THE MIDDLE EAST IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA: 
THE CASES OF RALPH WALDO EMERSON, NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, 
AND EDGAR ALLAN POE

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The presence of the Middle East in the works of American artists between the Revolution and the Civil War is pervasive and considerable. What makes this outlandish element of critical significance is that its proliferation coincided with the emerging American literary identity. The wide spectrum of meanings that was related to it adds even more significance to its critical value. In its theoretical approach, this work uses Raymond Schwab’s *The Oriental Renaissance* as a ground for all its arguments. It considers the rise of the Oriental movement in America to be a continuation of what had already started of Oriental researches in Europe. Like their counterparts in Europe, the American writers who are selected for this study were genuinely interested in identifying with the Oriental thought. The European mediation, however, should not be allowed to hold any significance other than pointing to the fact that French, German, and English Orientalist organizations were more technically equipped. The sentiment of identification with the East resonated equally on both sides of the Atlantic.

This work investigates three cases from antebellum America: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allan Poe. It shows that each one of these writers found in the East the apt means to address a concern of a national nature. To Ralph Waldo Emerson, Sufism, through the Persian poets, spoke intimately to what
the nation needed of reform on the individual level. He gravitated to their theory of
man’s divinity and perfection. To Nathaniel Hawthorne, the history of the East
provided events and characters that spoke allegorically to a need in American society
to recognize more often the individualism of its citizens. To Edgar Allan Poe, the
Arabesque multiplied the world of his fiction, and allowed him to critique the regional
voices of the divided nation.
To My Brothers, the Heroes of Freedom in and above the Syrian Desert:
The Tyrant’s Whip Might Burn My Skin
But It Will Never Touch My Soul
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Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii
Dedication .................................................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgements ..................................................................................................... v
Vita ............................................................................................................................... vi

Chapters

1. Introduction ............................................................................................................. 1
2. Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Legacy of Sufism ................................................. 18
3. Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Oriental tale .......................................................... 93
4. The Arabesque in Edgar Allan Poe’s fiction ........................................................... 177
5. Epilogue .................................................................................................................. 245

Bibliography ................................................................................................................. 254
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The vast expanse of the sea was immense, and it usually took weeks and sometimes months for any piece of news to cross the Atlantic, yet the citizens of the newly born republic still eagerly waited to hear the latest of the Sublime Porte’s faraman, or edicts, and Sir William Jones’s discoveries in Persia and India. The news of Jean-Francois Champollion, “who has been living for these ten years on the Inscription of Rosetta, and who has lately been making some steps in Egyptian Literature, which really appear to be gigantic” (ABC, 367), soon enough was on the pages of Philadelphia’s The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art. America’s fascination with the Middle East would continue for more than half a century to occupy its citizens’ imagination. From the myriad pieces of evidence, I refer to the Massachusetts Historical Society’s selection in 1795 of Sir William Jones¹, the world’s most prominent Orientalist then, as their honorary correspondent, not

¹ Sir William Jones (1746-1794) was England’s most celebrated orientalist. He was a judge, a philologist, and a poet. At a young age he learnt Greek, Latin, Arabic and Persian, and later in life he would add Sanskrit. He studied law and become a circuit judge in Wales. At the end the American Revolution, he was appointed in 1783 to the supreme court of Bengal. He founded the Asiatick Society of Bengal, and institutionalized Oriental studies.
knowing that he had died few months earlier (Yhohannan, 107). Or the fact that the H. and P. Rice edition of *The Arabian Nights* (Philadelphia, 1794) was the best selling American book before the turn of the nineteenth century; Or the fact the Thomas Moore’s Oriental book, *Lalla Rookh*, was the best seller in 1817 in the United States (Schueller, *US Orientalism* 26). But America’s interest in the East did not originate at home; it was an extension of a movement that was forcefully changing the literary scene in Europe. In a retrospective evaluation of what writers in Europe wrote about the East from late 18th to mid 19th century, Edgar Quinet in his *Genie des religions*, published in 1841, devoted a whole chapter to the influence of the East in Europe, designating the chapter and the intellectual movement that it describes “The Oriental Renaissance” (Schwab, 11).

Catching up with the fervor, America as well became involved in writing and talking about the East. The interest that American writers had in the East holds a unique significance for American scholarship because it coincided with the nation’s search for its cultural independence. The East became part and parcel of the emerging American identity. Emerson captures the spirit of this period in the following questions, taken from his “American Scholar”\(^2\): “If there is any period one would desire to be born in, is it not the age of Revolution; when the old and the new stand side by side and admit of being compared; when the energies of all men are searched by fear and by hope; when the historic glories of the old can be compensated by the rich possibilities of the new era?” (68). America was a perfect embodiment of this age

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\(^2\) This was an oration that Emerson gave before the Phi Beta Kappa Society, at Cambridge, on August 31, 1837.
of “becoming.” The study of the cultural traffic between America and the Islamic East in this agile age adds further significance to its re/formative spirit. American writers repeatedly transformed the East into a theater on which they paraded the drama of their domestic politics. Good examples of this would be Royall Tyler’s *The Algerine Captive*, William Ware’s *Zenobia; or, The Fall of Palmyra*, or Susan Haswell Rowson’s *Slaves in Algeirs: or, A Struggle for Freedom*. Or they transformed America into a stage and invited characters from the Islamic East to subtly examine the nation’s social and political apparatuses, as can be seen in Peter Markoe’s *The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania*, or Mustapha’s letters in Washington Irving’s *Salmagundi*. But in most cases, the East would figure emblematically in the American text in the presence of a metaphor, a proverb, a name, or a racial characteristic that signifies the East.

The character and thought of the East became a major subject of perusal for the American public. And the semantic spectrum of the East varied in its depth and meaning, as Malini Johar Schueller explains in her *U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature 1790-1890*. The East was not homogeneously represented, argues Schueller, but was presented in variant meaning, according to its writers’ views on the nation’s politics, domestic and international. In many cases, however, writers in America (and Europe) expressed in their works a genuine interest in identifying with the character of the East. The East, to such writers, was not an expression of their fascination with the exotic other. Their works expressed, instead, their earnest search for their ‘self’ in the Oriental other. In this mood of Orientalism, there existed a room
in the American representation of the East that held and encouraged the Orient to appear with some of its native elements.

In the pages of this study, I focus on the active role that the East played in the construct of the American letters, where the East had left lasting impressions. Thus my selection of the texts is governed by Oriental activism, which each of my selected texts exhibits through its invocation of Oriental thoughts, symbols, historical facts, and imagery. And from the wide scope of geographies and cultures of the East, I choose the Near East to be the subject of this research, pointing to what attracted the American writers to its Islamic and historical aspects.

My theoretical approach to the subject is founded on our contemporary analyses of Orientalism as a discipline. In the last fifty years, or so, two monumental works were produced on this subject: Raymond Schwab’s *La Renaissance orientale* (1950) and Edward W. Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). These two works represent two radically different readings of the role that the East played in the formation of Western thought from the advent of Romanticism to our modern time. While Schwab focuses on instances of assimilation, we see Said preoccupied with dissimilation. And where Schwab is interested in humanist integration, Said is interested in alienation. Their differences arise from their different theoretical approaches. To Schwab, the argument was simply historical and thus required the compilation of inexhaustible facts, texts, and individuals to show that Western identification with the East was a theory that was followed with practice. On the other hand, to Said, the argument was purely ideological. The orient was an “invention” created by the imperial powers, England
and France. They “orientalized” the Orient. The ramifications of this polarity can be seen in the division in the academy between the departments of Near Eastern Studies and German literature on the one hand, and the departments of English on the other. Leftist ideologies have for the last thirty years been compelling scholars in English departments to dig into the implications/complications of the powerful structure of Orientalism, overlooking a very simple fact that discussing Orientalism as a homogenous thought is also an illusory notion. Near Eastern Studies and German literature, on the other hand, base their argument on history.

Although I premise this study on Schwab’s historical research and theory, I find it incumbent upon me and my work to explain my disinterest in Said’s argument. The sheer discursive power that his *Orientalism* has lately accumulated, and the silence that ensued his final judgment in classrooms on what is the East in the Western thought impels me to say why I have decided to dispense with such an intriguing argument. His theory now amounts, especially for any discussion that might touch on the East in English departments, to a formidable theoretical force that pulls arguments, near and far, to it. I think that we should not forget that on one level, Said’s *Orientalism* is his rightly enraged statement of the wrecked identity to which every Palestinian, after half a century, has now come down to. An “I,” helplessly searching for its history. Said knows that there is no history without land, or we should say history loses its substance without land. From this personal fact, Said approaches his subject matter. He writes in his introduction to *Orientalism*, “Much of the personal investment in this study derives from my awareness of being an ‘Oriental’ as a child.
growing up in two British colonies. All of my education, in those colonies (Palestine and Egypt) and in the United States, has been Western, and yet that deep early awareness has persisted” (25). He learned how to adroitly wield the language of his colonizer, mastered Western rhetoric, and figured out the political game of power, language, and representation. To him, Orientalism is borne from discursive practices, ultimately political. And his Orientalism is another discursive practice in which he casts the colonizer’s language in a new discourse that successfully exposes the imperial monopoly of language. And we all know that his political statement was a worldwide success, so successful that everyone who wants to make a statement about the East has to make a statement about his Orientalism, citing it, quoting it, and very often barricading behind it.

