

Introduction

For centuries, the Western fascination with the East has been the subject of countless books, plays, and movies, particularly after the economic and intellectual effects of colonialism in the early nineteenth century introduced “Oriental” cultures to a sophisticated drawing-room audience. However, Hafiz, Sa’di, Jami, Rumi, and other Sufi masters had a place, however obscure and inaccurately portrayed, in the corpus of English translations long before Oriental themes and settings became a popular characteristic of nineteenth-century poetry. In fact, Sufi poetry was available to a European audience as early as the sixteenth century: the earliest reference to Persian poetry occurred in English in 1589, when George Puttenham included four anonymous “Oriental” poems in translation in *The Arte of English Poesie*; translations of Sa’di’s *Gulistan* were available in Latin as early as 1654’s *Rosarium*, translated by the Dutch orientalist Georgius Gentius. From the early seventeenth century onward, Western interest in Persian and Sufi poetry steadily increased, though such interest most often took the form of general references to Persian language and culture and not to specific poets and their works. Such references were already a standard component of the medieval travel narrative, and almost always misidentified the names of Iranian and Arab poets, mystics, and philosophers, accompanied by equally creative spelling variations. Moreover, there was no literary value attached to literal translations, and no effort made to replicate the formal elements of the original poems. Instead, Sufi poetry entered Western literary circles as versified adaptations or imitations. Sa’di’s *Gulistan*, Hafiz’s *Divan*, Omar Khayyam’s *Ruba’iyyat*, as well as Firdawsi’s monumental work of Persian epic *Shah Nameh*, were all available to English audiences in some form by 1790. With their libertarian sentiments and didactic bent, Sufis appealed to an Enlightenment-era mentality that emphasized deism and an ethical rather than doctrinal conception of religion.

By the end of the seventeenth century, references to individual Sufi poets occurred with greater accuracy and specificity. *The Travels of Sir John Chardin* (1686) in particular was notable for its surprisingly accurate assessment of the basic tenets of Jalal al-Din Rumi’s *Mathnawi* and Mahmud Shabistari’s *Gulshan-i raz*, including Rumi’s proofs of the existence of God *in* man and the emphasis on individual and social tranquility that lay at the heart of Sufism’s esoteric

teachings. As a result of personal experience with the Sufis of Isfahan and a detailed understanding of the Persian language, Chardin included an unprecedented amount of factual information about Sufism itself, such as an extensive etymology of the term and an explanation of the important differences between Sufism as a mystical order and Sufism as the political basis of the Safavid Dynasty.

Though themes such as the vanity of the world, the analogies between experience in Nature and in love, and the inability of human reason to explain or address the world's mysteries were not unique to Sufism, they found an eloquence of expression in the *ghazals* of Hafiz, for instance, that resonated with the nineteenth-century Western world even in translation. Though its traditional themes and images were often exploited for purely aesthetic purposes, Sufi poetry did in fact have a more significant effect on Romantic and Transcendental poetry than simply providing a storehouse of Oriental imagery. The image of "the East" as a place of great wisdom that possessed an esoteric knowledge lacking in the West gained popularity due to its compatibility with the spirit of Romanticism, which saw the essence of Eastern wisdom in the concept of *carpe diem*. The phrase, meaning "seize the day," was coined by the Roman lyric poet Horace, but emerged as a popular theme in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century love poetry, often as an incitement to a love affair. By the nineteenth century, *carpe diem* had become an axiom as well as a poetic motif, and invoked a sense profound spirituality intertwined with the very notion of daily existence that should not be confused with the present-day, self-serving connotation of the phrase.

