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The Influence of Hafez on Ralph Waldo Emerson: Tracing Persian Mysticism in American Transcendentalism

Khalilullah Tawhidyar[1*];Sayyed Bashir Aalemy[1]; Malang Jan Momand[1]

[1]*Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Parwan University, Afghanistan*

[1]*Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Laghman University, Afghanistan*

[*]*Corresponding Email: khalilullahtawhidyarsapi@gmail.com, Phone Number: +93 788 906 535*

Article History:
Received: 17. 5.2026
Accepted: 02. 6.2026
Online First: 22.6.2026

Citation:
Tawhidyar, K. Aalemy,S.B. & Momand, M.J. (2026). The Influence of Hafez on Ralph Waldo Emerson: Tracing Persian Mysticism in American Transcendentalism. *Kdz Uni Int J Islam Stud and Soc Sci*;3(2):249-260

e-ISSN: 3078-3895

Abstract

This study examines the influence of the Persian Sufi poet Hafez on Ralph Waldo Emerson and explores Hafez's role in shaping American Transcendentalism. When Emerson encountered Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's West-Eastern Divan in 1838, he developed a sustained interest in Hafez and subsequently studied Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall's German translation, Der Diwan von Mohammed Schemsed-din Hafis. The present study addresses a clear scholarly gap: although Emerson's admiration for Hafez has been acknowledged, there has been no sustained comparative textual analysis of how specific Hafizian themes and poetics informed Emerson's major writings. The corpus of this study includes Emerson's essays "Fate," "Power," "Illusions," "The Poet," and "Persian Poetry," alongside selected ghazals from Hammer-Purgstall's translation that Emerson demonstrably read and cited. For Emerson, Hafez became a "poet for poets," whose mystical vision, antinomian spirituality and celebration of intellectual freedom resonated deeply with transcendental philosophy. Over nearly fourteen years, Emerson repeatedly referenced Hafez, ultimately praising him as the "prince of Persian poets," ranking him above Pindar, Anacreon and Burns and placing him in poetic stature alongside Shakespeare. Through qualitative, library-based comparative textual analysis, this study demonstrates Hafez's transnational literary legacy and his constructive contribution to Emerson's intellectual development and to the broader evolution of American Transcendental thought.

Keywords: Hafez, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Transcendentalism, West Eastern Divan, Persian literature.

Introduction

Emerson's access to Hafez was mediated primarily through two German works by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall: Der Diwan von Mohammed Schemsed-din Hafis (1812–1813) and Geschichte der schönen Redekünste Persiens (1818). These anthologies provided Emerson

with sustained exposure to Persian mystical poetics and played a decisive role in shaping his understanding of Eastern literary and philosophical traditions.

For Emerson, Hafez emerged as a paradigmatic "poet for poets," whose vision of nature, spirit, and self offered a compelling counterpart to his own philosophical inquiries (Yohannan, 1943). Emerson's repeated references to Hafez in essays such as Fate, Power, and Illusions, as well as his designation of Hafez as the "prince of Persian poets," attest to a deep intellectual and aesthetic engagement that extended well beyond casual admiration (Ekhtiar, 1997).

While earlier scholars that includes Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), widely recognized as a foundational figure in American Transcendentalism, also played a significant role in introducing Persian literary thought to the Anglo-American intellectual tradition. During the formative years of his philosophical and poetic development, Emerson engaged extensively with Persian poets, translating approximately seven hundred lines of Persian verse from German into English. These translations include works by Saadi, ʿAttar, Nezami, Anvari, Rumi, and most extensively Hafez. Of the sixty-four poems Emerson translated, more than four hundred lines were drawn from Hafez's poetry whose mystical sensibility closely resonated with Emerson's emerging Transcendentalist ideals (Fotouhi & Taebi, 2013).

Gay (1928), Carpenter (1930), Christy (1932), Richardson (1995), Obeidat (1998) and Almansour (2005) have documented various dimensions of Emerson's engagement with Eastern mysticism and Persian literature, much of this scholarship emphasizes thematic similarity, literary influence or formal resonance rather than the underlying cultural and philosophical motivations for that engagement.

This study argues that Emerson's reception of Hafez reflects not only an aesthetic affinity but also the political, social and cultural conditions of nineteenth-century America in which Transcendentalist discourse actively sought philosophical alternatives beyond conventional Western sources.