To me, Said’s Orientalism raises three concerns, two of which are interrelated and were predicted by the author himself: German Orientalism, and Romanticism. Said recognizes the significance of what German Orientalists did in the first half of the nineteenth century, but he still apologetically dismisses them. “Any work that seeks to provide an understanding of academic Orientalism,” he writes, “and pays little attention to scholars like Steinthal, Muller, Becker, Godziher, Noldeke –to mention only a handful –needs to be reproached, and I freely reproach myself” (18). His grounds for this dismissal, he later explains, were simply that German scholars did not hold political presence in the Orient, and “the German Orient was almost exclusively scholarly, or at least a classical, Orient” (19). He also dismisses any writing about the history of Romanticism for similar reasons, politics and ideology. He finds “what is
missing in the book [E. S. Shaffer’s “Kubla Khan” and the Fall of Jerusalem³] is some sense of the political as well as the ideological edge given the Oriental material by the French and British writers I am principally concerned with” (18). Thirdly (for this Said does not apologize because it is implied in the structure of his whole argument and consequently forms one of its primary premises), he proposes that there was one homogeneous West, out of which came one homogeneous Orientalism. This uniformity, according to Said, arises from the simple political fact that imperialism has one object, to conquer the East. But this overarching generality undermines one of the basic ideological terms that Said uses in his book, hegemony. Said recognizes hegemony in the cultural traffic between East and West, but he resists recognizing it in the intellectual traffic within the West. Said insists on portraying for us One West, the Imperial West, when in fact the West was many. Romanticism, an undisputable fact in the history of Western thought, is founded on variation. Romanticism is a reformative mode of thought. What the romantic writers proposed was not only heterogeneous or different from the elements that comprise their Western world, but was radical and revolutionary.

Schwab identifies the East as a formative concept at the heart of Romanticism. He opens his argument, in The Oriental Renaissance, indicating an analogy between the Renaissance, when Greek manuscripts were discovered in the 15th century, and the sweeping interest in Oriental texts in late eighteenth century Europe. This analogy was an “article of faith” in the period; but it was not of Schwab’s invention. It was avidly

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³ In this book, Shaffer adopts Schwab’s historical argument, tracing the influences of the Oriental thought, through the German Orientalists, on Coleridge, Browning, and George Eliot.
discussed, written about, and disseminated among writers, societies, clubs, salons, movements, and organizations in the early 19th century. Schwab quotes from the German Orientalist, Eckstein: “Oriental literature will become, for superior minds, what Greek literature was for the scholars of the sixteenth century” (12). He traces the chain reaction among the period’s writers, and so he identifies the influence of Eckstein on Hugo, but then he points out that Eckstein in turn had received his Orientalism from Friedrich Schlegel, who wrote in the *Athenaeum* in 1800, “We must seek the supreme romanticism in the Orient” (13). Almost thirty years later, Louis Dussieux would write, “Oriental erudition is the complement of the Renaissance” (15). Said was not wrong when he described Schwab’s book as “encyclopedic.” The massive quantity of historical facts and quotations with which he floods his research is impressive, even to Said. Notwithstanding the massive historical research that we encounter in the book, Schwab’s argument is still easy to grasp. Its quantitative aspect bears on its final findings: the sources of humanity, before the 18th century, were limited to what existed exclusively within Europe. “The 1771 edition of Zend Avesta,” however, “marks the first approach to an Asian text totally independent of the biblical and classical traditions” (Schwab, 17). With this new approach to the East, “the ancient ‘wonders’ of lotus-eaters and mermen ended: the final ‘fabulous’ discovery would be that of human multiplicity” (Ibid, 17).

Ironically, Said, for a reason very clear (after all, he is now the gate keeper of Orientalism and keeps every statement made about the East in check), was chosen to write a forward for the English translation of Schwab’s *La Renaissance Orientale*. It is
an interesting piece of criticism, simply for the radically opposed views of its author
and the author of the book, which ineluctably and consequently shape their analyses of
Orientalism. While one traces the history of thought in humanity from the myriad facts
that comprise the human experience, the other finds in ideology the only factor that
shapes our history. But still, this forward is significant because it is the only place
where Said acknowledges that Orientalism was not one, but many. The careful reader
can sense the awkward tone through which Said delivers the introductory statement of
the book. We find him repeatedly oscillating between the obligation towards the
forceful historical argument that Schwab made and his obligation towards a
diametrically opposite one he made in *Orientalism*. But Said cannot suffer having his
forward undermine the grounds of his academic reputation, so we find him on several
occasions falling into misrepresentation or cliché criticism. And consequently the
forward, as a piece of criticism, fails. Eventually it comes down to nothing but void
rhetoric. This is how we can explain why right after Said describes Schwab’s book as
“a sort of library of humanity slowly being discovered, walked into and described” he
adds that the French author’s massive knowledge was “valued less for its ponderous
classics than its surprising eccentrics” (viii). When he comes to describing the main
argument of the book, Said writes, “The underlying theme of this book is the
European experience of the Orient, which is in turn based on the human need for
absorbing the ‘foreign’ and ‘different’” (viii). Faithful to his ideology, Said avoids
using ‘identifying’ but uses “absorbing” to describe Schwab’s analysis of the
interaction between West and East. If we go back to Schwab’s own words, we will
definitely see the same encounter described in a completely different tone. Quoting from Brunetiere, Schwab writes “The contact with oriental matters profoundly modified the French mind” (15). Then he adds, “The nineteenth century, and even the eighteenth, would not have been all they were ‘if the things of the East and the Far East –from India and China specifically – had not formed part of the composition of their spirit’” [again quoting Brunetiere] (15). Soon afterwards, Schwab reminds us of his theme that the Orient “not only enriched the index of knowledge, it determined lines of thought.”

“Endless detail,” Said writes, “is the mark of Schwab’s major scholarly work,” but to him it lacks “a theoretical explanation for what he does” (viii). But then on the next page, he undoes his critical observation when he comments that “Schwab takes the position that Romanticism welcomed the Orient as an influence benefiting poetry, prose, science, and philosophy. So here already is one major theoretical and scholarly contribution of Schwab’s work: influence in Romantic literature is seen as enrichment and useful persistence, rather than a diminishment and worrying presence” (ix). Said makes another correct observation of the French scholar’s theoretical position when he writes, “His investigations of discursive formations can show, for example, that the library, the museum, and the laboratory underwent internal modifications of paramount importance. Dotting Schwab’s web are countless dates, names, journals, works, exhibitions, and events (for instance, the Nineveh exposition of 1846 in Paris) that give his narrative its gripping immediacy” (xvii). Schwab’s historical theory revolves around measuring the effects of some ruptures, in the order of things, that can
produce a revolution in our knowledge. He uses this theory to describe the effect of Bernard de Montfoucon’s *Antiquité et représentée en figures* and Winckelmann’s *Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture* on man’s way of acquiring knowledge. He concludes that “knowledge acquired through the reading was suddenly transformed by knowledge acquired through handling of actual objects, objects for which an active search had been made” (18). Anquetil’s lifetime project was initiated by this new mood of learning, and his findings would in turn produce another rupture in Western knowledge. Undoubtedly, partiality towards his theoretical position was what made Said overlook or look disparagingly at Schwab’s work. With this attitude Said repeatedly compromised his work as a critic, and on one or two occasions even plummeted into offensive irony, especially when he describes Schwab’s thematic phrase, that the Orient “multiplied the world,” as “Schwab’s happy phrase” (xvii).

In this study, I build my argument on Schwab’s findings. I use his theory of Oriental influence on Romanticism as a major premise for my work, relying mostly on his inexhaustible historical research. My work revolves around three American writers: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allan Poe. My selection of these writers was influenced by their prominent place in the canon of American literature. My goal in this argument is to reawaken in the academy certain beliefs in the East that the nation held dear in the first half of the 19th century. I find that our efforts to understand, and thus better teach, what American artists wrote in
that period very often entails an explanation of the Oriental element. I hope that my arguments in the following three chapters will fill in the gaps that our discussion of Emerson, Hawthorne, and Poe still have.

My first chapter revolves around Emerson and his fascination with Islamic spirituality. I spin a narrative from his journals and letters tracing the history of his love for the Middle East. In my research I follow the blossoming of the Middle Eastern thought in his mind, showing how his initial interest in the biblical history of the Levant would later on grow into a love for the history of thought in Middle East. The first history book that attracted him was Edward Gibbon’s *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which he read between 1819-1824. From this book, Emerson established his budding theory of comparative literature and religion. Next, in 1830, Emerson would read Joseph Marie Degerando’s *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie*. From volume IV, he extensively learned about Islamic philosophers, spirituality, and Sufism. From Degerando’s book, he started to appreciate the intellect of the Islamic East. In 1837, he read Abu-al Fida’s history. His first documented reading of Persian Sufi poets was in 1840. Emerson did not know Persian; therefore, he relied on Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall’s German translations. The first Persian poet that he read was Hafiz. In 1843, he started reading from Saadi. Emerson’s next reading from Sufi literature comes from *Akhlak-i-Jalaly*. This book introduces the “seeker” in the Sufi order to methods of cultivating spirituality in mind and soul. During this period, Emerson’s persistent interest in Islamic culture would show in his work. The first example of influence appears in his lectures at the Masonic Temple in
Boston in 1841. In 1850 he becomes more vocal in his references to the Islamic culture, as we can see in his “Plato,” “Swedenborg; or, the Mystic,” and “Goethe; or, the Writer.” His “Persian Poetry,” which is his most elaborate discussion on the subject, appeared in 1858. From this essay, we learn that he also read Farid al-Din Attar’s *The Conference of Birds*, a cornerstone text in Sufi literature. In 1865, Emerson wrote a preface for Saadi’s *Gulistan*, introducing the book to the American reader. From this considerable exposure to Persian Sufi poets, I argue that Emerson’s theme of annihilation and union with the Spirit comes partly from Sufi literature, whose men of letters had vastly and repeatedly discussed it. His symbolism of wine and intoxication echoes this Oriental source too. I also show how in his rhetoric, Emerson repeatedly surprises us with what reminds us of Sufi rhetoric. His playfulness with language and his interest in inventing new meanings, all find their roots in Sufi poetics.