What is remarkable is that the spiritual map of "the East" of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe and America had no geographical location, and all Easterners were allegedly conveying the same message—that of living in the present, accompanied by a lack of concern for the material and a focus on goodness, peace, and love. The fact that there is no such thing as a monolithic East and that the Orient consists of diverse cultures was overshadowed by the interest of European and American literary masters and intellectuals in developing a utopian model inspired by the East. This fascination with the stereotypical image of Eastern cultures may have had something to do with the wounds of post-Civil War American society. As the extent of the inhumanity, cruelty, and tragedy of the Civil War was becoming more and more apparent, the perceived Eastern message of the temporality and fleeting nature of life and the idea of existence being closely connected with suffering was indeed therapeutic and soothing to the traumatized American society. Sufi beliefs in their most simplistic interpretations resonated on the level of the national consciousness. "Eastern wisdom," with its perceived message of brotherhood and love, transcended boundaries of education and sophistication. In fact, the spirit of universalism was so strong at the time that Islam itself was of little interest to American scholars; it simply served as the context within which Sufi poetry and prose were composed, not the true source of its message. This, of course, was the case for all Eastern spiri-

tual traditions; the fact that they all were saying the same thing bore testament to the universality of the message and the irrelevance of the particularity of the religious doctrines that distributed them. Thus, the giants of American literature emphasized the intricacies of the message of Sa'di, Hafiz, and other Persian Sufi masters but paid little or no attention to the religious tradition to which they belonged. The search was for that which unifies, and the need to discover the common humanity and decency of man made it necessary to break the barriers that religious traditions had imposed upon society.

Exploring other religious and spiritual traditions therefore became the earliest attempt to establish a dialogue among civilizations and create a global village. The corpus of Sufi poetry available in the 1840s was dramatically increased from that available at the turn of the century, and would only increase further as the century continued. By the end of that decade, Persian Sufi poetry had reached Concord, where the Sufi poets found an audience that appreciated them on philosophical and religious as well as literary levels. As a community of writers and intellectuals, the New England writers drew from the same available sources to produce unique written reactions in the forms of poetry, essays, and letters, all manifesting a similar attraction to the Persian-inspired ideals of Sufism. The spiritual landscape of New England spread throughout the rest of America in the form of inspired movements such as Transcendentalism and Perennialism, which stated that the Muslim Sa'di, the Hindu Rabindranath Tagore, and the other masters of "Eastern" wisdom had access to the same Universal Wisdom as Emerson and Whitman.

Sufism became entrenched in the American literary and spiritual scenes in two ways: the scholarly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the popular in the twentieth century. It seems hardly necessary to mention and nearly impossible to overemphasize the importance of Sir William Jones in transmitting Oriental history and literature to the West over the course of his government service in Bengal and Calcutta (1783–1794). The sheer quantity of information that he communicated back to England and America in the records of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, the journals *Asiatic Researches* and *Asiatic Miscellany*, and in his posthumous collected *Works* is even more impressive with the knowledge that he was simultaneously serving as a puisne judge and diplomat in the service of the East India Company. Jones was well aware of the exhaustion of neo-Classical poetic themes, images, and forms, and he saw in the poetry of Hafiz a possible infusion of new passion and spiritual awareness, provided the lyrics were free from the beleaguered eighteenth-century diction that characterized previous translations of the *Divan*. One of Jones's most famous poetic translations was "A Persian Song," based on Hafiz's eighth *ghazal* and widely circulated in the *Annual Register*, *Gentleman's Magazine*, *Monthly Review*, and *Town and Country* between 1772 and 1786. He was not the only scholar to bring new translations of Sufi poetry to the West; he was, however, the most prolific and

most passionate contributor to the corpus of Sufi materials that was available to poets seeking to represent the Orient at the turn of the nineteenth century. The German influence was gradual but immense, most notably the work of famed orientalist Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall. He translated Hafiz's complete *Divan* into German in 1812 and 1813 and sent a copy of these translations to Emerson, who translated them into English (sometimes with such literalness that they maintain the German word order) and distributed them among the Concordians who shared his interest in Sufi poetry.

