

## Seeking the Meaning of Life: A Study of Islamic Mysticism in Ralph Waldo Emerson's Literary Works

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### Abstract

Ralph Waldo Emerson's interest in the East is evident throughout his essays, poems, and lectures. He regards the East as an ignored territory of knowledge and mysticism that contains invaluable wisdom awaiting to be explored by Western thinkers. As the world witnesses an ever-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 it. Besides the direct quotations from eastern texts, Emerson seems to integrate some of his knowledge of eastern and especially Islamic writings into his texts. This article aims to explore the implicit references to Islamic philosophy and Sufism in Emerson's works, focusing on the theoretical notions of Ibn Arabi's theosophy. Through careful reading of Emerson's works and Islamic mystical texts, this study shows significant similarities between Emerson and Ibn Arabi. The similarities reflect Emerson's deep reading and understanding of the Islamic and mystical texts, as he finds out in them sources of new knowledge and spirituality. This article unravels such implicit connections in Emerson's works under the notions of the Unity of Being and Imagination to confirm that Emerson has read the great

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Persian theosophical literary works, and through them, especially through Hafiz and Rumi, he learned Ibn Arabi's theosophy, and used his in-depth knowledge of them to substantiate his ideas in his works.

**Keywords:** Ralph Waldo Emerson, Ibn Arabi, Orientalism, Over-Soul, Unity of Being, Imagination, Mysticism.

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## **1. Introduction**

The Orient represents a spiritual muse rather than a geographical location for Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882). He is an exceptional writer who mesmerized the minds of his readers throughout the world. His deep understanding of Eastern culture, especially Islamic texts, epitomizes him as a universal mind of extraordinary knowledge. In a world that is witnessing an ever-increasing gap between the East and the West, Emerson stands as an iconic American writer, who advocated a universal theory. Emerson's influence was similar to that of a prophet with an American tongue. His works shaped the thought of his generation, and important intellectuals followed him. The world nowadays needs a revival of Emersonian thinking, which knows no bounds. His way of thinking encompasses the cultures of the West and the East, and especially the Islamic thought and culture, which he regarded as sources of new knowledge that helps in expanding wisdom and universal thought.

This article attempts to make a comparative examination of Emerson's insights in his works and the mystical notions of Ibn Arabi (d. 638/1165-638) as the greatest master of Islamic mystical thought. Ibn Arabi was born in Murcia (Southeast Andalusia Spain), the center of a fertile age of Islamic, Christian, and Jewish thoughts. When he was young, he studied philosophy, theology, mathematics, and cosmology. He wrote more than 350 works, including *Futuh al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Revelations*), which is an encyclopedia of

spiritual knowledge, and *Fusus al-hikam (Bezels of Wisdom)*, an exposition of the inner meaning of wisdom.

As William Chittick writes, “Ibn Arabi can be considered the greatest of all Muslim philosophers, provided we understand philosophy in the broad, modern sense and not simply as the discipline of *falsafa*, whose outstanding representatives are Avicenna and, many would say, Mulla Sadra” (Chittick 2019). Ibn Arabi’s theology is different in some concepts from other theologian and mystics; Imagination and the Unity of Being are two of these concepts that have had great impact on the scholars and philosophers in the East and the West. Although Ralph Waldo Emerson was influenced in his life and thought by various intellectuals, including Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, Thomas Carlyle, and Emanuel Swedenborg, his views and ideas are much closer to those of Ibn Arabi. Emerson was also influenced widely by Rumi and Hafiz, two great Persian poets.

This paper examines two different spiritual, religious, and mystical traditions, and attempts to show that they have contributed or may contribute in future to the creation of a global culture of peace. Yet, it is a known fact that war and violence have often appeared in the name of religion. Emerson, as a great theologian, loved all people based on his pacifist view and tried to promote love and peace. By comparing Emerson’s mysticism to Sufism and especially that of Ibn Arabi, this paper seeks to discuss how Emerson, who lived in a part of the world that is far from the Orient in a different culture and time could understand and adopt the messages of Islamic mysticism.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is twofold: first, to give a clear understanding of Emerson’s background as a great American

transcendentalist essayist and poet; second, to examine critically the ways in which Emerson experienced and recreated the Orient in his individual works in the light of Ibn Arabi's notions of the Unity of Being and Imagination.