My second chapter addresses the role of historical Middle East in the fiction of Nathaniel Hawthorne. In this chapter, I build my argument around three main texts, “The Gentle Boy,” *The Blithedale Romance*, and *The Scarlet Letter*. The East figures in Hawthorne’s works as a platform from which the author voices his skepticism of the rising social forces in the nation. In “The Gentle Boy,” the author uses “Ilbrahim,” an Oriental character, to critique fanaticism in Quakerism and Puritanism. The irony intended in this work is of multiple layers. It invokes past and present, religion and politics. On the contemporary level, the text mirrors the public skepticism of political fanaticism. In a nation plagued by extremism, Ilbrahim embodies the nation’s need to
reconcile its conflicting social forces. Ilbrahim, to use Victor Turner’s argument on liminality, figuratively represents the nation’s threshold to a peaceful future. In *The Blithedale Romance*, the authorformulates his skepticism about reformation, including socialism, liberalism, and women’s rights. In this book the heroine is decked with the crown of the Oriental queen, Zenobia, and made a champion for women’s rights in the Republic. Hester Prynne, in *The Scarlet Letter*, does the same thing, but instead of borrowing from the history of the Middle East, she borrows from its Arts. Hester constructs from the Arabesque, with which she decks her ‘A’, an armor that protects her from the scourges of the Puritan law. We learn from the narrative that at the end, the Arabesque triumphs over this law. My analysis of the Arabesque, however, is not limited to its significance as a visual art. I extend its dialogical system to include the author’s narrative style. I argue that the cycle of the Arabesque informs the narrative structure of Hawthorne’s two selected novels, helping him to create a self-reflexive space. Finally, I show that by including an Oriental emblem in each of his works, the author finds a suitable means to reconstruct the American scene. Such inclusion allows the text to become a liminal zone that legitimizes his negotiation of the norms of his culture. Thus, in all of my examples, the otherness of the Middle East disappears by an intentional act of identification, allowing the ‘self’ to see itself in the ‘other’. Even on the author’s personal level, I find that he recognizes in the Middle East an imago of his lifetime career.
With Edgar Allan Poe, The Middle East figures in his works as an aesthetic principle. I argue that the Arabesque represents Poe’s main theory in poetics, on which he built, through his short life, his dreamed of authorial space. I relate Poe’s theory and practice of the Arabesque in fiction writing to Schlegel’s discussion of romantic irony. I then establish dialogism –inclusion of irresolvable conflicting voices– as the main aspect that interested Poe in the Arabesque. In “The Philosophy of Composition,” he writes “Two things are invariably required –first, some amount of complexity, or more properly, adaptation; and, secondly, some amount of suggestiveness –some under current, however indefinite of meaning” (683). The critical significance of the Arabesque in Poe’s works can be easily noticed from the titles of two of his collections: Eleven Tales of the Arabesque, and Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque. From the influence of German romanticism on Poe, I thus conclude that his fiction is fundamentally ironic, and link its ironies to the regional voices of Poe’s socio-political scene. Through his Arabesque, he aspired to transcend the dividing regional line; but if he shows some sympathy towards the south, we should not mistake this for a faith. In his “Four Beasts in One –the Homo-Cameleapard” and “Some Words with a Mummy” he criticizes the hegemony of the North and particularly the administration of President Andrew Jackson. To create his irony in these two tales, Poe selects characters and events from the history of the Middle East to be his medium. In other places, Poe uses the Middle East and the Arabesque to express his skepticism of the national literature penned by Northern writers. Thus, if the writers of New England flaunted their region’s industrial progress,
he mocked them in “The Thousand-And-Second Tale of Scheherazade.” And if the philosophers of the New England, especially the Transcendentalists, employed the Orient as a trope of their philosophical reformation, he mocked their aspiration in “Ligeia.” The continuous failures of his narrator in this tale to fathom the “expression” of the heroine’s Oriental eyes speak of sarcasm of the sages of New England. Poe, nonetheless, acknowledges the autonomy of Oriental Knowledge, but more importantly mocks his narrator’s shortsightedness for not understanding the impossibility to ‘define’ the East by Western traditions. But the “suggestiveness” of the Arabesque in “Ligeia,” I argue, allows also for another reading of the tale. According to this reading, I find the racial opposition between Rowena and Ligeia (its two female characters) to suggest the author’s criticism of the South’s slavery. Ligeia is an enchantress; with her black eyes, she casts spell on the narrator and subtly intervenes in the domestic politics of Rowena’s boudoir. The fearful destruction of this house is inevitable.

From these three examples of American writers, I establish the intimate connection between the Middle East and American letters. The significance of the role that the East played in the emerging American culture cannot be exhausted; there are more texts to be discussed and more authors to be studied. There are Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Washington Irving, who wrote profusively about the East⁴, and Herman Melville whose visit to the Middle East became the subject of his epic poem Clarel, to name only a few. There also is a whole segment of captivity narratives

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⁴ Irving wrote Mahomet, Mahomet and His Successors, The Alhambra, and A Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada,
that was produced during the political crisis between the United States and the Regencies of North Africa between 1790’s and 1810’s. Thus I cannot claim that what I have penned in this work does justice to my subject. But it at least reawakens a specific form of Orientalism, an awareness that writers and readers of the first half of the nineteenth century in America shared about the East. I am interested in underlining their genuine interest in identifying with the art, history, and philosophy of the Middle East. But by the passage of time, this awareness died away, and with it meanings that once were part and parcel of what they wrote.
CHAPTER 2

RALPH WALDO EMERSON AND THE LEGACY OF SUFISM

“We have lifted the veil off from thee, and thy sight today is keen.”

Koran, 50:22.

The verse describes a state of perception, to which, if man elevates himself, the veil standing between him and the reality of reality, as Sufis say, drops. It appears in Al-Ghazzali’s *Alchemy of Happiness*¹, which, as Walter Harding tells us in his *Emerson’s Library*, was among Ralph Waldo Emerson’s books. *Alchemy* was written in the 11th century as an introductory course for those who were interested in Sufism but were not part of the order. Its mystic discourse levitates its reader through spheres of knowledge moving up from the world of the self, to that of god, to reality, and finally to beyond reality. The book was translated by Henry A. Homes and published in 1873 in Albany N.Y., the same edition that was owned by Emerson. Readers who are interested in investigating the sources of the Oriental thought in Emerson’s works

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¹ This book was written in Persian and it is Al-Ghazzali’s abridged edition of his *Ihiya Ulum al din* (revivification of the science of the religion) which was written in Arabic. The author wrote the book at the end of his productive writing career. Al-Ghazzali is also known for *Incoherence of the Philosophers*. In this book, he expresses his Sufi doctrine on knowledge: the seat of knowledge is the heart not the mind.
will find that the book is rife with moments that remind them of Emerson’s spirituality, such as the correspondence between the body and Soul, and man’s inborn divinity, as seen in the following paragraph:

Man has been truly termed a “microcosm,” or little world in himself, and the structure of his body should be studied not only by those who wish to become doctors, but by those who wish to attain a more intimate knowledge of God, just as close study of the niceties and shades of language in a great poem reveals to us more and more of the genius of its author. (13)

Emerson, in “Fate,” uses the same line of argument: he uses the human body as an example to illustrate the works of “fate.” Fate is the materialization, the finite face of the infinitude which we call nature. “Every spirit” he writes, “makes its house; but afterwards the house confines the spirit. The gross lines are legible to the dull; the cabman is phrenologist so fast, he looks in your face to see if his shilling is sure” (Works VI, 9). Then he writes, “Read the description in medical books of the four temperaments and you will think you are reading your own thoughts which you had not yet told” (Ibid). The correspondence between macrocosm and the “microcosm,” according to Emerson, is the door to the “knowledge of God.” The heart of man is “like a mirror” on whose surface he sees the reflection of God’s thoughts. Or as the Ghazzali explains, “he whose inner eye is opened to behold the beauty and perfection of God will despise all outward sights in comparison, however fair they may be” (Alchemy, 80). Furthermore, his description of man’s journey through this world,
which “may be divided into four stages –the sensuous, the experimental, the
instinctive, and the rational” reminds us of Emerson’s thoughts on man’s levels of
experiencing life (Ibid, 40). Every intellectual faculty, Emerson believes, corresponds
with one meaning of nature. He explains this system of correspondence in *Nature*,
where he shows that man’s senses perceive the world as a home for his
“commodities,” but his speculative mind “reaches the absolute order of things as they
stand in the mind of god” (18). And when Ghazzali quotes the prophetic tradition,
“God is more tender to His servants than a mother to her suckling-child,” he reminds
us of Emerson’s recurrent trope of the maternal intimacy between man and God
(Alchemy, 16). In *Nature*, he writes, “Nature stretches out her arms to embrace man,
only let his thoughts be of equal greatness” (Works I, 21). And earlier on he declares
that man should not live by conventions because he is suckled by nature, and because
he “Embosomed for a season in nature” (Ibid, 3).