The first popular American publication to include a poem by Hafiz was *The American Museum or Universal Magazine* in 1792, which printed, uncredited, "Ode Translated from the Persian of Hafez," one of the poems translated by John Nott in 1787. Though it was preceded by the "Tale of Hafez" included in the first volume of the *New York Magazine or Literary Repository* (1790), a story which starred two men named Hafez and Saadi, those characters were not intended to represent the poets of Shiraz; they were simply evidence of the name recognition attributed to symbolic Eastern figures in an imaginative landscape strongly shaped by the *Arabian Nights* and other popular Oriental materials. Additionally, the Oriental Translation Fund, founded in 1828 as an arm of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, supplied scholarly information to American journals such as the *Knickerbocker* and the *American Monthly Magazine*. The society's most valued contributions were translations, though the fund also published memoirs, articles, and other materials of interest to American students of Persian poetry. Limited by different trade routes that bypassed India and the Near East and a complete unfamiliarity with the Persian or Arabic languages, American newspapers printed uncredited or pseudonymous translations, and occasionally complete fabrications, alongside British and French sources such as Sir William Jones and Sir William Ouseley. As in Britain, Hafiz and Sa'di proved to be the two most popular Persian poets, though Edward FitzGerald's 1868 second edition of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* inspired the creation of the Omar Khayyam Club of London and America as well as a circle of "Omarian Poets," including Nathan Haskell Dole and Henry Harman Chamberlin. Also as in Britain, the popularity of Persian poetry inspired a wave of imitations produced by less notable poets who did little more than patch together Oriental tropes and Byronic sentiments.

The popular twentieth-century version of Sufism came through such spiritual masters as Inayat Khan, who came to America in the 1930s from India. From the 1930s to 1950, the Muslim immigration from Lebanon, Syria, and later Palestine further strengthened the Sufi presence in America. The spiritual emphasis of the anti-war movement against the Vietnam War created a market for gurus and spiritual masters to come to America; it is during this period that Sufi centers (*zawiyyah* in Arabic and *khanaqah* in Persian) were established in major American cities. In the aftermath of the 1978–79 Iranian revolution, there was a large migration of Iranians to the United States which helped to

establish various orders of Persian Sufi tradition. A full survey of the journey of Sufism to America would be a very interesting work, which however goes beyond the scope of this volume.

The political dimension of the response to Eastern philosophy and poetry by the American literary masters of the nineteenth century is also one that must serve as a subject of future inquiry. However, it seems noteworthy that at a time when the spirit of colonialism in Europe and America was heavily characterized by a condescending and even cruel ethnocentrism that declared the “Other” had nothing to offer, distinguished American scholars called attention to the profundity of the spiritual fruits of these civilizations. Perhaps these attempts to revere and respect the wisdom of the so-called inferior races were in part a subtle method of spiritual protest against the colonialists’ perspective, comparable to the way in which contrasting the themes of Rumi’s poetry of love against Osama Bin Laden’s theology of hate toward the West calls to attention the noble aspects of Islam in the present day.



This volume is divided into three parts. Following a chapter on the English Romantics as the background for the American literary master’s interest in Sufism, the first section is devoted to a study of different aspects of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s relationship with Sufism. The second section explores Walt Whitman’s mystical writings and his influences, touching on Emerson and Sufism in the process. Finally, the third section discusses the Sufi influences of other American Transcendentalists, who were also inspired by earlier figures like Emerson.

The first essay, Leonard Lewisohn’s “English Romantic and Persian Sufi Poets: The Wellspring of Inspiration for American Transcendentalists,” does not concern the Transcendentalists directly, but provides an invaluable introduction to the root themes and images that underlie all poetry written by poets with Neoplatonic influences, including Sufis, Romantics, and Transcendentalists. Like the Romantic poets, the Sufi masters with whom they were acquainted worked with a common set of symbols that Lewisohn describes as “publicly hermetic, so that all writers and readers of Sufi poetry quickly understood its celebrated set of ‘esoteric signs.’” Part of the aim of these symbols was to introduce the language of human love and physical experience as a counterpoint to the discursive and abstract language upon which mystical poetry relied to describe otherwise indescribable experiences. Well-suited to Romantic temperaments, Hafiz in particular was unmatched in the Sufi literature for his lyrics on love and wine. Hafiz was particularly revered in India, where Sir William Jones drew most of the material that introduced the West to Eastern culture and literature. Lewisohn traces examples of this and similar themes, including those of mystical death and *carpe diem*, between the works of British Romantic poets Percy

Bysshe Shelley and William Blake, and Sufi poets Rumi and Hafiz, providing insight into the little-explored relationship between Sufism and the Romantic poets as well as establishing the artistic and thematic framework occupied by the Transcendentalists later on in America.