Material and Method

This study is situated within a comparative literary and transcultural framework, focusing on the reception of Persian mystical poetry in nineteenth-century American literature. It examines the works of Hafez (Shams-ud-Din Muhammad Hafez, 1315–1390) and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), with particular attention to Emerson's essays, translations and critical writings that engage with Hafez's poetry. Adopting a qualitative, library-based research design, the study employs comparative textual analysis to explore Emerson's engagement with Hafez, highlighting parallels in philosophical concepts, poetic motifs and mystical symbolism. Critical reading techniques are used to identify recurring themes, stylistic influence and intellectual correspondence between the two poets. The research emphasizes the intersection of Persian Sufi mysticism and American Transcendentalism, tracing how Hafez's mystical vision informed Emerson's transcendental ideals and situating these insights within the broader political, social and cultural discourses of nineteenth-century America.

Hafez of Shiraz: Life, Legacy and Literary Mastery

Khwāja Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāfiẓ Shīrāzī (1320–1390) is widely regarded as one of the greatest poets of Persian literature (Lazard, 1992). Born and raised in Shiraz, the "city of roses and nightingales," reliable details of his life remain limited with most information drawn from his poetry and later biographical accounts (Arberry, 1946).

The pen name Hafez, meaning "the memorizer," reflects his reputed mastery of the Holy Quran (Safa, 2002). Orphaned at a young age and raised in modest circumstances, he apprenticed as a baker while pursuing studies in theology, philosophy, history, calligraphy and poetry which demonstrates early intellectual and artistic promise (Lazard, 1992).

Hafez is celebrated as the supreme master of the Persian ghazal, elevating this lyrical form to exceptional artistic and philosophical heights (Arberry, 1946). His poetry combines musicality, rich imagery, mysticism, love, irony and social critique, exploring complex human themes including desire, faith, power and hypocrisy (Safa, 2002).

Throughout his life, Hafez received patronage from local rulers, notably Abu Ishaq Inju but faced challenges under the austere rule of Amir Mubarez al-Din, prompting incisive poetic criticism of political and religious hypocrisy. Later, under Shah Shoja, his position at court was partially restored (Lazard, 1992). Hafez reportedly declined invitations to foreign courts, including India and is famed for his clever and tactful interactions with figures such as Timur (Arberry, 1946).

Hafez died around 1390 in Shiraz and was interred in a garden now known as Hāfezieh, which remains a major cultural and literary landmark (Safa, 2002). His Divan continues to occupy a central place in Persian literary culture, providing insight into human experience and mystical reflection across centuries (Lazard, 1992).

Ralph Waldo Emerson: personality and spirituality

Ralph Waldo Emerson (May 25, 1803–April 27, 1882) was a foundational figure in nineteenth-century American literature and philosophy, renowned as an essayist, poet, lecturer and the leading voice of the Transcendentalist movement. Through his advocacy of self-reliance, individualism and spiritual independence, Emerson profoundly shaped American intellectual and cultural thought which has emphasized the unity of the soul, nature and human potential (Packer, 2018).

Born in Boston, Emerson experienced early loss with the death of his father at age seven and was raised by his mother and his intellectually formative aunt, Mary Moody Emerson. He attended Boston Latin School and entered Harvard College at fourteen where he developed disciplined habits of reading, journaling and reflection, graduating in 1821 (Brooks, 1973).

Although initially trained for the ministry, Emerson gradually rejected institutionalized religion in favor of a more intuitive and personal spirituality. His essay Nature (1836) articulated the philosophical foundations of Transcendentalism while his address "The American Scholar (1837)" called for cultural independence and original thought in American letters. His major collections, Essays: First Series (1841) and Essays: Second Series (1844), including "Self-Reliance," "The Over-Soul," and "The Poet," remain central to American philosophical and literary discourse (Gura, 2007).

Emerson's thought integrates philosophy, spirituality and social critique, advancing a pantheistic vision in which nature and the human soul are intrinsically connected. His

influence extended to a wide circle of writers and thinkers, most notably Henry David Thoreau who embodied Emersonian ideals of moral autonomy and intellectual independence (Packer, 2018).

Emerson's legacy endures as a cornerstone of American Romanticism and Transcendentalist philosophy, with his belief in the "infinitude of the private man" continuing to inspire global discussions on individuality, ethics and spiritual freedom (Packer, 2018).