In all these examples of correspondence, we sense the resemblance between
Emerson’s and Al-Gazzali’s spirituality. But we cannot, at this point, argue that this
book was a source that influenced the mystic strain in Emerson’s writings. Its time of
publication indicates that Emerson had acquired the book only a few years before he
died. But at the same time the similarity between the mysticism of Emerson and that
of Al-Ghazzali invites us to investigate the roots of this resemblance. Obviously we
cannot consider that *Alchemy* was Emerson’s introduction to the spirituality of Islam,
or Sufism, because it came so late into his life. Nonetheless, pieces of evidence of his
interest in the spirituality of Islam –its language, symbolism, irony, and arabesque
style; its philosophy, spirit of independence, and psychology—appear as early as the late 30’s and continue to appear throughout his literary journey. My premise in the following discussion is that Sufism did not burst into his consciousness on a day, but it grew like a bud out of his reading about the East when he was a youth; and later, as he continued his reading, it blossomed into a distinct spiritual thought. Its root in his reading springs from his general interest in the Middle East and its culture. The careful reader can see that as Emerson became more articulate about the transcendental philosophy to which his intellectual constitution gravitated, his interests in Islamic spirituality grew too; until his fascination with the mysticism of the Persian poets convinced him to introduce the subject to the nation through Saadi’s *Gulistan*.

The influence of Sufism on Emerson has always been recognized by critics, such as Marwan M Obeidat, Arthur Christy, John D. Yohannan, Frederic Carpenter, Robert M Gay, and Robert D. Richardson Jr., to name a few. Regrettably, however, such influence has never been treated fully. In this chapter I will try to complete the story of Emerson and the spirituality of Islam. I will visit overlooked pages from the author’s journals and letters and point to facts that have never been discussed in this specific area of research. I will highlight the names of some orientalists who played a significant role in introducing Sufism to the West, and point to Emerson’s attraction to their discourse. Based on what I will compile of evidence to prove Emerson’s notice and knowledge of Islamic mysticism, I will then show that in his earliest essays Emerson produced rhetoric that to a certain extent resembled that of the Sufis, an observation that makes us wonder if this vein of spirituality did not run through his
writing form the beginning to end. But to get that point, I will have to start the story with Emerson’s initial interest in Arabia and the Islamic culture; and I choose to make my departure from a point that has become a tradition among the scholars who investigate the genesis of Emerson’s Orientalism.

The story traditionally commences with Emerson’s letter of June 10, 1822. Emerson had just returned to Boston from a two-week walking tour with his brother William. His mind was weighed down with anxious thoughts about the continuity of a barren life that he found himself in after graduating from Harvard. He did not get what he hoped for, “an ushership at the Latin School” or “a teaching job in Providence, R.I.”; instead he found himself almost compelled to accept the offer of working as an assistant at his brother William’s school for young females (Frank, 10). The only outlet left for him to save his mind from the ennui of intellectual stagnation was a stimulating correspondence that he kept with his aunt Mary Moody. After coming back from this trip, Emerson hastens to write her back. That he was intellectually energized can be easily seen.

I am curious to read your Hindu mythologies. One is apt to lament over indolence and ignorance, when we read some of those sanguine students of the Eastern antiquities, who seem to think that all the books of knowledge, and all the wisdom of the Europe twice told, lie hidden in the treasures of the Bramins & the volumes of Zoroaster. (Letters I, 116)
In a footnote comment on these “Hindu mythologies,” the editor of Emerson’s letters, Ralph L. Rusk, explains that earlier that year Mary had sent her nephew two letters about the same subject. In the first, dated May 24, she told him about her fortune of having recently received a friend from India, who “showed her ‘fine representations of the incarnation of Vishnoo,’ which reminded her of Greek fable and doctrine of transmigration” (Ibid). In the second, dated June 26, she included a poem, which seems to have been taken from Sir William Jones’ “A hymn to Narayena” to give Emerson, as Mary Moody phrased it, a “sweet morsel of Hindu poetry” (Ibid). This same poem appears shortly afterward in Emerson’s journal entry of July 6th 1822, but without any reference to its source. Satisfied with what they get from this section of the letter, critics tend to conclude that Emerson was exclusively attracted to Hinduism and Zoroastrianism, and consequently dismiss what he said in the rest of the letter. If we continue reading few paragraphs down, we will read the following:

[I]t is very natural that literature at large, should look for some fanciful stores of mind which surpassed example and possibility. You may remember the supposed number of tales printed in the Arabian age of learning, –I have forgotten, but it was incredible. Nevertheless I have high reverence for what has actually been discovered, and it teaches us the economy of mind which is established by commerce and communication between land & land.  [My emphasis] (Ibid, 117)

I think that there are many points that can be inferred from this section of the letter of as much significance as those which critics produce in their discussion of the earlier
passage. The language of this part is very important because it lets us into Emerson’s amateur knowledge and his genuine sentiment towards the works of the Orientalists. He felt “reverence for what has actually been discovered” and that definitely was not limited solely to Hindu literature because what he said before this compliment indicates that his sentiment was extended to include “the Arabian age of learning.” Emerson has not yet developed the critical sense of a full-fledged orientalist to differentiate between the literature of India and that of the Middle East, as he will show later on in “Persian Poetry.” At this point, however, we can sense his general admiration for the Oriental mind and philosophy. In this passage, we can also see the seed of his future thought on the “economy of mind,” as discussed in his “Plato.” There, Emerson says, “Philosophy is the account which the mind gives to itself of the constitution of the world. Two cardinal facts lie forever at the base; the one, and the two. –1. Unity, or Identity; and, 2. Variety” (Works IV, 47-8). His association of Asia with the speculative mind and Europe with the understanding mind is the fully-grown thought of the ampersand that we see between “land” and “land” at the end of the above quoted passage from Emerson’s letter. Unfortunately his journals and letters at this period do not make any reference to the source of these “discoveries,” which he referred to; but we will not be mistaken if we suggest that his amateur knowledge might have been gleaned from the general circulation of orientalist literature by specialized magazines and periodicals, such as *Asiatick Miscellany* and *Asiatick Researches*, which became fashionable among the literati of the period. References to both of these journals would later appear repeatedly in both his Journals and Letters.
Even this early interest in the “Arabian age of learning” has a precursor in Emerson’s Orientalism. In the following pages I will trace the development of his consciousness of the Middle East and show how by the passage of time it developed from being a geographical site that signifies otherness to being a thought that he identified with. The first Oriental entry in his journals was about the Middle East, and seems to be derived from his reading about its ancient history. On April 4th 1820, while in college, he quotes from an unidentified source, “All tends to the mysterious East,” but we soon learn that he meant the land of the “Phenicians [who] gave the Greeks their Alphabet” (Journals I, 12,13). Four years later, he mentions, in a letter to his brother William, this same historical idea about the origin of the alphabet, but with a minor change. He playfully tells his brother, “The innocent ciphers which the Arab invented were tortured into representations of annual expenditure & made to exhibit a long array of the pros & cons concerning a change” (151). Undoubtedly, Emerson used “Arab” to mean the geography of the Levant. “The roots of Greece and Rome,” Victor Cousin\(^2\) writes in *Introduction to the History of Philosophy*, “are absolutely oriental. Language, writing, the alphabet, processes of industry and agriculture, mechanical arts, primitive forms of government, the primitive processes and characters of art, and the primitive forms of religion, all, all are oriental” (42).

Emerson’s interest in the Middle East at this point in his life was purely historical. He seems to be trying to explain to himself the movement of civilization from East to

\(^2\) Of Victor Cousin’s works, *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie : histoire de la philosophie du XVIIIe siècle* “was the work Emerson read in 1831” (Richardson, 114). My quotation comes from Henning Gotfried Linberg’s translation, which was published in 1832. In *Emerson’s Library*, Walter Harding shows that Emerson owned both the original the translation.
West. If we go back to the 10th of April 1820, we will find him proclaiming his resolutions to read “Greek language & antiquities & history with long and serious attention & study” (Journals I, 14). He regrets that no “rlcks of Egptn ltrtr rmnd” [relics of Egyptian literature remained]” (Ibid).

