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**THE INFLUENCE  
OF RUMI'S THOUGHT  
ON WHITMAN'S POETRY**

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**ABSTRACT**

**S**ufism or *tasawwuf* is the inner, mystical, or psycho-spiritual dimension of Islam. However, many scholars believe that Sufism is outside the sphere of Islam. As a result, there has always been disagreement among religious scholars and Sufis themselves regarding the origins of Sufism. The traditional view sees Sufism as the mystical school of Islam and its beginnings in the first centuries following the life of the Prophet Mohammad. Indeed, there is another view that traces the pre-Islamic roots of Sufism back through mystics and mystery schools of the other regions gathered into the trunk known as Islamic Sufism.

The word Sufi originates from a Persian word meaning wisdom and wisdom is the ultimate power. The following survey tries to explore this concept in the works of Rumi and its impact on the western writers and poets particularly Whitman. It tries to show how Whitman inspired from Rumi and came to be the messenger of Sufism in his poems. These poems reveal the depth of Sufi spirituality, the inner states of mystical love, and the Unity of Being through symbolic expressions. They also express aspects of Sufism and of traveling the Sufi path inaccessible in prose writings.

**Key words:** Sufism; Persian literature; Persian poetry; Rumi, Whitman.

## Introduction

Persian writing is one of the world's most established written works (Bruijn, 2015; Trinity, 2013). It compasses over two centuries, though a significant part of the pre-Islamic material has been lost. Its sources have been inside Greater Iran including present-day Iran, Iraq and the Caucasus, and additionally locales of Central Asia where the Persian dialect has truly been the national dialect (Tehrani, 2014; Reviews, 2012). For example, Molana (Rumi), one of Iran's best-adored artists, conceived in Balkh or Vakhsh (in what is presently Afghanistan or Tajikistan), wrote in Persian, and lived in Konya, then the capital of the Seljuks. The Ghaznavids vanquished expansive regions in Central and South Asia and received Persian as their court dialect. There is in this way Persian literature from Iran, Mesopotamia, Azerbaijan, the wider Caucasus, Turkey, western parts of Pakistan, Tajikistan and different parts of Central Asia. Not all this literature is composed in Persian, as some consider works composed by ethnic Persians in different languages and dialects, for example, Greek and Arabic, to be incorporated. In the meantime, not all writing written in Persian is composed by ethnic Persians or Iranians. Especially, Indic, Caucasian, and Turkic poets, essayists and writers have likewise utilized the Persian language as a part of the land of Persianate societies and cultures (Branch, 2014; Zarandi et al., 2014).

Depicted as one of the colossal writings of humankind, Persian literature has its establishes in surviving works of Middle Persian and Old Persian, the last of which go back similarly as 522 BCE (the date of the most punctual surviving Achaemenid engraving, the Behistun Inscription. Persian literature was considered by Goethe one of the four primary collections of world literature (Zarandi et al., 2014). The majority of surviving Persian literature, notwithstanding, originates from the times after the Islamic success of Iran around 650 CE. After the Abbasids came to control (750 CE), the Iranians turned into the recorders, scribes and bureaucrats of the Islamic domain and, progressively, additionally its poets and writers. The New Persian literature emerged and prospered in Khorasan and Transoxiana in light of political reasons – the early Iranian administra-

tions, for example, Tahirids and Samanids were situated in Khorasan (Zarandi et al., 2014).

Iranians wrote in both Persian and Arabic (Divsalar and Mazhari, 2013; Lewis, 2011); Persian prevailed in later artistic circles. Persian poets, for example, Ferdowsi, Sa'di, Hafiz, Attar, Nezami, Rumi and Omar Khayyam are additionally known in the West and have affected the writing of numerous nations.