In the first section, Ralph Waldo Emerson is given the title of “Master” for the seriousness of his commitment to Sufi doctrine, and his pervasive influence on so many other writers. These essays illustrate Emerson’s conflicted relationship with exoteric Islam, his serious interest in Persian Sufi masters, and his use of the “Orient” as a framework and vocabulary to align himself with the kind of spiritual universe he yearned for all his life. They also emphasize the crucial role he played in publicizing and popularizing Sufi poetry. Emerson did not publish his first volume of verse until he was 43, but between the ages of 40 and 55 he read and was constantly inspired by the work of Sa’di in particular. He even translated over 700 lines of Persian verses, often from the German, in the free versification tradition of the eighteenth century, often adding rhyme and regularizing rhythm in order to achieve a deliberate poetic sensibility. Silently, he sometimes combined fragments of different *ghazals* in passages intended for publication, or his own translations with those of von Hammer-Purgstall.

Mansur Ekhtiyar considers these and other aspects of Emerson’s background in his essay “Chronological Development of Emerson’s Interest in Persian Mysticism,” in which he traces the gradual development of Emerson’s interest in Eastern thought in general, and in Islamic and Persian mysticism specifically. Beginning with Emerson’s college years, Ekhtiyar unravels how Emerson became interested in Hindu and Zoroastrian thought first, and then, through English and German translations of such Persian Sufi poets as Hafiz and Sa’di, came to develop an intense interest in Islamic mysticism. In his *Works*, the *Essays*, and the *Journals*, Emerson’s enthusiasm for the Eastern use of imagery and symbolism is evident, although he consistently struggles with the Islamic sense of fatalism he found in Sufism. Still, the struggle did not prevent him from expounding upon Hafiz’s use of “wine” or playing with the notions of solitude and exile.

In the next chapter, Marwan M. Obeidat takes a more analytical approach to the eminent Transcendentalist. Marking Emerson’s interest in Oriental thought “as the beginning of interest in comparative religion in America,” the author offers an insightful analysis of Emerson’s uneasy and conflicted relationship with Islamic mysticism. While Emerson remained intensely interested in Oriental thought to the end, Obeidat shows how the poet’s Western mindset still considered the Occidental identity superior; as Emerson himself asserted, “Orientalism is Fatalism, resignation: Occidentalism is Freedom and will.” This chapter also suggests that Platonism and Neoplatonism provided a common language with which the American Romantics understood and related to Islamic mysticism.

The following essay, Parvin Loloi’s “Emerson and Aspects of Sa’di’s Reception in America,” primarily concerns the means by which Emerson became

acquainted with Sufism and Persian mystical literature, and the poems of Sa'di in particular. Emerson became aware of Sufism when he was only eleven years old, but it was not until he became acquainted with German and French translations that his interest grew and matured into scholarly thought. His preoccupation with these translations both influenced his own transcendentalist sentiments and gave him a preexisting yet flexible linguistic framework to express them. As demonstrated in the autobiographical poem "Saadi" (1842), which Loloi quotes in full, Emerson came to identify Sa'di as the ideal poet, as well as an aspect of himself. In analyzing the poem, Loloi also traces its Romantic elements, including an emphasis on nature and its relation to "divine essence." Loloi affirms the role that Platonism and Neoplatonism played in interesting the Romantics in Oriental literature. Neoplatonism in particular made it possible for a common discourse and metaphysical language to emerge, as the author explores in the latter part of her essay.