## **2. Islamic Mysticism and Ralph Waldo Emerson**

The usage of the term “mysticism” has had a variety of meanings. Mysticism has been popularly known as becoming one with God or the Absolute. It may also refer to the attainment of insight into ultimate or hidden truths and into human transformation supported by various practices and experiences. Defining mystical experience as the direct experience of a relationship with a fundamental Reality allows different types of relationships to be acknowledged and investigated. The methods and means of fostering and maintaining such consciousness vary between religious traditions, but the products of the various practices are, at their roots, the same. As Rumi states in his *Mathnavi*, “Every prophet and every saint has his own spiritual method, but it leads to God: All are one” (cited in Chittick 1983, 136). Eveline Underhill, an English writer and pacifist known for her numerous works on religion and spiritual practices, holds that Eastern mysticism is distinguished from its Western counterpart by demanding another stage beyond union. According to Underhill, among the characteristics of this stage are total self-annihilation and a loss of individuality through merging with the infinite (Underhill 2004, 172).

Emerson was familiar with Oriental thought as manifested in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, but he was strongly attracted by the spirit of Persian poetry, especially that of Hafiz, Sa'adi, and Rumi. The poetry of Persia and the Sufism that Emerson loved were much affected by the theosophy and mysticism of the Ibn

Arabi. So, this study is largely based on Ibn Arabi's mystical concepts. Ibn Arabi, whose innovative ideas have been scattered in his diverse books, has always been considered as a very difficult theosophist. He is a pioneer theosophist with revolutionary ideas, and his great impact on succeeding theosophists and philosophers, especially the Sufis, cannot be ignored. Even his opponents were impressed by him. The following section is an attempt to point out the notions borrowed from Islamic mysticism in Emerson's works.

### **2.1. Unity of Being**

The concept of the Unity of Being (*wahdat al-wujud*) in Ibn Arabi's view is a theosophical approach to the world of being. It is also a conceptual interpretation of mystical unveilings. According to William Chittick, Ibn Arabi never used the term in his works, and just referred to it implicitly in one case (1983, 5). However, after his death, the opponents of this theory called him an advocate of the Unity of Being to excommunicate him, Ibn Taymiyyah being probably the first who made such a claim (Jahangiri 1996, 263). On the other hand, to bring Ibn Arabi's views closer to the philosophers' teachings and terminology, his disciples employed terms such as "existence" (*wujud*) and "unity" (*wahdat*), which were more familiar to philosophers, and coined the term "Unity of Being" to refer to Ibn Arabi's mystical view.

However, apart from the term itself, the concept of the Unity of Being or restricting existence to God and denying the existence of anything else comprises the main idea in Ibn Arabi's works. According to this idea, there is only one real existent (or existence) in the whole world, and all observable pluralities in the world have originated from a pervasive unity that embraces all of them. In other

words, there is a kind of unity in this plurality, whose relation to pluralities is like the relation between the limited and the absolute.

Ibn Arabi considers the existence of the world the same as the existence of the Truth. R. W. Austin writes, “The concept of the Oneness of Being is an all-embracing one, in that all Ibn Arabi’s other concepts are but facets of it, just as he would say that all distinction, difference, and conflict are but apparent facets of a single and unique reality, the ‘seamless garment’ of Being, whose reality underlies all derivative being and its experience” (Austin 1980, 25). Ibn Arabi has clearly emphasized, “At the station of self-manifestation, He is the same as all things; however, in the essence of things, He has no unity with them; He is incomparable with and higher than such a thing. He is God and things are things” (Ibn ‘Arabi 1980, 168). He further adds, “In a sense, the Truth is the same as creatures ... the Truth is not the same as creatures, thus be aware. It is the cause of both combination and separation, for it is both one and many and leaves nothing but Himself” (Ibn ‘Arabi 1980, 79). On the other hand, he believes that in everything there is a sign indicating that God is the same as that thing; thus, there is nothing in existence other than God; that is why in *Futuhat* he writes that Bayazid and some of the earlier saints said, “I am God and I am glorified” (Ibn ‘Arabi 2004, 2:392).