On January 12 of 1822, he pens his first philosophical thought. He seems to be enthusiastic about such a “commencement” and finds himself “ambitious to say some fine things about Contrast” (Ibid, 59-60). The example that he produced to illustrate his theory about contrast in history comes from the Middle East. It indicates that at this early age the Middle East began to be transformed in Emerson’s mind from mere geography into a thought. The first example that he selects to explain his theory comes from Arabia. He writes “Before the time of Mahomet and the comparative civilization of the deserts the merciless Arab celebrated a feast of peace annually of seven days in which the deadliest enemy & the longest feud were forgotten & reconciled in a religious harmony & joy until the Close of the period” (Ibid, 60). It seems that Emerson admired the Middle Eastern culture for its ability to erase grudges, even if this toleration was for only the feast’s duration. To him, this custom still succeeded in bringing enemies to each other’s embrace. A possible source for this cultural observation would be Edward Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. In the “Appendix” to his *Orient in American Transcendentalism*, Arthur Christy places Gibbon’s book as the first documented history book that introduced Emerson to the East. Emerson’s historical inquiry, in the same journal entry, leads him to wonder about the empires that lived in the ancient world, “Egypt,
Assyria, or Persia” and ponder whether “religion” was the “bond of connection” that runs through history. On the 21st of the same month, he continues his historical monologue about “Contrast,” keeping his eyes all the time on the Middle East as a primary instance to illustrate his historical theory. He writes, “whether the sudden development of the mind in Arabia and the <un>irresistible force with which the religion of Mahomet was carried from the banks of Euphrates to the banks of the Guadalquiver had any other connection with the deep sleep under which Europe was laid than the unknown laws <of Contrast> which take place to keep the level in human affairs, there is no reason to suppose” (Ibid, 68). According to this historical law of contrast, nations succeed each other: “The Turk built his throne there upon the ruins of Rome and the Russian at this day holds suspended over the Ottoman Capitol” (Ibid, 69).

His theme of “Contrast” then develops into a more abstract discussion that engages the difference between the nature of religion in the East and West. Emerson at this point makes a statement that can help us explain his sympathy with the East. He admires “the voluntary offerings of the imagination and the understanding to a sublime but unseen Spirit” of the East, and with skeptical mind he looks at the “implicit submission of duty, of custom, of fear” of the West (Ibid, 75). In these two observations we witness Emerson’s incipient notion of the cultural difference in the character of the East and that of the West. The connotation of “voluntary offerings” is a harmonious continuity between man and divinity, while “duty,” “custom,” and “fear” connote disparity and conflict. Later on, in 1849, when Emerson published
Representative Men, this amateur theory would figure as a fully developed philosophical theme in “Plato.” But as for the 1820’s, Emerson continues to show his interest in the Middle East. On page 109 of his journal of 1822, Emerson includes a brief description of Arabia:

Arabia is the country of the horse –fleeter & gentler there than elsewhere; of the camel –happily named the ship of the desert, who will transport a weight of 1000 lb, & whose flesh is fit for food, his hair for weaving, his dung for fuel, & even an extract of his urine is a valuable salt; of the Bedoween, who from the first year of recorded time up to this moment has preserved his savage Ishmaelitish independence, who is lavishly hospitable, & a ferocious robber, nominally the subject, yet insults the towns & plunders the caravans of the Turk. The Arab neither laughs nor weeps. Mecca & Medina his holy cities are small poor places of populations about 20,000 apiece. But a law of Mahomet ordained that every Mussulman should visit Mecca once in his life. This wise for the fortunate command is the source of which caravans which grow to armies resort & Mecca contains, so long as the fair lasts, a vast population of .

The Geography of Asia is thus generally sketched. (Journals I, 327-328)

Emerson includes in “Catalogue of Books Read: 1819-1824” Gibbon’s fifth volume of The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. The editor, in the footnote of the above
passage, remarks that Emerson borrowed this volume two times, December and “Fall,” and Emerson makes a reference to his reading from Gibbon’s volumes in his entry of May 7 of 1822. Volume V from Gibbon’s history includes 500 pages of the history of Islam, from its beginning to the time of the second crusade. Based on what we see in Emerson’s journals of this period, we can certainly conclude that his short description of Arabia was derived from Gibbon’s volume. And his entry of July 22 seems to be the fruit of his reading of Gibbon. In this entry Emerson theorizes about the decline of “Egypt and Arabia, Greece and Italy” (305). His initial theory of “contrast” has by now evolved into an observation of the general movement of civilization in the history of humanity. I have to note here that Gibbon’s work also includes synopses on the cultural milieu of the rise of the Islamic empire, which can illustrate this forming idea of continuation. For instance, of the fate of the libraries of Constantinople Gibbon tells us that

In the ninth century, we trace the first dawnings of the restoration of science. After the fanaticism of the Arabs had subsided, the caliphs aspired to conquer the arts, rather than the provinces, of the empire [Roman Empire]: their liberal curiosity rekindled the emulation of the Greeks, brushed away the dust from their ancient libraries, and taught them to know and reward the philosophers, whose labours had been hitherto repaid by the pleasure of the study and the pursuit of truth.

(417)
During the Caliph Almaamun’s reign 786-833, the writings of Plato and Aristotle were translated into Arabic, marking the incipient interest in philosophy among the Arab scholars. It is very important to know that Gibbon’s comment on the link between the Muslim scholars and the Byzantine libraries would become a ground for a continuous debate over the origins of Sufism in early 19th century. In *The History of Persia*\(^3\) (1815), John Malcolm says, “The principal Sufiee writers are familiar with the wisdom of Aristotle and Plato: their most celebrated works abound in quotations from the latter. It has often been assumed that the knowledge and philosophy of Greece were borrowed from the east; if so, the debt has been repaid. An account of Pythagoras, if translated into Persian, would be read as that of Sufiee saint” (300).

Emerson’s reading of history continues through the 1820’s, and seems to spark his imagination with some poetic light. His journal entry of December 1828, again, discusses the history of the Saracens, but we can sense in his words now his rising interest in their culture. His admiration for their strong character animates his description. “They too” he writes, “had a <heaven> mythology [,] they had a warlike heaven; a paradise of the strong, a glori(ous)fied gymnasium, fresh air, fine horses, robust health, & good game –filled up to the brim all their conception of wellbeing; blood & thunder in the background of Valhalla” (Journals III, 148). Between their

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\(^3\) In *Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Reading*, Kenneth Walter Cameron shows that Emerson borrowed Malcolm’s *History of Persia* volume one and two between March 26 and April 14 in 1864. But this does not necessarily mean that he did not read it before. Cameron shows that Emerson borrowed Tholuck’s *Blütensammlung aus der morgenlandischen Mystik* in 1869, when we learn from Emerson’s letter of 1856 to Cabot that he was familiar with the book even years before.

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“mythology” and “Valhalla,” Emerson portrays a vigorous life that throbs with thunder, robust people and strong horses. This sentiment will become the theme of his “Heroism.”

In December of 1832, Emerson took his first trip to Europe, an event which would bring him closer to the Middle East, but not close enough. Forty years later, in 1872, after the family house in Concord was destroyed by fire Emerson suffered in body and soul. His friends and family arranged for his journey with his daughter, Ellen, to Europe and Egypt to revive his soul. Although his trip of 1832 did not reach the Oriental land, it was still spirited with the oriental zephyr. His journal entries for this period include several comments on the effect of Arabic language and culture on the Maltese culture. He comes to the conclusion “The Maltese is Arabic with a mixture of Italian” (Journal VI, 118). We learn from his journal that while he was in Malta he was also reading from Goethe’s works, and we wonder if it was the West-East Divan; but he does not specify which of Goethe’s works he was reading. After three months, however, he includes in his short entry of March 29 two lines from Goethe’s West-East Divan. But if we don’t know for sure whether the Oriental Divan of Goethe was Emerson’s companion before bedtime at the Maltese hotel, we know for sure that many nights before he closed his eyes thoughts from the Middle East became alive in his fancy. In the entry of December 9 1834, he writes: “Last night

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4 In this essay, Emerson cites Thomas Carlyle’s lecture, “The Hero as a Prophet. Mahomet: Islam,” which was delivered on May 8 1840; and Simon Ockley’s The history of the Saracens : comprising the lives of Mohammed and his successors, to the death of Abdalmelik, the eleventh caliph, with an account of their most remarkable battles, sieges, revolts, &c. Both sources discuss extensively the heroism of the leaders of Islam. In this essay Emerson also cites Sir William’s translation, The oriental geography of Ebn Haukal, an Arabian traveller of the tenth century for examples of Arabian heroic generosity.
I recollected four names for four lectures; Luther, Michel Angelo, Milton, George Fox; then comes question of Epaminondas esteemed by the ancients greatest of the Greeks; Demosthenes for the sake of his oratory & the related topics, Phocion, More and Socrates, for their three renowned deaths; Hampden for his Saxon soul, Muley Moloch; Reynolds” (Ibid, 356). Emerson included the Moorish prince in his list of historical men for the bravery that he showed in the face of his horrific death.

In his letters as well, Emerson shows that the history and culture of the Middle East were a topic that he liked to share with his correspondents. Prior to 1822, Emerson’s letters do not show much interest in the East save for two occasions: the first appears in a letter sent to his brother Williams in January 1816, which included an anecdote about Aurelien, the conqueror of Palmyra; the second appears in a letter sent to aunt Mary Moody Emerson November 1821, and this also has a reference to the ancient history of the Middle East, but it sheds light on the romantic meaning that the Middle East held in Emerson’s imagination at such an early age. He tells his aunt that at a quiet moment at night, while watching the sky he thought “there was something lofty something sublime in the watchfulness which claimed to itself the shining host in their solemn and silent revolution & something honourable in the solitude which mingled with such pure society. The Assyrian shepherds have inherited a spotless fame who have written their names and fancies in the stars to be read as long as language lasts” (103). On January 4, 1830, he tells his brother that “beginning on the best recommendation” he has just started reading “Degerando Hist. Comparée des
Systemes de Philosophie” (Letters I, 291). At this point Emerson was reading from volume one; but on February 1, he would check out the fourth volume from the Boston Athenaeum. Almost one third of this volume contains a vast discussion of the Muslim philosophers and mystics.