Emerson's Inspiration and Engagement with Hafez

Ralph Waldo Emerson's engagement with Hafez was largely mediated through Goethe's West-Eastern Divan which introduced him to Persian poetry and profoundly shaped his literary sensibilities. Encountering Hafez, Emerson admired the Persian poet's mastery and sought to emulate his poetic stature, aspiring to achieve comparable prominence in the literary world.

Goethe, a central figure in European literature, played a pivotal role in fostering Western interest in Persian poetry, particularly Hafez. In his West-Eastern Divan, Goethe incorporated Persian themes and terms, creating a synthesis of Eastern and Western literary traditions. Although the Divan was not a direct translation of Hafez, Goethe's work demonstrated his deep admiration for the Persian poet whom he referred to as "Saint Hafez" and "Celestial Friend," celebrating Hafez's literary and philosophical grandeur. The Divan consists of twelve books, including Hafez-Nameh (Book of Hafez) and Eshq-Nameh (Book of the Lover) which collectively positioned Hafez on the international literary stage and conveyed Goethe's vision of a global, humanistic philosophy transcending nationality and creed (Ashouri, 2003).

The influence of Goethe's Divan extended beyond Emerson. Nietzsche, for instance, became captivated by Hafez through both Goethe and Hammer-Purgstall's German translation, regarding Hafez as an exemplar of the "Dionysian" spirit and the free-spirited celebration of life. In works such as The Joyful Wisdom and his poem An Hafis: Frage eines Wassertrinkers (To Hafez: Questions of a Water Drinker), Nietzsche praised Hafez's wisdom, poetic insight and joyous engagement with life, citing him repeatedly as a model of philosophical and artistic excellence (Ashouri, 2003).

For Emerson, this transnational literary trajectory from Hafez to Goethe to himself that illuminated the universality of poetic expression and inspired his own reflections on art, spirituality and the human experience. He obtained Hammer-Purgstall's German translation of Hafez's Divan and devoted years to studying it, integrating its themes into his essays and poetic thought (Frances, 1966). Thus, Hafez's influence on Emerson was both direct and mediated, rooted in admiration, intellectual engagement, and a transcontinental literary dialogue that connected East and West.

Emerson and Persian Poets: Hafez, Saadi and Their Influence

Persian poets, particularly Hafez and Saadi exerted a profound influence on Emerson, second only to the impact of Hindu literature and Neo-Platonist thought. Although he encountered Persian literature later in life,first reading selections in 1841, he was immediately captivated. In 1842, he composed the poem Saadi for The Dial and by 1843 he had read Saadi's Gulistan, noting in his journals that the work resonated deeply with the portrait of humanity he sought to convey in his poem (Emerson, 1909). By 1846–1847, Emerson had explored Persian poetry more fully through Joseph Freiherr von Hammer-

Purgstall's German anthology and to some extent, Chodzko's Specimens of Ancient Persian Poetry (Emerson, 1909).

Emerson engaged Persian poetry through both creative and critical writing. He authored two essays,most notably Persian Poetry,and two poems, Saadi and Bacchus, reflecting his appreciation of the Persian poets' intellectual freedom, joy, and celebration of life. He also provided a preface for the first American edition of Saadi's Gulistan (1865) and compiled Fragments of Poet and the Poetic Gift, an idealized interpretation of Hafez and Saadi. Many of his translations of Persian poems from Hammer-Purgstall are preserved in the Centenary Edition, which also contains extensive notes drawn from his journals and letters (Emerson, 1909).

In his essay Persian Poetry, Emerson highlighted Hafez's "complete intellectual emancipation," describing a poet unafraid of names, religions, or societal constraints: "He fears nothing. He sees too far; he sees throughout; such is the only man I wish to see and to be" (Emerson, 1909, p. 463). Emerson admired both Hafez and Saadi for their joy, which he attributed to their trust in life and partial liberation from fatalism and orthodox constraints, without renouncing religion entirely. Their work fused spiritual devotion with a love of beauty and a humane worldview, qualities that deeply resonated with Emerson.

