. Emerson makes a similar claim in the poem by calling the bee a “philosopher.”

To make the striking similarities easier to observe, it is significant to quote the verse in the Quran that refers to bees. In George Sale’s translation, the verse says,

Thy Lord spake by inspiration unto the bee, saying, provide thee houses in the mountains, and in the trees, and of those materials wherewith men build hives for thee. Then eat of every kind of fruit, and walk in the beaten paths of thy Lord. There proceedeth from their bellies a liquor of various colours, wherein is a medicine for men. Verily herein is a sign unto people who consider. (Sale 201)

The verse shows that God “spake” his words to the bee. The bee is portrayed as a creature chosen by God to do a specific thing in life that serves humans. First, the bee is instructed “by inspiration” the way to build the complicated and beautifully constructed hives. In Nasr’s *Study Quran*, he explains the verse saying “there is evidence of the bees’ intelligence in their construction of their hives and the perfectly symmetrical, hexagonal structures characteristic of them, the secrets of which elude even human intelligence” (Nasr 675). This analysis of the verse, and the analysis that accompanies George Sale’s Quran, correlate with Emerson’s view of bees as intelligent, or as Emerson describes them “wise” (445). Then the verse describes the process of making honey. The verse stresses the importance of honey as a beneficial liquid that can be used to cure illnesses. On the other hand, Emerson seems to be inspired by the verse above when he describes the process of making honey in his poem as follows,

Aught unsavory or unclean,  
Hath my insect never seen,  
But violets and bilberry bells,  
Maple sap and daffodels,  
Grass with green flag half-mast high,  
Succory to match the sky,  
Columbine with horn of honey (*Essays and Poems* 445)

In these lines, Emerson continues to glorify the bee. He portrays the bee as a clean insect that searches for beauty in nature. He mentions various types of flowers as the bees' source of honey. The way Emerson refers to the bee as "my insect" is also intriguing. It is evident that both the Qur'anic verse and Emerson glorify bees as insects capable of producing honey, which is essential in keeping a healthy body. The insects are also pictured as intelligent by both. Emerson seems to confirm the thought that he was influenced by the Quran when he wrote this poem, as he revels in the bees' "drowsy tune," which reminds him of "Syrian peace, immortal leisure / firmest cheer and bird-like pleasure" (*Essays and Poems* 445). The reference to Syria, an important country for Islam, and following that by the religious concept of immortality are clues to Emerson's reading of the Quran in this poem.



## CONCLUSION

Emerson is an exceptional writer that mesmerized the minds of American readers and readers throughout the world. His writings created the basis of what is called the intellectual declaration of independence. His readings of the eastern culture, especially Islamic texts, represent him as a universal mind of extraordinary knowledge. He integrated the Islamic texts he read, such as the Quran, within his works, and their influence is apparent throughout his essays and poems. Emerson quoted the Quran in his essays “Plato; or, the Philosopher”, “Swedenborg; or, the Mystic”, “Napoleon; or, Man of the World” and “Shakespeare; or, the Poet”, which are in the collection titled “Representative Men”. Referring to the Quran within these essays shows the depth of Emerson’s interest in the Quran and Islamic culture. In a world that is witnessing an increasing gap between the east and west, Emerson stands as an iconic American writer who advocated for a universal understanding. This study aimed to reflect on the eastern, especially Qur’anic, influence on Emerson’s writing. Beyond the specific references in the aforementioned essays, there are lines in Emerson’s works that bear significant similarities to Qur’anic verses and Islamic texts, such as the Hadith, and this study focused on these similarities. In “Napoleon; or, Man of the World”, Emerson writes “God has granted," says the Koran, "to every people a prophet in its own tongue"” (*Essays and Poems* 332). Emerson’s influence was similar to that of a prophet with an American tongue. His works shaped the thoughts of his generation, and important thinkers that followed his steps. The world nowadays needs a revival of Emersonian thinking that knows no bounds. His thinking encompassed the cultures of the west, the far east, and the

Islamic culture, and he regarded these as sources of new knowledge that expands his wisdom.

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