## Persian Poetry

Classical Persian poetry and verse is constantly rhymed. The principal verse structures are the Qasideh, Masnavi, Qazal and Ruba'i (Iran Chamber Society, 2015; Schimmel, 2014). The qasida or ode is a long lyric and poem in monorhyme, for the most part of a panegyric, instructive or religious nature; the Masnavi, sent in rhyming couplets, is utilized for gallant, sentimental, or narrative verse; the ghazal (ode or lyric) is a similarly short poem, generally passionate or mysterious and fluctuating from four to sixteen couplets, all on one rhyme. A convention of the ghazal is the presentation, in the last couplet, of the poet's nom de plume or pen name (takhallus). The ruba'i is a quatrain with a specific meter, and an accumulation of quatrains is called "Ruba'iyyat" (the plural of ruba'i). At last, a gathering of a poet's ghazals and other verse, orchestrated alphabetically based on the rhymes, is known as a divan (Iran Chamber Society, 2015).

A word may not be strange here on the unconventional challenges of deciphering Persian verse and literature toward the western reader. To the pitfalls regular to all interpretations from verse must be included, on account of Persian literature, such extraordinary challenges as the free utilization of Sufi symbolism, the incessant artistic, Koranic and different references and suggestions, and the general occupation of monorhyme, a structure exceedingly compelling in Persian yet unsuited to most different languages. In any case, most essential of all is the way that the verse of Persia depends to a more prominent degree than that of most different countries on excellence of language for its belongings. This is the reason a significant part of the considerable volume of "qasidas in commendation of sovereigns" can at present be read with delight in the original, though. It is gener-

ally unsuited to interpretation. So, the best appeal of Persian literature lies, as Sir E. Denison Ross commented, in its language and its music, and subsequently the reader of an interpretation “has perforce to forego the essence of the matter” (Iran Chamber Society, 2015; Zarandi et al., 2014).

### **Characteristics of Persian literature**

#### **i. Preponderance and advantage of Poetry**

A genuinely broad prose literature, basically of a narrative, episodic, and admonishing kind likewise thrived, yet it is dominated by poetry regarding quality and quantity alike (Nanaje, 2010; Nejati and Shafaei, 2008). In fact, poetry is the art par excellence of Persia, and her notable social and cultural accomplishment. In spite of their significant achievements in painting, pottery, textiles, and architecture, in no other field have the Persians succeeded in accomplishing the same level of prominence. While the extent of alternate arts stayed constrained, literature and verse formed into a vehicle for the most refined musings and the most profound suppositions. Pensive and enthusiastic in the meantime, poetry talks the language of the Persian heart, psyche, and soul, completely mirroring the Persian world perspective, background and life experience (Nanaje, 2010).

#### **ii. “Tangential” Structure and Organization**

The literary works of Persia for the most part have a tendency to be unmistakable instead of emotional, expressionistic rather than naturalistic, natural as opposed to compositional (Lee, 2012). This does not imply that Iranian writings lack sensational, dramatic or well-constructed stories. The Shah-nama contains some intense stories with impressive emotional impact. The scenes of Rostam and Sohrab, Siyavosh and Sudaba, and Rostam and Esfandiyar, are compelling in themselves as well as told with excellent structural cohesion - just like various occasions reported by the eleventh-century historian Bayhaqi. From their Persian interpretations, it is clear that the Middle Persian historical novels in light of the lives of Mazdak and Bahram Chobin were emotional and well-formed. One need just allude to the epigrammatic quatrains of Omar Khayyam and his imitators to demon-

strate that emotional strategy was not outsider to Persian literary taste. Numerous authors and poets exceeded expectations in effectively expressing an idea adequately by the prudent utilization of complexity, accentuation, paradox, and incongruity, yet above all else by a fitting delineation utilized as a part of Persian didactic literature to dramatize an abstract point or dictum.