Evidently, Unity of Being is the most important component of mysticism in Emerson’s works. As Craig Considine rightly states, “One of the key components of Emerson’s transcendental philosophy is non-duality, which essentially means ‘not two’” (Considine 2013, 20). The time Emerson has spent in the natural wonders of nineteenth century Massachusetts offered him many experiences of deep mystical union with the universe. Emerson’s notion of “oneness” is one of the main ideas discussed in his essay *The Over-Soul* (1841), about which

he asserted that mankind should be united, “as the water of the globe is all one sea, and, truly seen, its tide is one” (1903, 2:294).

The soul is in fact one of the main sources of truth and the catalyst of spiritual growth for Emerson. He in *The Over-Soul* declares, “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” (1903, II, 269). He adds, “The simplest person, who in his integrity worships God, becomes God” (1903, II, 292). This line can be paralleled with Ibn Arabi’s remark in *Futuhat* that “He [God] is not only their Maker but also their being. All things owe their existence to Him [and] existence is not something against the Truth or out of Him so that He may give it to other than Him. Rather, He is the same as existence and all entities have appeared through Him” (Ibn ‘Arabi 2002, 1:406).

Emerson describes the various aspects of the over-soul. He states that the Supreme Being or the over-soul is present in every human being and in natural world and has attributes such as beauty, love, wisdom, virtue and power. Emerson describes the over-soul as the universal unity within which every person’s particular being is contained. The over-soul is the very essence of our being and it inspires our thinking and actions; Myerson writes, “The over-soul is better conceived as a source of energy, an enabling power, of which each individual is a particular manifestation” (2000, 165). So, the soul, in communion with the over-soul, perceives and reveals truth. The soul is not an organ but the perceiver and revealer of the eternal present in man (Emerson 1903, 2:279). Emerson adds, “The soul in man is not an organ but animates and exercises all the organs ... so, every individual must always exercise a mind of vigilant

watchfulness and openness to the disclosures of the soul, or its revelations, the influx of the Divine mind into our mind” (Emerson 1903, 2:270).

Regarding the existence of God and the existence of the world as viewed by Ibn Arabi, Chittick states, “Concerning the knowledge of God we must say that the highest level of Oneness is that the existence of the world is the same as the existence of the Truth and that of other than Him. And if there were no limits, there would be no differences and distinctions” (Chittick 1983, 16). For Emerson, over-soul is the basis of all the truth as well, as he says in *Compensation*:

The soul is under all this running sea of circumstance, whose waters ebb and flow with perfect balance, lies the aboriginal abyss of real Being ... Being is the vast affirmation, excluding negation, self-balanced, and swallowing up all relations, parts, and times within itself. Nature, truth, virtues, are the influx from thence ... (1903, 2:121)

He also states in *Self-Reliance*, “Here are the lungs of that inspiration which giveth man wisdom, and which cannot be denied without impiety and atheism” (Emerson 1903, 2:64). However, Emerson was not a true pantheist; he strongly believed that the Over-Soul is not in persons or things; rather, persons and things are in the Over-Soul. Not having individual souls, beings participate in the Over-Soul, a participation that bespeaks an idiosyncratic view of relationship that authorizes his new definition of revelation. “I am part or parcel of the Over-Soul,” he writes in *Nature* (1903, 1:10). He thought of God as the soul of the world, as the Universal Mind pervading all things, and regarded the human mind as an integral part of the Absolute Mind. In *The Over-Soul*, he writes:

The soul gives itself, alone, original, and pure, to the Lonely, Original, and Pure, who on that condition, gladly inhabits, leads,



and speaks through it ... and thereby I do overlook the sun and the stars, and feel them to be the fair accidents and effects which change and pass. (1903, 2:296)