His readings about the culture of the Middle East allowed him sometimes to use humorously some of its symbols in his correspondence. But this Oriental humor, as we see instances of it in his letters, is also indicative of his constant preoccupation with the Oriental thought. In his letter of October 2, 1831, for instance, he use the epithet “Imam” with his brother; and in his of September 10 of 1845, he refers to his aunt Mary’s trip from Malden to New York as “Hegirah,” and in his of July 6, 1841 to Miss A.D. Woodbridge, he asks “Will Miss Woodbridge now allow me to show her a stroke of the petty tyranny of my office as poetic critic or ‘Fadladeen’ to the Dial and to tell her why I did not press my friend Miss Fuller to insert these harmonious lines you have sent me in the Dial for this month” (Letters II, 414). This same appellation, which he gave to himself, appears in an earlier letter that he sent on February 27, 1836 to Amos Bronson Alcott. At the end of the letter he informs Mr. Alcott, “Imagining I saw many verbal inaccuracies I ran over the first hundred pages this morn with a pen in my hand & I enclose you my sheet of spoils.” In a footnote to “spoils,” the editor of the Letters explains that Emerson has written six pages back to Mr. Alcott and has titled them “Fadladeen” (Letters II, 6). When in December 1839, Emerson finished his course of lectures in Boston, his journal of the same year shows that he was not satisfied with his performance. Margaret Fuller had written him several times in
February of 1840, and his responses to them spoke of a melancholic tone. To cheer himself up his letter of February 21 1840, he wrote, “But though the day be Syrian, I will not drivel any more, but subscribe myself your friendship with good intention of writing speedily again” (Letters II, 255). Emerson’s reference to the “Syrian” day was a joke on his “Humble-Bee,” which is a full-of-life- poem that he seems to have composed in 1837. In this poem, the persona says that the “Hot midsummer” day tells him “Of Syrian peace, immortal leisure,/Firmest cheer, and bird-like pleasure” (Works IX, 39). Finally, from his Middle Eastern humor, Emerson on two occasions uses the missing window in Aladdin’s palace\(^5\) as a humorous metaphor for incompletion. One appears in his letter of June 28, 1838 to Margaret Fuller, where he tells her “The omnipresent tragedy of More & Less never moves us to such sadness as in these unperfect favorites, the missing window of Aladdin’s palace. Yet it is impertinent in us to whine or to pity them” (Letters II, 142). And again it appears in his letter of July 21, 1840 to Margaret Fuller, where he shares with her his concerns about an oriental poem that he had already written and was preparing for publication. He writes “The ‘Sphinx’ has fourteen verses & only wants one to complete it, but that is unluckily in the middle & like Aladdin’s window” (Letters II, 317).

\(^5\) It originally comes from “Aladdin; Or, the Wonderful Lamp” in the Arabian Nights. When the Genii built Aladdin a palace, it came short from perfection in one window missing.
Between the late 30’s and early 40’s, Emerson’s readings about the Middle East began to blossom into knowledge. He had already read the *Arabian Nights* and he proved to be familiar with the *Koran* from the time when he was in college, but now he became more focused and attentive in his reading. If the last ten years he had been interested in the history of the Middle East, now he became interested in the Oriental mind and philosophy. In the “Appendix” of his Orient in American Transcendentalism, Arthur Christy states that Emerson started reading Joseph Marie Degerando’s *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie* on January 1, 1830. Then he asserts that “On February 1, of the same year [1830], he drew volume IV” (278). This volume contains six chapters. The third and fourth chapters, which are chapter XXIV and XXV, discuss extensively the history and forms of philosophy in the Islamic world. We can sense the presence of a mystic tone in his writings after a month from borrowing this volume. In what looks like a late March entry of 1830, he writes “The power that we originate outlives us, takes imposing & stable forms & Caesar becomes a dynasty; & Luther & Calvin each a church; & Mahomet re-presents himself in a third of human race” (Journals III, 184). This volume did definitely help in shaping Emerson’s thoughts on the spirituality of Islam. He came back repeatedly to it, as we can see in the journals of 1830 and 1831. Thus, it is very important that I describe its contents briefly, and I hope it will help shed some light on an overlooked

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6 In *The Readings of Emerson*, Kenneth W. Cameron shows that Emerson had reread three volumes from the Arabian Nights, 2, 3, and 4 in the period between August and September of 1822.

7 He repeatedly quoted form George Sale’s translation of the Koran. For instance, in the *College Theme Book*, he quotes in October 1819 the following verse: “In aforetime I created Jan from out of scorching fire.”
area of Emerson’s fascination with the spirituality of Islam on the one hand, and on Degerando’s role in instituting Islamic philosophy and Sufism in Orientalism in the West.

One of the first obstacles that a researcher on Emerson’s knowledge about Islamic spirituality faces is the documentation of his reading on Sufism. But with Degerando’s book, now we can do so. “He [Emerson] rarely used the word Sufi” writes Robert Richardson (423). And I positively add: he never used the word. He used ‘mystics,’ ‘mysticism’ and ‘dervishes’ but never ‘Sufism’; and he even had some reservation about designating it with the first. In his letter of August 7, 1856 to Cabot, he talks about two Sufi writers, Rumi and Attar, and he says, “I knew pretty well the ‘Mystical’ parts, as we rudely call them” (Letters V, 29). He seems to consider calling them such is an act of profanity or blasphemy against their spirituality. I find the absence of the term “Sufism” from Emerson’s vocabulary at a time when every orientalist derived some pleasure by merely using it is itself indicative of his reverence for it. How could he confine it to some ‘ism’ when everything in its history and its system of thought speaks of its antagonism to all form of “isms”? Because of his enormous interest in the Middle East, Emerson could not be unaware of the term. He had definitely at one point come across Sufism, probably years before his reading of Degerando; but this volume will allow us to document Emerson’s first reading about Sufism. Chapter XXV runs 200 pages in a 600-page volume, so we can see that it forms the biggest chapter. In it Degernando presents an extensive discussion of the doctrines of the major Muslim philosophers and mystics of the 10th and 11th centuries.
The chapter starts with an introduction about the arts and morals of the Arabs during the period of their conquests, the 10th and 11th century. At this age of prosperity, the author proposes two sources of influence on Muslim philosophers: Plato and Aristotle. He, therefore, develops a comparative discussion between Arab philosophers and the ancient masters of Greece. He then turns to discuss the general characteristics of Arabic philosophy, and he points out that Muslim philosophers had a preference for Aristotle, and discusses the cause and effect of this preference. Then he discusses the influence of the Neo-Platonists on them. Two kinds of philosophy consequently developed among the Arab philosophers: rational philosophy and mystic philosophy. For the first kind, Degerando discusses the philosophy of Alkendi and Alfarabi in general, referring to “Facultes de l’ame,” “Principes des connaissances,” “Des formes,” and finally “De l’entendement actif.” Then he talks about Avicenna, referring to his logic, his psychology, his theory on the aspects of sensations and the internal sense, his hypothesis on physiology, the operation of understanding, knowledge, and finally his theory on “the cause” and metaphysics. Next, Degerando discusses Al-Ghazzali’s criticism of Aristotelianism and Neo-Platonism, referring to his refutation of the notion of causality, his skepticism, his logic, his metaphysics, his psychology, and his hypothesis on ideas. The last of the philosophers are Avicebron, with a reference to his discussion of the source of life; and Averroes, including his works on Aristotle, his mixing of Aristotelianism with views from Neo-Platonism, his theory on sensations, forms, his hypothesis on material understanding and universal understanding, and his metaphysics. Degerando devotes the rest of the chapter to
discuss mysticism. He talks about its origin among the Muslim scholars, pointing to a possible source in the Sabian theology. From the spiritual philosophers, Degerando includes ibn al-Tophail’s *Philosophus Autodidactus*, pointing to the value of its discussion of intuition and spiritual ecstasy. Then he talks about the Sufis of Persia, the origins of their mysticism, the spirit of their doctrines. For a source, Degerando names Silvestre de Sacy’s *Livre des Conseils*, a translation of Attar’s *Pandnamah*, and quotes from and comments on this book. Degerando ends his discussion with a word on the moral philosophy of Arabs and a reference to the “sect of talkers” who were a group of skeptic rhetoricians.