But it is the making of mind-sets and impacts and the portrayal of scenes and opinions that have remained the main concerns of the writers and poets of Persia. Abstract and literary constructions of an architectural nature, where all points of interest are subordinated to the prerequisites of an overriding subject or thought, have from time to time been the convincing point of Iranian literary works. Structural frames as, they are seen in the West, with emotional pressure coming about because of their improvement of characters and their imagined connection don't distract the Persian literary mind. Instead of following a planned advancement from introductory premises to climax and resolution, the Persian authors permit themselves to investigate, frequently at a lackadaisical pace, the scenes and points of interest that energize their own creative energy, and to impart these to the reader. This, unfocused, wandering kind of literary development finds its preeminent sample in Rumi's Mathnavi, where mysterious thoughts and preachings are represented by stories inside of stories, with no reasonable structure between drifting sermons and philosophical comments.

It is additionally obvious that in the present century, when fiction composing has get to be prominent, it is the short story (basically descriptive) and not the novel that has pulled in the best talents and abilities. What's more, in Afghani's Showhar-e Ahu Khanom and Dowlatabadi's Kelidar, two huge post-World War II books, continuous peregrinations, have a great time abusing the repercussions of their subjects, and fanning out into side back alleys are usual of the same centrifugal inclination that we see in the works of Nezami or Attar.

Persian poets and essayists are demonstrated experts of vignettes, aphorisms, concise comments, world renowned expressions, well suited

definitions, pregnant suggestions, illustrative stories, and innovative short depictions; these methods are exemplified in the pages of the most observed Persian exposition work, Sadi's *Golestan* (The rose greenery enclosure), created in the thirteenth century. Persian and Middle Persian have a rich store of insight writing, comprising for the most part of withdrew or approximately associated good adages and moral perceptions from which one can barely find a rational arrangement of moral reasoning. It is symptomatic of the Persian method of speculation and artistic preference that the genuine unit of Persian verse is the line (distich or bayt). The best Persian artists regularly succeed in communicating significant contemplations or energetic conclusions within the limitations of a solitary couplet (Artarena, 2015).

### iii. Decorative Orientations

A third element of Persian writing is its desire for the utilization of rhetorical devices and ornament. It has regularly been notified that Persian arts have a marked decorative inclination. This is obviously found in the visual expressions: architecture, book illustration, wall painting, calligraphy, bookbinding, and materials, and also in music. In modern Persian criticism, this propensity, an indispensable piece of masterful expression in Persian letters, has been fairly belittled, incompletely as a result of changes in abstract qualities and mostly on the grounds that the faultfinders have typically centered around exorbitant cases. Such a perspective, in any case, overlooks the benchmarks of taste prevailing in medieval Persia and its circles of social impact, and it misses, too, the genuine nature and capacity of decoration in Persian writing. A long way from being a simple expansion or adornment, decoration is a key component of literary expression. It is one of the significant gadgets writers or poets utilize to show their resourcefulness, granting style and modernity to their items, and awakening the reader's profound respect (Iran Daily, 2010; Chalisova, 2009).

In early Persian poetry, ornament is negligible, mostly as a result of the poetry's youth and as it was displayed on Sassanian poetry. In pre-Islamic Persia, as we have seen, poetry and music went as hand in hand, and the

minstrels for the most part sang their ballads to the backup of instruments. Poetry, to judge by our few remaining cases, was genuinely basic in arrangement since the music was there to help convey its passionate effect. Numerous early Persian sonnets were, indeed, imagined as melodies and were sung by the writer or a ravi (Arabic rawi, reciter) as instanced by Rudaki's well-known poem on Bukhara (Nanaje, 2010; Iran Daily, 2010).

It was not long, notwithstanding, before poetry accomplished an absolutely isolate presence from music and its own particular custom was built up with a repertory of routine topics, themes, symbolism, and imagery. Since the free play of creative ability was fairly restricted by the limitations of this convention, embellishment and decoration turned into an essential method for displaying scholarly aptitude and of inspiring one's audience. Stylistic mastery and rhetorical craftsmanship slowly turned into a sign of good composition.