Emerson comes very close here to Ibn Arabi's mystical notion that "There is no being save Him" (*tawhid al-khas*), a condition granted by intuition, which sees the Truth in the creatures and believes that there is nothing in existence other than God. Consequently, Emerson is definite that when contact is established with *The Over-Soul*, it is ignoble to expect the resultant revelation to take the form of "fortune-telling." Such "low curiosity" (1903, 2:284) must be checked. Man must simply go on working and living, and all his doubts and hesitations will resolve themselves; he will find that "the question and the answer are one" (1903, 2:285).

## **2.2. Imagination**

In Ibn Arabi's ontology, Imagination plays an essential role; it is seen as the creative source of manifestation, the very cause of our existence, and the powerful intermediary that enables us to remain in constant contact with the Infinite and the Absolute. In *Futuhāt*, Ibn Arabi states that, "Everything other than God is Imagination" (Ibn 'Arabi 2004, 2:313; 2002, 1:207); it concerns very much the interplay of divine-cosmic-human currents in which images become invested with meanings and meanings vest themselves in images, in which God and man share and exchange the creative urges and passions which make the whole tissue of our tragi-comic universe vibrant with life and sensitivity (Austin, 1992, 1). Mohsen Jahangiri states that Ibn Arabi considers life an imagination; the dreams also belong to the realm of imagination, so the world is imagination in imagination (Jahangiri 1982, 318). It is similar to something that Hafiz tells in his

sonnet 298, “The world and its affairs are all nothing for naught/A thousand times I have inquired of this trend.”

For Ibn Arabi, both imagination and reason are necessary to understand the Truth. Hooman Koliji writes that, according to Ibn Arabi, imagination is essential to complete reason, and that is why “he argues that the rational path of the philosopher and theologian needed to be complemented by the mystical intuition of the Sufis and the function of this intuition is that of ‘unveiling’ (*kashf*) while ‘re-veiling,’ which facilitates imaginal vision. This is the level of human imagination, a voluntary act that can participate in the higher level of *mundas imaginals*, thereby bringing consciousness” (Koliji 2015, 18-19).

Interpreting Ibn Arabi, Chittick explains that the heart must become attuned to its own fluctuation, at one beat seeing God's incomparability with the eye of reason, at the next seeing His similarity with the eye of imagination: its two visions are prefigured in the two primary names of the Scripture, *al-Quran*, “that which brings together,” and *al-furqan*, “that which differentiates” (quoted in Koliji 2015, 18).

When Ibn Arabi talks about imagination as one of the two eyes of the heart, he is using the language that philosophers established in speaking of the soul's faculties. But he is more concerned with Imagination's ontological status, about which the early philosophers had little to say. In this regard, Koliji asserts that here Ibn Arabi's use of *khiyal* (imagination) accords with its everyday meaning, which is closer to image than imagination. It was employed to designate mirror images, shadows, scarecrows, and everything that appears in dreams

and visions; in this sense it is synonymous with the term “*mithal*”<sup>1</sup> (Koliji 2015, 19). Ibn Arabi stresses that an image brings together two sides and unites them as one; it is both the same as and different from the two. A mirror image is both the mirror and the object that it reflects, or, it is neither the mirror nor the object (Koliji 2015, 19). “A dream is both the soul and what is seen, or, it is neither the soul nor what is seen” (Koliji 2015, 20). By nature, images are/are not. In the eye of reason, a notion is either true or false. Imagination perceives notions as images and recognizes that they are simultaneously true and false, or neither true nor false (Koliji 2015, 20).