Persian poetic influence is evident in Emerson's poems Days and Bacchus. In Days, composed around 1847, he translates the Persian motif of divine gifts and Sufi imagery into a meditation on time, human fortune, and natural beauty:

Daughters of Time, the hypocritical Days,
Muffled and dumb like barefoot dervishes,
And marching single in an endless file,
Bring diadems and fagots in their hands.
To each they offer gifts after his will... (Emerson, 1909, p. 463)

The poem reflects Hafez's "playing with magnitudes" and the Persian symbolism of dervishes, while conveying Emerson's philosophical reflections on life, divine providence, and human agency. Similarly, Bacchus (1846), composed concurrently with his initial study of Hafez, embodies the Persian celebration of freedom and joy, linking Hafez's imagery of wine with Emerson's vision of sunlight and vitality:

"Wine that is shed Like the torrents of sun Up the horizon wall" (Emerson, 1909, p. 463).

While Emerson acknowledged Hafez's lyric brilliance, he was personally drawn to Saadi's humanity, wisdom, and moral vision. Saadi's emphasis on universal fraternity,"All men are the members of the same body, which is created from one essence",mirrored Emerson's own ideals of self-reliance, compassion, and service to others. He frequently paired Saadi with literary figures such as Æsop, Cervantes, Homer, and Shakespeare, noting the Persian poet's timeless relevance and perceptive understanding of human nature (Emerson, 1865).

Ultimately, Emerson regarded Hafez and Saadi as models of poetic freedom, joy, and aesthetic perception. They inspired his engagement with nature, humanity, and literary expression, shaping the moral, philosophical, and artistic dimensions of his poetry. Through them, Emerson encountered a vision of life grounded not in materialism or rigid fatalism, but in beauty, joy, and the emancipated spirit of the poet.

Love as the Ultimate Goal in Hafez 's Poetry

Love lies at the heart of Hafez's poetry, serving as both the spiritual and existential core of his work. For Hafez, love is the alchemy of eternal bliss, a divine force that elevates the human soul. In his poetry, love is often synonymous with Allah , and he frequently employs the male pronoun to signify the Beloved (Lazard, 1992).

Hafez presents love as perfect and absolute, with any imperfection attributed to human limitation:

"My Loved one's beauty has no need of an imperfect love like mine: By paint or powder, mole or streak, can a fair face more brightly shine?" (Safa, 2002, p. 112)

The Beloved is simultaneously gracious and formidable, visible only to those who are pure in heart. Love is depicted as a sacred trust unique to humanity:

"Heaven, from its heavy trust aspiring to be free, the duty was allotted, mad as I am, to me" (Safa, 2002, p. 115).

Although love may appear effortless at first, its true pursuit demands perseverance and detachment from worldly concerns:

"O Cupbearer! Pass round and offer thou the bowl / for the love which at first seemed easy, has now brought trouble to my soul" (Arberry, 1946, p. 98).

"As soon as thou hast found thy loved one, / Bid to the world a last farewell" (Arberry, 1946, p. 102).

Through love, the soul attains immortality, entering the eternal realm:

"He whose soul by love is quickened, never can to death be hurled: Writen is my life immortal in the records of the world" (Safa, 2002, p. 120).

Even fleeting experiences of love, such as in dreams, are intensely pleasurable and spiritually transformative:

"In a dream, to the abode of the Beloved did I wend: Oh happy the dream where I see the Darling Friend" (Lazard, 1992, p. 145).

For Hafez, the pursuit of love requires complete trust in Allah , the Absolute Beloved. Knowledge of Allah is a prerequisite for true love, and acts of devotion, prayer, longing, and surrender attain full significance only when motivated by love. Humans are, in essence, beggars of divine grace, and patience is essential even when the Beloved's presence seems distant. All of creation reflects Allah 's love, consistent with the Sufi understanding that the world mirrors divine grandeur:

"I was a hidden Treasure and I desired to be known, so I created a creation to which I made myself known; then they knew me" (Salami, 2009, p. 37).

In Hafez's vision, love is not merely emotional; it is transformative, ethical, and mystical, guiding humanity toward joy, immortality, and union with the divine (Arberry, 1946).

Love in the lenses of Emerson and the Influence of Persian Sufi Poets

Emerson opens his essay Love with a quotation from the Qur'an:

"I was as a gem concealed, Me my burning ray revealed" (Holy Quran, as cited in Emerson, 1904, p. 110).

For Emerson, love is a universal, spontaneous, and transformative experience, not limited by age, caste, or social convention. While it often begins in youth, true love matures over a lifetime, evolving in depth and understanding. Through love, individuals' cross borders, make sacrifices, and endure trials, actions that may appear as mistakes to some are justified through the lens of passion and devotion (Emerson, 1904).