### iv. Conventionality

A fourth element of Persian literary custom is the conventionality of its themes, imagery, and symbolism. The significant themes and types of Persian poetry were situated in the first century of its appearance; they are seen as early as the works of Rudaki (d. 940-41). Besides, the distinctive classifications of Persian poetry for the most part relate to particular structures: the *qasida* (tribute), a long mono-rhyme, for panegyrics; the *ghazal*, a shorter mono-rhyme of around seven to fourteen lines, for lyrics; the *mathnavi* or couplet, for narrative themes; the *roba'i* or quatrain for epigrammatic ballads; and the *qet'a* (piece or fragment) for casual themes. These structures and their relating genres have remained genuinely consistent for almost a thousand years (Nanaje, 2010; Iran Daily, 2010; Simidchieva, 2003). Traditional poets have constantly made their works inside of the prerequisites of formal canons and thematic and imagistic traditions.

### Persian Sufi poetry

Poetry, more specifically Persian poetry, is not as simple to discuss in an article as it is the speech and heart of Persia, the land of beauty, love, and poetry playing the most important role in Persian literature. The softest and richest lan-

guage in the world is the Persian and it is so peculiarly adapted to the purposes of poetry. The history of Persian Sufi poetry was called by A. J. Arberry "the golden era" (De Bruijn, 1997). The term golden era was coined because the greatest sufi poets who created the most influential poems all lived in Persia. Sufi poetry has had a great effect in persian poetry as Reynold Nicholson's statement shows: "Sufism has few ideas, but an inexhaustible wealth and variety of illustration" (5), we can claim that Sufi poetry is the most fruitful form of persian poetry that has had such a superb effect in persian literature being called the mine of persian literature (Lotfi, 2009). "The mine of Persian literature," observes an elegant writer, "contains every substance, from the dazzling diamond to the useful granite, and its materials may be employed with equal success to build castles in the air or upon earth" (Costello, 1899, p. 44).

Most of the classical Persian poets are Sufis, a profession of religion so mystical, that it is difficult to explain in a few words (Ernst, 2003). Sufism or *Tasawwuf* is "the esoteric or inward aspect of Islam" (Burckhart, 2008, p. 5). They prefer meditations and ecstasies of mysticism to the pleasures of the world. Their fundamental tenets consists of the existence of absolutely nothing but God: that the human soul is an emanation from His essence and it will finally be restored to Him.

The poetical compositions of the Persian Sufi poetry are of several kinds. The most important are the quatrain or *rubai*, the *qasida*, the *ghazal*, and the *mathnavi*. Persian quatrains consist of four lines and the sequence of two internal rhymes. The Persian name for quatrain is *rubai*, a derivation from the Arabic *arba*. According to Shams-i Qays who was living in early thirteenth century, "the *rubai* was invented by the poet Rudaki who lived in the tenth century" (De Bruijn, 1997, p. 7). *Rubai* deals with any theme that could be treated in classical Persian poetry. The *Qasida* was borrowed by religious minded poets from the literature of the courts. It is originally a long poem of praise (a long praise poem) written in monorhyme. It may consist of either praise or satire, morality or other subjects. The Persians do not extend the length beyond one hundred and

twenty distiches; but the Arabians sometimes make it exceed five hundred.

Love is probably the most universal symbol for the relationship between the mystic and the Divine. In the language of love, a poet can put his words in the most proper manner for his relationship with his Creator. No form of poetry is as closely tied to the theme of love, as the Persian *ghazal*. In general, we can tell *ghazal* is a poem of love, using various themes. "Sanai was also the earliest writer of mystical *ghazal*" (57). The name of Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi is often mentioned as the third master of *ghazal* after Sanai and Attar. The usual subjects of the *ghazals* are beauty, love, or friendship; but frequently they are employed to set forth the praises of wine, and many treat of the mysteries of the Sufis. The poet generally introduces his name in the last couplet.

Mathnavi is a "kind of narrative poetry, internal rhyme of all distichs, which changes with each following line" (84). The greatest mathnavi is *Mathnavi* by Rumi which has a literal and figurative sense. In fact, whatever we are searching for in Persian literature, we can understand that the name of Rumi is in the peak of this mountain. Especially in Persian Sufi poetry the name of Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi can't be denied because his name is like a star which is at the center of the Sufis sky. A great star which Sufis sky can't be bright without its presence.