The influence of Hafiz on Emerson is the subject of the next chapter. Farhang Jahanpour's essay, "Emerson on Hafiz and Sa'di: The Narrative of Love and Wine," is divided into four sections. In the first section, Jahanpour traces Emerson's interest in Persian poetry from his exposure as a teenager to the poetry of Sa'di, Hafiz, and Jami, to his more mature encounters with Firdawsi and Sa'di's *Gulistan*. The second section discusses the German translations that served as guides to Hafiz's difficult esoteric language, and quotes passages from Emerson's *Journals* in which he expresses sincere appreciation of Hafiz's poetry. The third section focuses on Emerson's own translations; of the approximately 700 lines of Persian poetry he translated into English, about half of them are from the work of Hafiz. Although Emerson's dedication to the translations is unquestioned, his faithfulness to the originals varies; often, he attempted a literal translation, while other times he mixed poems together or elaborated upon them himself. The article ends with a section that traces the echoes of Hafiz's poems in Emerson's writings, both Oriental and involving other subject matter. This section features some of Emerson's own renditions of Hafiz's poems in English and compares them to the original Persian.

Whitman existed in the same cultural milieu that saw Ralph Waldo Emerson embrace Sufi poetry to justify his own belief in self-reliance by reinterpreting Sa'di's didacticism and libertarian sentiments into a doctrine of democracy and self-equality in Nature. Whitman saw evidence of divinity in the most commonplace people and objects, and celebrated the material world as part of the divine Logos and as proof of the underlying humanity in a nation that was increasingly divided by sectional differences. Like Hafiz, Whitman also accepted the ineffability topos that implicitly accompanied all Sufi mystical poetry. The interpretation of Walt Whitman as a mystical poet gained popularity among scholars in the 1960s. "He is the one mystical writer of any consequence America has produced," Karl Shapiro wrote, "the poet of the greatest achievement."¹

Eastern mysticism in particular seemed to resonate with Whitman, as V. K. Chari and T. R. Rajasekharaiah have examined at length using Hindu and Buddhist texts. Based on comparisons between poems and the contents of Whitman's unpublished journals and notes, Rajasekharaiah concludes persuasively that the poet was in fact well-read on the subject of Vedantic philosophy by the end of his life, though his understanding of Eastern mysticism was likely more intuitive than academic when the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published in 1855.

The next series of essays, grouped under the title "The Disciple: Walt Whitman," is meant to acknowledge the idea that the same connection between poet and philosophy holds true of Whitman and Sufism as well. The traditional starting point from which to test this connection is Ralph Waldo Emerson, the main conduit of Sufi poetry into the Transcendentalist literary community. Whitman was an avid reader of Emerson, and would in all likelihood have read the poem "Saadi" when it was published in 1842. Additionally, the influence of Hafiz is quite clear in Emerson's 1848 poem *Bacchus*, though it is not a direct translation of a Hafiz sonnet. Whitman may also have read the series of "Ethical Scriptures" from the sacred books of the Orient that Emerson and Thoreau published in *The Dial* in 1842 and 1843, or the translations of several fragments of mystical poetry that Emerson provided *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The Liberty Bell* in 1851. Like Emerson, Whitman found his path to Sufism through German translations of Persian poetry, and various Sufi doctrines, such as the annihilation of the Self in God (*fana' fi'llah*), had a deep effect on his life and work. In the first essay of this section, Mahnaz Ahmad, in "Whitman and Hafiz: Expressions of Universal Love and Tolerance," presents a biographical and analytical study and also illustrates Whitman's own concept of love, as depicted in the character of the "graybeard Sufi" in his poem "A Persian Lesson," alongside Ahmad's own exquisite translations of Hafiz's difficult *ghazals*.