Emerson emphasizes that the experience of love is both deeply personal and universally recognizable. In literature, theatre, or storytelling, readers and audiences empathize with love and its consequences, including betrayal, joy, and longing, demonstrating its power to bridge human differences. Even the hardest hearts can soften in the presence of love, which communicates directly through the soul, surpassing words and formal expression (Emerson, 1904).

Love, for Emerson, is not merely emotional but profoundly existential and restorative. It enlivens the old, heals the sick, comforts the lost, and fosters security and joy. Nature itself participates in love's expression: birds sing, trees sway, and flowers bloom, reflecting the universality and vitality of this force. While its beauty lies in the beholder's perception, love remains constant across generations, impervious to temporal or social change. It is experienced rather than described, a spontaneous, authentic affection that is as much a gift from the divine as it is a human capability (Emerson, 1904).

Emerson's conception of love resonates closely with the Persian Sufi tradition. Hafez, for instance, enshrines love as the central principle of spiritual and ethical life, valuing humanity and devotion through a lens of joy and beauty:

"It's a matter of creed for me: goblets of wine, my love's lips just like rubies, this is my doctrine / I won't forsake. Puritans, I offer you apologies" (Hafez, 2002, p. 89).

Hafez's emphasis on love reflects a lineage within Persian Sufism that includes Sana-i-of Ghazna (d. 1131), who declared love itself to be both his spiritual path and religious creed: "Why do you ask about my creed and faith tradition? / It's clear. My creed is Eros. Amor is my canon" (Chittick, 2007, p. 45).

Similarly, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273) extolled love as a transcendent force that elevates the human spirit:

"In eros lies transcendent heights which rise / And summon us to music that's immortal. Save to seek those erotic highs / One should never dance, never revel" (Rumi, 1995, p. 72).

For Emerson, Hafez and the Sufi poets exemplify a vision of love as both a divine and humanizing power, harmonizing spiritual devotion with the joy, beauty, and moral growth that love inspires. Love, in this sense, becomes the ultimate goal of human experience, a principle that unites heart, mind, and soul (Emerson, 1904).

American Transcendentalism and Parallels with Hafez

Ralph Waldo Emerson must be understood in the context of American Transcendentalism, a literary, philosophical, and political movement of early nineteenth-century America. Alongside Emerson, key figures included Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Amos Bronson Alcott, Frederic Henry Hedge, and Theodore Parker. Inspired by English and German Romanticism, biblical criticism (Herder, 1791) and the skepticism of David Hume transcendentalists sought a new era of individual and spiritual awakening.

The movement emphasized the divinity of nature, the intrinsic wisdom of the human soul and the primacy of individual conscience. It critiqued corruption in religion and politics while fostering an American form of intellectual and spiritual independence. Two principles of Transcendentalism resonate closely with Hafez's beliefs: the supremacy of intuition over reason and nonconformity in religion.

For transcendentalists, intuition, the inner faculty of insight, surpassed empirical reason as the highest means of understanding truth. Emerson distinguished the poet from the empirical thinker in The Poet, arguing that scientific methods could not address

humanity's fundamental questions (Emerson, 1960). Similarly, Hafez challenged the supremacy of reason:

"O thou who learn love's verse from book of reason / I'm afraid you can't know the point by research" (Hafez, 2002, p. 35).

Both Emerson and Hafez believed that true knowledge emerges through intuitive perception rather than scholarly study. Superficial learning could not satisfy the soul:

"Only the bird of aurora knows the value of a flower collection; not anybody who reads a page knows the meaning. Discard papers if you are our fellow student / since the knowledge of love is not found in books" (Hafez, 2002, pp. 34, 116).

The second parallel is religious nonconformity. Transcendentalism, rooted in American democratic ideals, challenged the conservatism of the Unitarian Church. Emerson rejected institutionalized religion, advocating for a personal, intuitive spirituality. In The Divinity School Address (1838), he argued against formalism and historical rigidity in Christianity, proposing a novel approach that emphasized direct experience of the divine. His study of Persian mysticism, particularly Hafez, liberated him from the constraints of traditional Christian orthodoxy and introduced him to a universal, spiritually intuitive perspective (Kleitz, 1988). Emerson himself noted that exploring multiple religions revealed common truths:

"When working on religions, people focus on points of difference while the pleasure comes from finding the points of similarity" (Emerson, 1904, pp. 226–227).