### **Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi**

Jalal al-Din Rumi was born on September 30, 1207 to native Persian speaking parents, originally from the Balkh city of Khorasan, in modern-day Afghanistan. He was born probably in the village of Wakhsh, a small town located on the Wakhsh River in the greater Balkh region, in modern-day Tajikistan. But because the whole area at that time was Persia, the major portion of which is present-day Iran, Rumi is celebrated in Iran as one of that country's most illustrious poets. Rumi is one of the famous influential figures in the history of Persia, currently known as Iran, as well as in the Western World.

His father, Baha al-Din, was a theologian, jurist and a mystic from Wakhsh. In 1219, Baha al-Din fled with his family from Balkh because of the impending invasion of the Mongols. Baha

al-Din, with his family and a group of disciples, set out from Balkh to Konia. On their way they passed some cities. When Baha al-Din arrived in Nishapur, the Iranian city, located in the province of Khorasan, Rumi encountered one of the most famous mystic Persian poets, Attar. It has been told that Attar "presented young Jalal al-Din-Rumi with his *Asrarnama* and informed his father that the child would someday become famous throughout the world" (Davis, 2013, p. 34). From Nishapur, Baha al-Din traveled to Baghdad. There he was invited by Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi to stay a while at his *Khaniqah*, but he did not accept. Instead, he stayed at the *Mustansariah* School. After Baghdad, he visited Mecca, Medina, and Damascus, all the time looking for a town in which he could settle (in or down) a *Madrashah* and teach his disciples who had accompanied him. None of these places satisfied Baha al-Din's requirements for a new home. From Damascus, he moved to Aleppo, and then to Malatya where he stayed for four years before he moved to Laranda (present-day Karaman), southeast of Konia, in present-day Turkey. He lived in Laranda for seven years. At Laranda, Jalal al-Din married Gawhar Khatun. They had two sons: Sultan Walad and Aladdin Chalabi. Finally, they settled in Konia. In Konia, Baha al-Din was given the title "king of the religious scholars (*sultan al-ulama*)" (Chittick 3). In Konia they found a peaceful place, and established themselves under the royal patronage of Alla al-Din Kaiqobad, a great Suljuk prince. When his wife died, Rumi married again and had a son, Amir Alim Chalabi, and a daughter, Malaken Khatun. When his father Baha al-Din passed away in 1231, Rumi succeeded him as professor in religious sciences at the largest theological school in Konia.

The climax of Rumi's life was at the moment he met a wandering dervish named Shams-e Tabriz. It is one of the most memorable encounters in the history of Sufism. Although there are various stories of this encounter, probably the most reliable account is the one that Shams himself recorded in his discourses (*Maqalat*). Where he says that he spoke as follows to Rumi:

"The first thing I talked to him was this: How is it that Bayazid did not need to follow (the example of the Prophet), and did not say Glory be

to Thee, or we worship Thee?" (Ernst, 2012, p. 286).

The place where these two oceans met each other for the first time is known as "Marc'al Bahreyn" (Aydin, 2004, p. 7). It is the most famous and probably the most fruitful relationship in Rumi's development. From that moment on, it was a great change in Rumi's life. He took Shams to live in his own home and the two men were inseparable; they spent hours a day together, sometimes isolating themselves for long periods to pray and fast in divine communion with God. This close relationship caused anger and jealousy among his students and his family. Rumi's lack of attention made them angry, because they were unable to change the attitude of their teacher. Because of their jealousy, life in Konia was very difficult for Shams. Without informing Rumi about his future residence, Shams left Konia. For fifteen months Rumi sought Shams's place without any luck. Finally, he received information that Shams was living in Damascus. He sent Sultan Walad to persuade Shams to return to Konia. In his joy Damascus was the centre of this world. *We are enamoured and bewildered and enraptured of Damascus, We have given our soul and bound our heart to the passion of Damascus* (Schimmel, 1993, p. 22). When Shams returned, for some time, all was well between him and Rumi's disciples. But the reunion of Rumi and Shams did not last for long. Again, a lack of attention to his teaching infuriated the disciples. Shams left Rumi for the last time (1247). Some people told Rumi perhaps Shams went to Syria. So, Rumi went to Syria but it was no result. We don't know exactly about the disappearance of Shams, and there are various stories, but the most reliable one is perhaps this one:

"Aflaki boldly states that he was murdered in connivance with Rumi's son 'Aliaoddin', the pride of professors". (23)

Rumi's major work is *Mathnavi Manavi* (spiritual couplets). Soon after his spiritual friend Shams appeared in his life, Rumi started his marvellous work, *Mathnavi*. It consists of twenty-seven thousand verses. It was written in couplets and collected into six large volumes. Rumi's six-volume masterpiece, *Mathnavi*, also may be said to have had only a single purpose:

communion with the Absolute. The *Mathnawt*, has often been called “the Quran in the Persian language” (Chittick 2). Rumi’s *Mathnavi* contains within its tales references to the Quran, the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, Muslim history, famous saints and sinners, poetic allusions, and tales of animals and fantastic events. Professor R. A. Nicholson translated the *Mathnawü* into English and characterised Rumi as ‘the greatest mystic poet of any age’ (Iqbal, 1991, p. 13). The *Mathnavi* expresses Rumi’s burning love, refined spirits, fine intelligence and lofty mysticism through the form of linked stories. Jalal al-Din Rumi is said to have been forty-three years engaged in writing the *Mathnavi*. Often whole nights were spent in its composition, Rumi reciting and his friend Husam al-Din copying it down and sometimes singing portions of the verse in his beautiful voice. It’s the only one of Rumi’s works that he deliberately composed in chronological order for a single purpose. R.A Nicholson (1925-40) in praise of *Mathnavi* said: “This is the Book of the *Mathnawh*, which is the root of the roots of the roots of the (Mohammedan) Religion in respect of (its) unveiling the mysteries of attainment (to the Truth) and of certainty; and which is the greatest science of God and the clearest (religious) way of God and the most manifest evidence of God.” (p. 13)

Rumi’s other major work is the *Divane Kabir* (great work) or *Divane Shams* (The Works of Shams of Tabriz); because Rumi used his friend’s name as his pen name, and consisting of over forty thousand couplets, this is a monumental work of divine lyricism. The *Divan* is a remarkable piece of literature in that it translates the author’s ecstatic experiences directly into poetry. William C. Chittick (2005) for explaining the value of *divan* has made this statement:

“It is well known that most of the *ghazals* (or “lyric poems of love”) of the *Diwan* were composed spontaneously by Mawlana during the *sama’* or “mystical dance.” This dance, which later came to be known as the “dance of the whirling dervishes,” is an auxiliary means of spiritual concentration employed by the Mevlevi order, a means which, it is said, was originated by Rumi himself. (p. 5)

Rumi was fading away in the autumnal days of 1273, and the physicians despaired of diagnosing his illness. He passed away on 17 December 1273, at sunset. It is told that that night was named *Shab-e Arus* (literally Wedding Night or Rumi’s Night of Union with God). His funeral was attended by all people from different religions.

### Rumi and Whitman

It is a matter of common knowledge that the 19th century American writers Emerson and Thoreau were deeply influenced by the oriental thought. For Whitman, the Sufi poets held a prominent position in shaping the course of hispoetics, from its philosophy to its structural organization. One poet in particular, Jalaluddin Rumi, seems to have had an effect on Whitman that has not been adequately examined. One of the primary problems in connecting Whitman to Rumi and the other Sufi poets is determining what kind of access Whitman had to their work. In nearly any scholarly analysis of Whitman’s poetry it is impossible to exclude mentioning Ralph Waldo Emerson’s influence as a mentor upon his poetic development. Emerson was America’s first internationally significant writer and philosopher, and his writings drew deeply on Persian poetry and thought. Best known for his role as a founder, philosopher, and poet in the Transcendentalist movement, Emerson also made a great contribution to American literature as a conductor who exposed Americans to medieval Persian Sufi poetry through his own efforts as a translator. Farhang Jahanpour claims that Emerson’s acquaintance with Persian literature started in his teen years:

“A study of Emerson’s *journals*, and especially an examination of the often neglected literary journals that he borrowed from various Boston and Harvard libraries, shows that Emerson’s familiarity with Persians goes back to his youth.” (Aminrazavi, 2014, p. 118)

His eastern studies between 1845 and 1855 were mainly dominated by Persian literature. Among the most important books which Emerson read during these years about Persian literature were: “W.R. Alger’s (1865) *the poetry of the east*; James Atkinson’s translation of *the Shah-Nameh*; James Ross’s translation of Sa’di’s *Gulistan* (the Flower Garden); the German transla-

tion of the *Divan* of the celebrated Persian mystic Jalal al-Din Rumi" (118). Sufi ideas found a way into Whitman's spiritual development under the influence of Emerson. Alger's *Poetry of the East*, more than half of which is devoted to Persian poetry, with a large selection of Rumi's poems, the rest of it being allotted to Hindi and Arabic poetry. In his "Introduction to Oriental Poetry," the second part of which deals with the Persian poets, Alger introduces Jalal al-Din Rumi in these exalted terms:

"The Sufi poets are innumerable, but their universally acknowledged head and master is the celebrated Mewlana Dschelaleddin Rumi, the greatest mystic poet of the whole Orient, the oracle of the devotees, the nightingale of the contemplative life, the lawgiver in piety, the founder of the principle order of Dervishes, and author of the *Mesnavi*. The *Mesnavi* is a vast and famous double-rhymed ascetic poem, an exhaustible coffer of Sufi lore and gems. From the banks of Ganges to the Bosphorus it is the hand-book of all Sufis, the law-book and ritual of all the mystics. From this work, says Von Hammer, this volcanic eruption of inspiration, breaks forth the inmost peculiarity of Oriental mysticism, a solitary self-direction towards the loftiest goal of perfection over the contemplative way of Divine Love. On the wings of the highest religious inspiration, which rise far beyond all outer forms of positive religion, adoring the Eternal Essence, in its completest abstraction from everything earthly, as the purest fountain of eternal light, soars Dschelaleddin, above suns and moons, above time and space, above creation and fate, beyond the primeval decrees of destiny, beyond the sentence of the last judgment, forth into infinitude, where he melts into unity with the Endless Being as endless worshiper, and into the Boundless Love as boundless lover. . ." (Alger, 1865, p. 66-67).

The searching eye of Whitman, himself a mystic bard of the Occident, must have seen over these lines. Undoubtedly, he also read Emerson's article, "Persian Poetry," "in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1858. Emerson introduced his readers to Persian poetry in this essay, particularly "the seven masters of the Persian Parnassus": Firdusi, Enweri, Nisami, Jelaleddin, Saadi, Hafiz, and Jami" (Ford, 1987, p. 12-13). The different ways in

which the two Americans came to appreciate the Sufis' work ultimately highlighted their deeper philosophical differences to such an extent that it led to a split between Whitman and his onetime mentor. Emerson approached the Sufis from an intellectual standpoint, while Whitman was increasingly drawn toward the way in which the Sufis placed the body at the core of their poetic expression, including, and particularly, sensual experience. Indeed his very transcendental doctrines, which later influenced Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, are said to have developed largely out of his reading of Persian mysticism, at the center of which, of course, stands Rumi's *Mathnavi*. By way of indirect influence, *Leaves of Grass*, in addition to Alger's *Poetry of the East*, seems to have benefitted from Emerson's Persian mysticism too. And this could be responsible for the amazing points of resemblance we can encounter between Rumi and Whitman.

Another critic Massud Farzan in his article *Whitman and Sufism: toward a Persian lesson*, mentions similarities between Whitman and Rumi.