Massud Farzan continues the study of Whitman in the essay "Whitman and Sufism: Towards 'A Persian Lesson.'" Farzan compares the mystical experiences Whitman evokes in writings such as "Song of Myself," and "A Persian Lesson" to the Sufi concept of ecstasy, especially as explored in some of Rumi's poetry. Whether it is in Sa'di's *Gulistan* or Rumi's *Mathnavi*, "argument, abstraction, and getting stuck in logistics are anathema to Whitman and Persian poet-mystics alike," Farzan states. The chapter continues with a discussion of Whitman and Sufi concepts of the self, wherein the selfish "I" is juxtaposed with the divine "thou," and concludes with the idea of the mystical death of the self and unity with God.

In the next essay, Arthur Versluis discusses other authors in his "'Islamic' Magic and Mysticism of Thomas Lake Harris, Lawrence Oliphant, and Paschal Beverly." He uses a biographical approach to highlight the similarities between three notable figures involved in both the American Transcendentalist and indigenous esoteric traditions of other religions. Thomas Lake Harris' work reflects

aspects of Sufism, even though his direct familiarity with the “Sufi tradition” was nebulous at best. The case of Laurence Oliphant is different, for his travel to the Middle East and Palestine in particular may well have put him in contact with an array of Sufi groups. Oliphant specifically references Druze, whom he calls the “Druse,” a splinter Shi’ite group with a strong esoteric orientation. Finally, Versluis compares the experiences of Paschal Beverly Randolph, who also traveled to the Middle East and claimed contact with some of the more esoteric and mystical orders. Versluis questions the legitimacy of some of their teachings, but notes that whether it came in the form of intimate knowledge of esoteric traditions or simply a projection of what they imagined such traditions to entail, the influence of Sufism and its themes on these three figures was considerable.

The next essay, by John D. Yohannan, focuses on a number of specific figures who were primarily disciples of Emerson: Thoreau, Whitman, Longfellow, Lowell, Melville, and Lafcadio Hearn. Each of these figures made a serious literary investment in studying Oriental mysticism, although for some the allure was stronger than for others. Thoreau, for instance, echoed Emerson’s identification with Sa’di: “I know, for instance, that Saadi entertained once identically the same thought that I do, and thereafter I can find no essential difference between Saadi and myself. He is not Persian, he is not ancient, he is not strange to me.”²² This more exaggerated assessment stems from Thoreau’s limited understanding of Persian poetry. Less well-read than Emerson, he cared about the ideas themselves, not their sources, and it mattered little to him whether the poetry that expressed Sufi wisdom was well-translated or entirely fraudulent. Nor was he above deliberately misinterpreting Sa’di’s aphorisms to suit his own philosophical agenda. Yet, however far from traditional Sufi doctrine, the expansive, subjective philosophy of Sufism allowed for such interpretations on his part, as well as on the parts of other Transcendentalists. Yohannan also examines authors of less renown, including Amos Bronson Alcott, whose interest in Eastern wisdom led him to Sa’di and Firdawsi, and William Rounesville Alger, whose anthology *The Poetry of the Orient* (1856) served as an invaluable source of information for Walt Whitman, and which indicates the extent of his fascination with Sa’di, Hafiz, and other Persian Sufi masters. Yohannan also mentions Moncure Daniel Conway, a second-generation Transcendentalist who helped establish a link between the American and English devotees of Persian Literature and was instrumental in drawing attention to Omar Khayyam. The rest of the essay is devoted to Longfellow, Lowell, Melville, and Lafcadio Hearn, and shows their indebtedness to Emerson while quoting specific Sufi texts that helped shape their mystical orientation.

The next essay, Philip N. Edmondson’s “The Persians of Concord,” examines how the city of Concord became the locus of Transcendentalist writers, attracting literary minds such as Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, George William Curtis, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Edmondson

also elaborates on how transcendentalism utilized a similar ideology and set of themes similar to that of Romanticism as a preestablished linguistic framework to communicate Muslim mystical concepts.