Emerson defines imagination as the vision that regards the “world as symbolic and pierces the emblem for the real sense, sees all external objects as types” (Emerson 1903, 1:42). This definition of imagination as symbolic vision presupposes what Emerson variously refers to in his writings as “analogy,” “resemblance,” “hieroglyph,” “sign,” or “correspondence.” In other words, according to what he writes in *Nature*, there is consanguinity between matter and spirit, between inner nature and outer (1903, 1:9). Emerson applies the notion of *analogy* or *correspondence* to the creative process. In *Inspiration*, he writes:

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1. Koliji states it as an expression that was broadly embraced by Islamic philosophers after Ibn Arabi: it is because of their interpretation that *mithal* also became known as “the world of the Image” (as quoted in Corbin 1976, 21; Chittick 1984, 6). The Quran’s use of the term “*amthal*” (plural of *mithal*) is interpreted as “likeness and resemblance: it may be an example, a similitude, a parable or an allegory” (Bier 2008, 507). Sciences and in general geometric traditions used the term “*mithal*” to denote a model, an exemplary vehicle for its capacity of demonstration. Therefore, *mithal* and the concept of demonstration become related. As such, “*‘alam al-mithal*” becomes a world of the model and a realm of demonstration (2015, 19).

The Poet cannot see a natural phenomenon which does not express to him a correspondent fact in his mental experience; he is made aware of a power to carry on and complete the metamorphosis of mirror in which man is reflected colossally. Swedenberg, or Behmen, or Plato tried to decipher this hieroglyphic and explain what rock what sand what wood what [stone] fire signified in regard to man. (1903, 14:151)

In Ibn Arabi's views, the cosmos comprises a hierarchy of three distinct worlds or levels, the "world of spirits," "the world of images," and "the world of bodies" (Ibn 'Arabi 2002, 1:42). The world of images—also called the world of imagination (*alam al-khayal*)—plays a key role due to its intermediate position. It is the isthmus (*barzakh*) between the world of spirits and the world of bodies, the realm in which spirits are corporealized (*tajassud al-arwah*) and bodies are spiritualized (*tarawhun al-ajsad*). Ibn Arabi explains that the world of images is real, but we are generally unaware of it while awake. He writes in *Futuhat*,

The "middle," that which separates between two sides and makes them distinguished from one another, is more hidden than they are (*akhfā minhumā*). For example, the line separates between the shadow and the sun; or the barrier (*barzakh*) between the two seas—the sweet one and the bitter one; or that which separates between black and white. We know that there is a separating line there, but the eye does not perceive it; the intellect acknowledges it, though it does not conceive of what it is, namely, it does not conceive its whatness. (quiddity). (Ibn 'Arabi 2004, 2:536)

The reason why Ibn Arabi calls imagination *barzakh* is that it is "the meeting place of the two Seas—that is, the Sea of Meanings and the Sea of Sensory Things, because in this intermediary world meanings are embodied and sensory things are subtilized such that the entity of every object of knowledge (*ayn al-ma'lum*) is transformed or imaginalized in the viewer's eyes" (Ibn 'Arabi 2004, 2:361).

By “the two Seas,” Ibn Arabi alludes to the sweet and bitter seas in the following Quranic verse: “And it is He who has released the two Seas, one fresh and sweet, and He placed between them a barrier and a prohibiting partition” (25:53). Indeed, most people do not know whether they are perceiving the images of perceptible forms with the eye of imagination or with the eye of physical sensation, since both sorts of perception involve the sensing activity of the eye. That inner sensing activity is what presents the perception through both the eye of imagination and the eye of physical sensation (Morris 1995, 107). One may know that what one perceives is indeed sensible, not imaginal, and that one has perceived it with the eye of sensation, not the eye of imagination when (a) the eye perceives the image-object and, without being distracted, sees that its shape and characteristics do not change; (b) it does not see that image-object in different places at the same time, assuming it is definitely a single reality; and (c) that image-object does not change or transform into different states.

This is how one may understand how a human being can perceive his Lord in a dream, even though He transcends all forms or images, as well as how that perception of Him takes place and its limitations. Through this, one may understand what has come down in the sound report of the famous hadith concerning the Creator’s “manifesting Himself to souls at the Resurrection in the most unlikely of forms among those in which they saw Him” (Morris 1995, 9), and concerning His “transformation into a form which they knew before then” (Morris 1995, 9) after they had been denying Him and taking refuge from Him in the more agreeable form of His manifestation.