Massud Farzan reminds us Lord Viscount Strangford's idea:

"Whitman instead of wasting his gifts on *Leaves of Grass*..... should have translated Rumi (Aminrazavi, 2014, p. 155). Here however Farzan offers a thoughtful conjecture:

"While Strangford's comments were undoubtedly exaggerated, there is no reason why Whitman would not have been acquainted with Sufi poets of Persia and highly influenced by their thought and poetry. His contemporary kindred soul Emerson was extremely interested in the Sufis, having read their works extensively and written about them, notably Saadi and Hafiz. Thoreau too was fond of the Sufis and had quoted from Saadi's *Gulistan* in *Walden*. More unequivocally, Whitman's own 1891 poem 'A Persian Lesson' – originally called 'A Sufi Lesson' – is indeed a surprisingly accurate and inspired reflection of Persian Sufism'. (p. 164)

"A Persian Lesson" not only reflects a Sufi-inspired piece; it also contains lines which marvelously complement many a poem of Rumi dramatizing his concept of mystic evolution:

The motion of every atom is towards its origin;



A man comes to be the thing on which he is bent.

By the attraction of fondness and yearning,  
the soul and the

Heart Assume the qualities of the Beloved,  
who is the Soul of souls (Nicholson 83). Rumi

It is the central urge in every atom,  
(Often unconscious, often evil, downfallen)

To return to its divine source and origin,  
however distant,

Latent the same in subject and in object,  
without one exception. Whitman

Like Whitman, Rumi composed a vast amount of poetry. His masterpiece work is the *Mathnawi*, a six-book piece consisting of more than twenty thousand lines. However, it is not a single-storied epic poem, but a series of stories and meditation all directed toward the education and improvement of the soul. The opening lines of the proem to the first book evoke Whitman's use of grass:

Listen to the reed how it tells a tale, complaining of separations –

Saying, "Ever since I was parted from the reed-bed, my lament hath  
caused man and woman to moan.

I want a bosom torn by severance, that I may unfold (to such a one) the  
pain of love-desire.

Every one who is left far from his source wishes back the time when he  
was united with it.

In every company I uttered my wailful notes,  
I consorted with the unhappy

and with them that rejoice. (Nicholson, 1898, p. 1-5)

Rumi's reed longs to return to the reed-bed from which it has been separated; Whitman's relationship between human and grass works similarly. Whitman does not personify the grass as Rumi does, but he endows it with a nature that represents unity.

The closing lines of "A Persian Lesson" strongly echo Rumi's poetry in particular.

The Sufi teacher of the poem ends his lesson in Whitman-like fashion with a series of questions followed by his own conjectural response:

'Would you know the dissatisfaction? the urge and spur of every life;

The something never still'd – never entirely gone? the invisible need of every seed?

'It is the central urge of every atom,

(Often unconscious, often evil, downfallen,)

To return to its divine source and origin,  
however distant,

Latent the same in subject and in object,  
without one exception.'

The urge that Whitman attributes to every atom to return to its original, divine source evokes the proem to the first book of the *Mathnawi*. Rumi uses a reed and the crying noise associated with it as a musical instrument to illustrate longing.

### Conclusion

One may consider Whitman and Rumi as panentheists, according to their vision toward nature and God. In their panentheistic idea, they maintain that the Divine can be both transcendent and immanent at the same time. From their viewpoint, God might be everything without being identical with everything.

The research was not to express similarities between Rumi and Whitman because it is clear that both poets believed in God as a unifying force. But instead of all similarities found in Rumi and Whitman's poetry already mentioned above (some of them), it would be fantastic to mention how Sufi ideas attracted American writers. The peak of Sufism who is Rumi and an honor for Persia in the 13<sup>th</sup> century has been influential on American writers' thoughts like Whitman in 19<sup>th</sup> century. As mentioned in Rumi's introduction we can't deny the importance of Rumi in Persian literature as well as the world literature especially in Sufism.

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