In the final essay, Mehdi Aminrazavi traces the impact of Omar Khayyam's *Ruba'iyyat* upon an American audience. Khayyam was a polarizing poet: he was elevated to the level of prophet by some and demoted to that of demon by others. He gained immense popularity among the New England literary circles shortly after the 1859 publication of FitzGerald's exquisite rendition of the *Ruba'iyyat*. The Omar Khayyam Club of America was formed in 1900 as an opportunity for literary figures to celebrate the great Persian sage, and produced a small school of Omarian poets. Even though Omar Khayyam was not a Sufi in the strictest sense of the word, his *Ruba'iyyat* were understood to espouse the same esoteric Eastern wisdom that American audiences perceived in the Sufi mystical poets. Aminrazavi shows the extent of his influence, both among less famous literary figures and more notable authors like Mark Twain, T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound.

Mark Twain refers to the "wise old Omar Khayyam" for the first time in 1876, yet his life-long interest in the author of the *Ruba'iyyat* is well-known. Alan Gribben, in his essay "Bond Slave to FitzGerald's Omar: Mark Twain and the *Ruba'iyyat*," brings to light this little-known influence of Twain's and provides helpful context for understanding the place the *Ruba'iyyat* occupied in Twain's personal and poetic life. The sense of rebellion against the cruelty of life in the *Ruba'iyyat* resonated with Twain in the face of his own hardships. Gribben ends with a selected number of Twain's more burlesque *Ruba'iyyat*, while the complete version of the poems follows in the next chapter.



The original idea for this volume arose from a discussion with colleagues on the lack of a single volume highlighting the reception of Islamic mysticism by the academy, and the difficulty of accounting for increasing interest in Sufism after the turn of the nineteenth century. While there are many books dealing with the current interest in Sufi literature, particularly in the context of such popular authors as Rumi and Hafiz, there is no notable work on the historical background of Sufism's enthusiastic reception by eminent masters of classical American literature. It is hoped that including a variety of essays that bring together figures of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American literary scene in a single volume will make this an important contribution to the understanding of the complex web of ideological similarities that existed between Islamic mysticism and American Transcendentalism. Even without Emerson's background in the terminology and available translations of Persian poetry, the often-contradictory themes of mystical ecstasy, Oriental serenity, the divinely intoxicated intellect, and love for the emancipation of Soul—just to name a few

of Emerson's favorites—would have appealed to poetic imaginations such as those of Whitman and Thoreau. The use of the language of human love as a cipher for mystical knowledge of the Divine, the revelation of a new moral code as evidence of otherwise ineffable experiences, and the importance of embracing and transcending the physical world all find eloquent expression in the poetry of Emerson, Whitman, and a multitude of other writers, but they attain even greater clarity when compared to similar philosophical concepts illustrated by the Sufi masters.

Today, their interest lives on in the form of continued interest in Sufi poetry and prose, and it is thanks to the works of early masters of American literature that translations of Rumi have remained among the best-selling works of poetry in the last decade in America.

It should be noted that for historical reasons, I have left the transliterations of names and phrases in Persian and Arabic by the nineteenth-century American authors, as they have used them, which are often transliterated incorrectly. I have provided the correct transliterations in the glossary at the end of the volume.

Finally, I would like to express my debt of gratitude to a number of people who assisted me in preparing this volume. I am grateful to Dr. Leonard Lewisohn for his invaluable suggestions regarding the choice of articles and contributors. I would particularly like to thank my research assistant, Annie Kinniburgh, for her thorough reading of this manuscript and extensive editorial suggestions. Her recently completed thesis listed in the Bibliography provided me with new information which I found to be very helpful in recasting of the introduction.

I am grateful to Dr. Robert H. Hirst and the Mark Twain Project at the Bancroft Library of the University of California in Berkeley for granting me the permission to print all of the *Ruba'iyat* of Mark Twain.

Mehdi Aminrazavi
April 2014

Notes

1. J. E. Miller, K. Shapiro, and B. Slotte, *Start With the Sun: Studies in Cosmic Poetry* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), 58.

2. Henry David Thoreau, *Journal of Henry D. Thoreau*, ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), vol. IV, 48.