Ibn Arabi’s concept of imagination enriched Emerson’s vocabulary of this term. This fluidity of imagination is what Emerson refers to when, in

his *Poetry and Imagination*, he writes that the mind, “penetrated with its sentiment or its thought, projects it outward on whatever it beholds” so that “the world is thoroughly anthropomorphized, as if it had passed through the body and mind of man, and taken his mold and form” (1903, 1:5). Like all Romanticists, Emerson accords a very exalted role to imagination and believes that “men are imaginative, but not overpowered by it to the extent of confounding its suggestions with external facts. We live in both spheres, and must not mix them. Genius certifies its entire possession of its thought by translating it into a fact which perfectly represents it” (1903, 8:22).

Emerson believes that the world is imaginal, and in this imaginary world everything is related to each other, and only God is real and everybody is related to Him. In his essay *Nature*, Emerson describes the immersion of the human subject into the “larger whole” of a living nature in terms very similar to those used by Ibn Arabi in reference to his conception of the world of imagination,

Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball<sup>1</sup>; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental; to be brothers, to be acquaintances, master or servant, is then a trifle and a disturbance. I am the lover of the uncontained and immortal beauty (1903, 1:11).

Like Ibn Arabi, Emerson describes the experience of consciously participating in Nature as one in which the egotistical self is lost in communion within a sacred space, and thereby “immersed” in communion both with his fellow humans and with the God who has

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1. In this essay, Emerson describes nature as the closest experience to experiencing the presence of God. To truly appreciate nature, one must not only look at it and admire it, but also be able to feel it taking over the senses.

created and upholds them all. The present tense is important here. Emerson says, "I am part or particle of God" (1903, 1:11).

Consequently, for Emerson, the poet is valued because of his use of imagination to discern the meanings of sensuous facts. Likewise, Emerson believes that the poet sees and expresses the beauty in nature by the help of his ability to recognize the spiritual meaning of events. Moreover, the poet takes old symbols and gives them new uses, thereby making nature the sign of God. In *The Poet*, he declares that the poet's insight, "which expresses itself by what is called imagination, is a very high sort of seeing" (1903, 3:246), a way of transcending conventional modes in order to attend directly to the form of things. He is the one who knows and has moments when the secrets of the world are revealed.

As said before, Ibn Arabi's insight about Imagination centers on the mystical imagination mirroring Truth. This connection can be traced back to Emerson's organic theory of the soul in the sense that it seeks to transform itself into an ideal of itself; the one who, Emerson writes in *The Divinity School Address*, shall "look for the new teacher that shall follow so far those shining laws that shall see them come full circle; shall see their rounding complete grace, and shall see the world to be the mirror of the soul and God" (1903, 1:151).

To speak about imagination in the works of Emerson, it is best to discuss one of his excellent poems, *The Sphinx* (1904). This poem sheds new light on imagination and provides an account of what has been sketched by Ibn Arabi. *The Sphinx* displays the religious aspects of Emerson's life, but it also shows the mystery and sometimes the sorrow of his life. Throughout the poem, the reader finds out that the all-knowing Sphinx has seen history, yet still struggles to understand it.

To understand Emerson's *The Sphinx* more completely, one needs to understand the context in which it was written. Three events were of particular importance: Emerson's break with the church, his speech (*The American Scholar*) given to the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Harvard College and published in (1837), and his Divinity School Address. All of this, the history of Emerson's argument with the church and his push for a uniquely American intellectual life, is well-known biographical information. *The Sphinx* is a highly compressed symbolic rendering of Emerson's struggle with the American religious and intellectual life of the 1830s. That this struggle involves a sphinx, a mythical beast, is significant. Because it appears in both Greece and Egypt, the sphinx is a bridge between Western Hellenic traditions and Oriental ones. It was in turning away from the cultural emptiness of the West—in seeking inspiration from new sources—that Emerson discovered the sphinx and the Orient.