Thus, Emerson's transcendentalism shares essential affinities with Hafez: both valorize intuition over reason, and both embrace a nonconformist, personal approach to spirituality. In this light, Emerson's engagement with Hafez represents not merely literary admiration but a philosophical and religious dialogue that transcends cultural boundaries.

Parallels Between Sufism and Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism, emerging in early nineteenth-century New England, was both a philosophical and literary movement that challenged the rationalism of the eighteenth century, John Locke's empirical skepticism, and the rigid orthodoxy of Calvinism (Gura, 2007). Drawing on the ideas of Plato, Plotinus, Confucius, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and Sufi mystics, Transcendentalism emphasized the unity of the world and Allah, the immanence of the divine in nature, and the inherent wisdom of the human soul (Brooks, 1973)

At its core, the movement posited that the universe reflects a divine order and that the individual soul mirrors the universal soul. Humans may realize their divine potential either through mystical states, wherein the divine is infused into the human, or by engaging with truth, beauty, and goodness as manifested in nature and the Over-Soul. This correspondence between the human mind and the cosmos underlies Transcendentalist doctrines of self-reliance, intuition, and moral independence (Packer, 2018).

Key principles of Transcendentalism include:

1. The Over-Soul: The universal mind or being from which all existence emanates (Emerson, 1841).
2. Unity of Man and Nature: Humanity and nature are projections of the Over-Soul, reflecting its divine essence (Emerson, 1841).

3. Primacy of Intuition: True knowledge arises from insight and intuition rather than sensory experience or reason alone (Emerson, 1844).
4. Self-Reliance: Individuals must trust their unique genius and inner guidance, aligning with the Over-Soul (Emerson, 1841).
5. Imagination and Creativity: The human mind interprets nature and channels divine inspiration into art, beauty, and moral action (Gura, 2007).
6. Spiritual Quest: Understanding Allah through contemplation, meditation, and self-knowledge (Packer, 2018).
7. Simplicity and Austerity: A focus on essential truths and detachment from material distractions (Brooks, 1973).

Transcendentalism celebrated the individual as morally and spiritually autonomous, emphasizing personal experience, freedom from institutionalized religion, and a direct connection to the divine (Emerson, 1841). Emerson's essays, such as Self-Reliance and The Over-Soul, highlight the centrality of intuition, moral courage, and personal conscience in discovering truth and spiritual fulfillment (Emerson, 1841). Similarly, Henry David Thoreau's experiment at Walden Pond exemplified the Transcendentalist ideal of unifying with nature to achieve self-realization and spiritual clarity (Thoreau, 1854).

Many of these ideals resonate with Sufi mysticism. Like the Transcendentalists, Persian Sufis emphasized:

8. Absolute Unity (Tawhid): Allah 's oneness reflected in all creation (Safa, 2002).
9. The Universal Soul (Aqle Kol / Jane Kol): The interconnectedness of all existence (Lazard, 1992).
10. Trust in the Perfect Soul (Tavakkol): Reliance on divine guidance (Arberry, 1946).
11. Love (Mohabbat): A path to Allah and the ultimate bond between the divine and human soul (Salami, 2009).
12. Negation of Evil (Nafie Shar): Focusing on spiritual truth rather than material dualities (Safa, 2002).
13. Mystic Ecstasy (Eshq or Sowq): Moments of spiritual intoxication and divine inspiration (Arberry, 1946).
14. Constant Awareness of Allah (Muraqebat): Continuous mindfulness of the divine presence (Lazard, 1992).
15. Sincerity and Friendship (Ekhlas): Ethical and spiritual integrity (Salami, 2009).
16. Gnosis (Ma'refa): Direct experiential knowledge of the divine (Safa, 2002).
17. Self-Knowledge (Khodshenasi): Knowing oneself as the path to knowing Allah (Lazard, 1992).
18. Annihilation and Union (Fana and Vesal): Self-effacement and union with the divine (Arberry, 1946).
19. Simplicity, Poverty, and Austerity (Sadagi, Faqr, Riazat): Detachment from materialism and ego (Safa, 2002).
20. Contemplation and Present-Moment Awareness (Tamigh va Zharfandishi, Zendeghi dar Hale Hazer): Spiritual mindfulness (Salami, 2009).

21. Mortality (Marq): Recognition of death as part of spiritual realization (Lazard, 1992).

Both Sufism and Transcendentalism share a profound focus on the individual's direct experience of the divine, the centrality of intuition over reason, and the cultivation of inner freedom. Love emerges as the key conduit for spiritual realization in both traditions, serving as a transformative force that dissolves dualities and leads the seeker toward union with Allah. Consequently, the ultimate aim of both movements is the knowledge of the divine through inward experience, a pursuit expressed across cultures, religions, and philosophical systems (Emerson, 1841).

Hafez in the mirror of Persian Poetry by Emerson

In his essay Persian Poetry, Emerson (1935) admires Hafez as "the prince of Persian poets," praising him for combining the virtues of Pindar, Anacreon, Horace, and Burns with the insight of a mystic capable of perceiving deeper truths in nature. Emerson emphasizes Hafez's intellectual audacity and moral independence:

"He only is fit for company, who knows how to prize earthly happiness at the value of a nightcap. Our father Adam sold Paradise for two kernels of wheat; then blame me not, if I hold it dear at one gravestone" (Emerson, 1935, p. 194).

Hafez's work demonstrates a rapidity of thought and eloquence that surprises readers, as Emerson notes:

"See how the roses burn! Bring wine to quench the fire! Alas! The flames come up with us, we perish with desire" (Emerson, 1935, p. 195).

The poet's aphoristic style enables profound insights:

"In honor dies he to whom the great seems ever wonderful" (Emerson, 1935, p. 196).

"On every side is an ambush laid by the robber-troops of circumstance; Hence it is that the horseman of life urges on his courser at headlong speed" (Emerson, 1935, p. 197).

Emerson highlights Hafez's courage, self-reliance, and intellectual liberty as central to his poetic power:

"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 make him an object of interest and his every phrase and syllable significant, are in Hafez, and abundantly fortify and ennoble his tone" (Emerson, 1935, p. 198).

Hafez's emphasis on intellectual liberty extends to his critique of convention and hypocrisy:

"We accept the religions and politics into which we fall, and it is only a few delicate spirits who are sufficient to see that the whole web of convention is the imbecility of those whom it entangles, that the mind suffers no religion and no empire but its own" (Emerson, 1935, p. 199).

Emerson also underscores Hafez's mastery in portraying friendship and love:

"Thou leanest no secret until thou knowest friendship, since to the unsound no heavenly knowledge enters" (Emerson, 1935, p. 200).

"The chemist of love will this perishing mound, were it made out of mire, transmute into gold" (Emerson, 1935, p. 201).

Through Persian Poetry, Emerson positions Hafez as a model of moral courage, intellectual freedom, and poetic virtuosity, blending aesthetic admiration with

philosophical insight. Hafez's facility for transforming everyday experience into universal lessons exemplifies the transcultural dialogue that profoundly influenced Emerson's thought and Transcendentalist ideals.

Conclusion

This study explores the essential role Hafez played in shaping Ralph Waldo Emerson's literary and philosophical vision. Close analysis of Emerson's translations, essays, and critical reflections reveals that Persian mysticism was not a peripheral influence but a central component of his transcendental thought. The intellectual encounter between Hafez and Emerson exemplifies the transformative potential of cross-cultural literary exchange and contributes to a more globally situated understanding of American literary history. Hafez's influence on Emerson can be traced to 1838, when Emerson encountered Goethe's West-Eastern Divan and subsequently acquired Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall's German translation of Hafez's poetry. Emerson came to regard Hafez as an exemplary "poet for poets," admiring in him a spirit of self-reliance, intellectual freedom, and an ability to extract meaning and joy from ordinary experiences of life (Emerson, 1904). Emerson translated approximately 700 lines from Hafez, initially rendering them literally and later reshaping them through formal and metrical adaptation. His poem Bacchus (1847) draws substantially on Hafez's Saki-Nameh, reconfiguring the symbol of wine as a metaphor for creative inspiration and mental expansion. While wine in Sufi poetry signifies divine ecstasy, Emerson reinterpreted it as an emblem of intellectual and artistic liberation, carefully distinguishing metaphorical intoxication from sensual excess (Emerson, 1904). Through his sustained engagement with Hafez, Emerson found a poetic and philosophical model that affirmed joy, freedom, and imaginative vitality. This influence not only shaped Bacchus but also contributed significantly to the evolution of American poetic consciousness, underscoring the enduring dialogue between Persian mysticism and American transcendentalism (Bloom, 1995).

Acknowledgment

The authors also thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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