The main symbol in the poem is the sphinx herself, which is a lion with the head of a woman and wings at her sides. She has a riddle, which the travelers attempt to solve to gain passage. As discussed before, Ibn Arabi's notion of Imagination as fusing and merging the creative capacity of the human being is seen as mediating both symbolic representation and analogical reasoning by bringing sensory forms in meaningful relations. This idea is seen strongly in this poem where the sphinx symbolizes knowledge. As she sits for centuries, the sphinx accumulates knowledge, and only she knows the answer to the riddle or the answer to history over the ages, but at the same time the sphinx, stuck in her ways, cannot accept a traveler solving her riddle and kills herself as a result. This symbolism, shown throughout the poem, begins when the sphinx talking about nature as if she has seen everything that has happened.



Just as *The Sphinx* shows us Emerson's poetry, it also illustrates his orientalism. Hafiz and Sa'di were the subjects of two of his essays, *Persian Poetry* and *Sa'adi*, and inspired dozens of his translations and original poems. Emerson's comments on Hafiz's poetry, which make up most of the essay *Persian Poetry*, show us that he understood the language of Sufism. Emerson was right in pointing at the intrinsic conflict that constitutes Hafiz's poetry. He correctly argues that Hafiz's emphatic use of sensuous imagery was "to mark his scorn of sanctimony and base prudence" (1903, 3:250). He senses the felicity that colors Hafiz's imagination, but understands that "not the dervish, or the monk, but the lover, has in his heart the spirit which makes the ascetic and the saint" (1903, 3:248). In Sufism, the seat of wisdom is the heart, not the mind. Very often, Hafiz expresses his mystical experience with images of cup-bearers and wine. But intoxication should not, as Emerson correctly understood, be taken literary. It symbolizes the station of the mystic's self-negation. It is a moment of revelation, of union. Emerson adopts this imagery in *The Poet*. He calls poetry "God's wine" (1903, 3:29), but he tells us that the poet's "cheerfulness should be the gift of the sunlight; the air should suffice for his inspiration, and he should be tipsy with water" (1903, 3:29).

In *The Poet*, Emerson asserts that when the poet becomes one with nature, he speaks somewhat wildly, not with the intellect used as an organ, but with the intellect released from all servitude; or, as the ancients were wont to express themselves, not with the intellect alone but with the intellect inebriated by nectar (1903, 3:27). He further adds, if "the imagination intoxicates the poet, it is not inactive in other men. The metamorphosis excites in the beholder an emotion of joy. The use of symbols has a certain power of emancipation and

exhilaration for all men” (1903, 3:30). In other words, without creative imagination, symbolism cannot be understood.

Sufis and Transcendental thinkers, especially Emerson, address their questions along with their mystical experiences that are full of beauty. For common readers, their works seem difficult until they dive into their unfathomable sea, but it is the power of beauty, love, and nature that is perceived by imaginative writers using this creative imagination to portray these concepts.

### **3. Conclusion**

This study reflected on Emerson’s writing in the light of the mystical notions of Ibn Arabi in order to find the sharing points between the Eastern and Western mystical traditions. The world today is rife with suffering, mistrust, and wars, but by turning to the writings of Eastern and Western mystics like Emerson, we can find inspiration to build a stronger bridge between the East and the West, between Muslims and non-Muslims and other schools and ideologies. The writings of these mystics hint at the absurdity of the “clash of civilizations.” In the Orient and in the works of Emerson, we have a confluence of civilizations, not a clash between them. This is of fundamental importance for Emerson—the man who lived his ideals and was absolutely convinced of their relevance. Although many of his contemporaries were not fully convinced of the real value of his ideas, now in the twenty-first century and in the postmodern era marked by consumerism, loose morals, and loss of self-confidence, his thought appears to be highly topical, wise, and transnational. Even though culturally and religiously remote from us, the spiritual and natural principles proclaimed in Emerson’s works can still be a challenge for man to experience life meaningfully and in harmony with his inner self, with God as well as nature.

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