From this quick look at the topics that Muslim philosophers discussed, we can understand Emerson’s fascination with Degerando’s work. In addition to its vast discussion of the philosophy and mysticism of the Muslim world, the volume holds another significant value. It also helps us document Emerson’s introduction to the three main Orientalists who wrote on the spirituality of Islam: August Tholuck from Germany, John Malcom from England, and Silvestre de Sacy from France. Emerson’s works, journals and letters make references to these Orientalists, but no scholar has yet studied their influence on Emerson’s thought. Degerando writes:

Quelques-uns not pense que l’Inde pourrait avoir été le berceau de l’idéalisme mystique qui se répandit plus tard chez les Perses, soit qu’il eut passe directement chez eux, soit qu’il eut déjà pénétre antérieurement aux conquêtes des Arabes ; d’autres supposent qu’il a

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8 Emerson proves his familiarity with another of Attar’s works, *The Council of Birds*, from which he quotes for his discussion in “Persian Poetry.”
pu avoir sa racine dans la théologie même des Musulmans ; suivant d’autres, son origine dérive du Platonisme emprunté aux Grecs. M. Malcolm adopte cette dernière hypothèse, et remarque que les livres des sofis sont remplis de citations de Platon. M. Tholuck croit, au contraire, que les Arabes n’ont connu, en fait de philosophie grecque, que celle d’Aristote et de ses commentateurs. M. Sylvestre de Sacy estime que les doctrines mystiques étaient déjà naturalisées en Perse avant la conquête des Arabes. (278-9)

After this short description of the three main theories about the origin of mysticism in Persia, Degerando presents his own view:

L’exposition sommaire que nous venons d’offrir de la philosophie des Arabes réfute suffisamment l’opinion de M. Tholuck. Nous n’hésitons point à penser que les Perses eurent connaissance du nouveau Platonisme dès le temps de Chosroes, par les philosophes fugitifs de l’école d’Athènes ; mais nous remarquons que les nouveaux Platoniciens eux-mêmes, que le Gnostiques avant eux, avaient puise dans les doctrines orientales le germe des doctrines mystiques, et que les traditions de Zoroastre en particulier furent l’un des élémens [sic] dont se composa le syncrétisme qui dona naissance aux systèmes do ?

Alexandrie fut le berceau. Thophail, dans son Philosophus autodidactus, a lui-même donne le nom de philosophie orientale à la doctrine de l’union intime de l’âme avec Dieu.
Degerando reconciles the conflicting views of the Orientalists by arguing that Islamic mysticism is a composite of Greek elements and Persian native elements. He does so by arguing that Persia learned about neo-Platonism from the fugitive philosophers who fled the school of Athens, and the Gnostics before them.

In 1837, Emerson read one of Abu-al-Fida’s historical works. About this book, he writes “A great law ‘what we have within, that only can we see without.’ Only so much of Arabian history can I read, as I am Arabian within, though I should parse & spell Ockley⁹ & Abulfeda¹⁰” (Journals V, 286). On September 1 of 1838, he tells his aunt that he is enjoying the reading of Arnold H.L. Heeren’s Historical Researches, “who with great learning gathers up all the facts of oldest India, Egypt, Persia, Phoenicia” (Letters II, 154). Two years afterwards, we come on the first recorded reference that Emerson made about the Persian poets, but meanwhile his journals and letters continue to show his fascination with history and philosophy of the Middle East.

Emerson was first introduced to the Persian poets through the translation of Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall in 1840. In his Notebook, which covers two periods, 1838-1844 and 1847-1851, Emerson dates page 84 October 1839. On the next page of this journal, which is not dated but cannot be later than 1840, he makes his first reference to Hafiz. On page 93 of the same notebook, he mentions Hafiz along with “Ariosto & Scott.” Saadi appears too in 1842 but under “Miscellanies.” His entry of

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⁹ Simon Ockley is an English orientalist who wrote *The History of the Saracens* in three volumes. Cameron indicates that Emerson borrowed volume one and two from Boston Athenaeum in 1840, and then in 1842 he borrowed just the second volume.

¹⁰ In his journal, Emerson does not specify which book by Abul-Fida he read. But judging from the quotation and the comment that he made, it is probably *Annales Moslemici*. 
April 6 of 1842 includes some thoughts on Swedenborg and four poems, the last of which mentions “Schiraz,” the birthplace of Saadi and burial place of Hafiz. From the time when Emerson started learning about Hafiz, he seems to have recognized in the Persian poet a unique creative mind. In his writings, his first reference to Hafiz appears in “History,” in Emerson’s *First Series*, which was published on March 20, 1841. Emerson argues that man’s instinctive thoughts are translated into myriad historical facts, and literature is nothing but diverse expressions of these same thoughts. Based on this principle, Emerson proposes that all historical events are the same, all writers are the same. “One after another” man “comes up in his private adventures with every fable of Aesop, of Homer, of Hafiz, of Ariosto, of Chaucer, of Scott, and verifies them with his own head and hands” (Works II, 30). His fascination with Hafiz seems to surpass his admiration for the other Oriental minds. In his entry of June 7, 1841 in *Journal E*, he includes many quotations from Zoroaster. This is followed by a paragraph that reflects Emerson’s frustration with books, including those from the Orient. He writes, “‘Come,’ say they [books], ‘we will give you the key to the world’ –Each poet each philosopher says this, & we expect to go like thunderbolt to the center, but the thunder is superficial phenomenon [,] makes a skin-deep cut, and so does the Sage –whether Confucius, Menu, Zoroaster, Socrates; striking at right angles to the globe his force is instantly diffused laterally & enters not” (*Journals VII*, 457). But on the next page, Emerson allows for an exception in Hafiz. His statement reveals the extent of his admiration of Hafiz. He distinguishes
him from among the Oriental geniuses, with his ability to inspire the commonest site of life with the Spirit. He writes:

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

This sentiment continues to appear every now and then in Emerson’s journals. He writes in *Journal GH*, which covers the years 1847-8, the following lines, which he will later use in “Persian Poets”: “Hafiz is characterised by a perfect intellectual emancipation which also he provokes in the reader. Nothing stops him. He is not scared by a name, or a religion. He fears nothing. He sees too far; he sees <ever> throughout; such is the only man I wish to see and to be” [my italics] (Journals X, 165). This is the highest compliment that Emerson made to any historical figure that he wrote about. It tells us how far his Orientalism has grown since he wrote his aunt that famous letter, in which he included his little observation on “the economy of mind which is established by commerce and communication between land & land.” But most importantly, Emerson’s journal statement, especially its ending, unveils to us the nature of his relationship with the East. It is founded on recognition and identification.
He undoubtedly recognizes in the East a repertoire of rich history and culture. We don’t see in Emerson’s statement Said’s diminutive argument of Orientalism. Emerson does not look at the East as a barren land; on the contrary, to him it teems with founts. He understands his dry constitution and that is why he walks to the East: to quench his thirst with a draught from its spirituality. He recognizes in Hafiz the genius that he aspires to; he is his ideal poet. On this idealistic platform, where, as Emerson would say, time and place mean naught, identification with the East is another expression of rising to higher latitude.

In *Journal U*, which covers years 1843-4, Emerson again shows his total absorption with the Persian poets, but this time the cynosure of his attention is Saadi11. He quotes him extensively, filling five pages of this journal, from page 58 to page 63. Emerson, as the footnotes in volume IX of *The Journals* show, would later on use these quotations in several of his articles and lectures. In this lengthy entry, we find Emerson likening Saadi to Montaigne, to Gibbon, to Homer, to Dante, and To Chaucer. In praising him he says, “Saadi, possessed a great advantage over poets of cultivated times in being the representative of learning & thought to his countrymen” (*Journals IX*, 38). In Emerson’s eye, Saadi soars with his oriental genius high above “poets of cultivated times.” What interests us in this observation is not altitude, but the economy on which this observation was made. Emerson does not hesitate to acknowledge, as he does in “Plato,” the triumph of “the unity of Asia” over “the detail of Europe.”

11 At this point, there is no document that can help us name the source from which Emerson read Saadi; but after two years, in 1846, as Cameron shows from the records of Harvard College Library, Emerson borrows Saadi’s *Gulistan*.
From the Sufi legends that were told about Saadi, Emerson quotes “Saadi was long a Sacayi or Water-drawer in the Holy Land, ‘till found worthy of an introduction to the prophet khizr\textsuperscript{12}, Elias or the Syrian & Greek Hermes, who moistened his mouth with the water of immortality.’ Somebody doubted this, & saw in a dream a host of angels descending with salvers of glory in their hands. On asking one of them for whom those were intended, he answered, ‘for Shaikh Saadi of Shiraz, who has written a stanza of poetry that has met the approbation of God Almighty’” (39). Apart from the legendary aspect of this little tale, Emerson was more interested in the fellowship or harmony between Saadi and God as it is reflected in the ending. He is quick to notice this Sufi doctrine of privacy, secrecy and intimacy between man and his maker. Emerson was also impressed with Saadi’s wisdom. After a few pages in the same journal, Emerson includes the following example from Saadi’s aphorisms: “Nothing is so good for an ignorant man as silence and if he knew this, he would no longer be ignorant” (Ibid, 40). After twenty pages in his journal (Journal U), Emerson continues to show his interest in Saadi. On page 83, he quotes more from Saadi’s witticisms: “That is musk, which discloses itself by its smell, & not what the perfumers impose upon us,” (Ibid, 51). A couple of lines afterwards, the journal through what looks like

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{12} Sufi masters interpret the character of the man who appears in the story of Moses in chapter 18 in the Koran as ‘Khizir’ or Al-khader. Moses vows not to stop roving the land until he finds someone to teach him wisdom. And he meets a man on whom God has bestowed mercy and knowledge. Moses asks the man to teach, but the man warns Moses that “surely you cannot have patience with me.” But Moses insists and the man yields to him, on one condition that Moses promises not ask about any thing until the man speaks about it. In their walks the man damages a ship, kills a child, and builds a wall. In each of these events, Moses breaks his promise. At the end, the man dismisses Moses after he explains to him his reasons for these three horrific acts. The Sufis take this man to be Al-khader, and conclude that his gnosis lets him see into the reality of the things and transform him into an extension of the will of God.
\end{footnote}
a monologue shows Emerson’s constant preoccupation with the Persian poet. He writes:

I began to write Saadi’s sentence above as a text to some homily of my own which muttered aloud as I walked this morning, to the effect, that the force of character is quite too faint & insignificant. The good are the poor, but if the poor were but once rich, how many fine scruples would melt away; how many blossoming reforms would be nipped in the bud. I ought to see that you must do that you say, as tomato vines bear tomatoes & meadows yield grass. But I find the seed comes in the manure, and it is your condition [,] not your genius [,] which yields all this democratical and tenderhearted harvest. (Ibid, 52)

Emerson is very comfortable to announce, at least to himself, that the seat of his serious thoughts is Saadi’s wisdom. There is no harm in doing so since the Persian poet had already won the “approbation of God Almighty.” The passage apparently captures a leisurely experienced moment of meditation. He seems to be in perfect unison with Saadi’s mind. In this sweet moment of rumination, Emerson feels that “the force of character is quite too faint & insignificant” because it is a moment of identification with, of becoming one with Saadi’s mind. From this height he can now look down at the American scene and question its “democratical and tenderhearted harvest” because they are the outcome of “condition,” and he desires to see them effusing, like the “musk” of Saadi, out of the American heart.
The next documented source that Emerson read on the spirituality of Islam is *Practical Philosophy; Or, The Muhammadan People, Exhibited in its Professed Connexion with the European, so as to Render Either an Introduction to the Other, being a translation of the Akhlāk-i-Jalāly, the most esteemed ethical work of Middle Asia, from the Persian, with references and notes*. The book was translated from Persian into English by William Francis Thompson, and was published by *Oriental Translation Fund* of London in 1839. Its main subject is man, whose states and conditions are described in three different spheres, each of which figures as a section in the book. I- **The individual state**: in this part of the book the discussion revolves around virtue, the doctrine of unity, vices, art, and mental diseases. II- **The Domestic State**: in this part the book discusses: food, wife, children, servants, money, choosing a wife, raising children, and the rights of parents. III- **The Political State**: in this part the book discusses the means for progressive perfection, man’s mastery in nature, men to each other; affection improves civilization, between the young, parties, king and subject, high and low; good and bad civilization; good and bad government; rules of behavior to those in authority; friendship; and finally moderation, intercourse with enemies, and conciliation. Emerson includes a quotation from this book in “Swedeborg; or, the Mystic.” But while *Representative Men* was published in 1849, Emerson’s journals tell us that his interest in the book goes back to 1845. Pages 80 to 86 in Emerson’s *Journal Y* of 1845 are devoted to this book. He titled page 80 “Akhlak-I-Jalaly,” and filled the following pages with quotation form this book. “The book was Emerson’s introduction to Sufism, the mystical wisdom of Islam,” Robert
D. Richardson Jr. rightly comments on it (406). The Koranic verse\textsuperscript{13}, the poetry lines and the anecdote that appear in “Swedenborg” are all entered in these pages. Even earlier than that, another quotation from the book appears at the bottom of page 43 of *Journal W* in 1845. On page 56 of *Journal Y* of 1845, Emerson includes the following quotation from *Akhlak*, which pertains to the meaning of the Koranic verse\textsuperscript{14} that he used in the “Swedenborg.” He writes:

> The heavenly bodies are also animals, “but they enjoy not that fluctuating movement –through various steps & in divergent directions, that circum-lation through all the limits of imperfection, that shifting with the revolution of all things, so as to master the whole mass of reality in all its ramifications, –which forms the essential peculiarity of human nature” Akhlak-I-Jalaly [1839, p. 16] \textit{(Journals IX, 276)}

In making this selection, Emerson demonstrates his finesse in reading *Akhlak*. The passage pertains to a very fine Sufi concept that explains the immediacy between the will of god and nature. There is a common misconception about *Alkhak*. The book, like Saadi’s *Gulistan*, is a manual on Islamic ethics. It nonetheless breathes Sufism because its author was a Sufi and intended to discuss ethics from this ideal perspective. This kind of books was a major genre in Sufi prose writing\textsuperscript{15}.

\textsuperscript{13} Emerson writes in “Swedenborg,” “In the language of the Koran, ‘God said, The Heaven and earth and all that in between them, think ye that we created them in jest, and that ye shall not return to us?’ It is the kingdom of the will, and by inspiring the will, which is the seat of personality, seems to convert the universe into a person” (Works IV, 94-5).

\textsuperscript{14} See footnote 13.

\textsuperscript{15} The other genre of prose writing that Sufis adopted was defense treatises, such as Ibn Arabi’s *Meccan Illuminations*, in which the author describes and defends the Sufi doctrines.
Akhlak is also valuable for the introduction that Thompson wrote. In my review of what he wrote, I will focus on the thoughts that remind us of Emerson. The introduction speaks of a new area of cross-culture understanding, and attacks the “blind unreasoning animosity” that some readers might hold against Islamic books. To such readers, the author does not hesitate to remind them that between the 8th and 16th century

The Turkish and Egyptian dynasties –mere outposts of the great body of Islam –were able at different periods to encounter and baffle the united forces of Christendom; and while Europeans consoled themselves with imputing to their adversaries a social barbarism and vitiation inconsistent with their political power, they tacitly belied that flattering apology by borrowing that scholastic literature, which, however worthless as an end, was valuable enough as a means, to raise the borrowers to their present state of mental and physical superiority.

(XVI- XVII)

The author acknowledges the role of Muslim scholars in fostering the knowledge that fell into their hands in the 9th century, and from whom the West now received it back enriched with their commentaries. When Emerson introduced the Gulistan to the American reader, he selected Ross’s essay, “Of Sheik Saadi” because it spoke the same rhetoric. Ross writes:

Versed as many Oriental scholars among ourselves now are in the literature and poetry of Persia, and some of them inclined like myself to
communicate their knowledge, we cannot but lament that obstinacy in our English critics of peremptorily degrading its language, as that only of conceit and false thoughts, and of rating us as admirers of tinsel instead of gold (86).

We learn from these introductions that the Orientalists of the period did not share the same notion about the East: some of them—and this is perhaps because of their closeness, whether sympathetic or material, to the imperial centers, Britain and France—saw in the East nothing but savagery and void. If such Orientalists wanted to talk about the Oriental culture, they tended to describe it as disgracefully inferior to the technologically advanced West. Others, on the other hand, recognized in the East a history and a culture, different but as rich as those of the West.

In enumerating the gems that a reader can glean from the *Akhlak*, the author of the introduction points out that “fanatic and intolerant as the Muslims are in maintaining the claims of their ritual and so-called revelation at the utmost height, they should yet go farther than any other people in arguing this great question [of the general will] on its abstract ground, and thus in a manner acknowledge philosophic religion, as the basis of their morality, to possess a force and validity concurrent with revealed” (Ibid, xlii-xliii). Thus, Thompson shows us that *Akhlak*’s ethical argument is founded on man’s intuition, and ‘virtue’ “is only a higher species of instinct; -the proper guide to virtue, not advantage, but nature itself” (Ibid, xliii). And in pointing to the spirituality of Islamic philosophy, of which the book is a sample, the author writes, “if ever there was a system which contained undeniable elements of the purest
idealism, it was this of the Muhammedan Sufies” (Ibid, lii-liii). They hold every visible or conceivable object to be part and parcel of the divine nature (Ibid).

I want now to present from the book a few statements that express Thompson’s views. The author of the book writes, “since it is the object of this work to ascertain that principles of active wisdom, (which implies a knowledge of the nature of the human mind); because it is from this, through the medium of the will, that actions, whether praiseworthy or culpable, proceed, in order that by means of such knowledge it may be cleared of vice and graced with virtue, and so arrive at the due perfection of which it is in search” (Ibid, 10). This passage shows that the approach that the author intends to take in his work is philosophical; it springs from the knowledge of “the human mind.” The goal is to describe the virtues that will help man reach his “due perfection.” Therefore, he recognizes that perfection is man’s right. My next selection comes right after Emerson’s aforementioned quotation from the book. The passage describes the state of harmony that man can achieve when he hits a perfect balance between body and soul.

Here, when graced with equability of temperament and the due adjustment of bodily and spiritual powers, he becomes like the celestial orbs as touching both spirit and body; for to be intermediate between opposites is to be void of them. In the course of such his purification, his mind becomes figured with the pictures of past and coming events in their fragmentary aspects, even as are the spirits of the orbs: and this either from insight exercised into the world of patterns (for this world,
in the opinion of the chief philosophers, may be perceived as well as conceived, or else from a retroversion of these pure pictures or ideas continually thrown off by the reasonable soul to illuminate the conception; after the fashion (as many philosophers think) of man’s bodily make, which rests on a principle of detrusion and propensity to revert. (Ibid, 16-17)

The passage reminds us of Emerson’s discussion of ‘equilibrium’ in “Plato.” In this essay, Emerson writes, “The balanced soul came. If he [Plato] loved abstract truth, he saved himself by propounding the most popular of all principles, and absolute good, which rules rulers, and judges the judges. If he made transcendental distinctions, he fortified himself by drawing all his illustrations from sources disdained by orators and polite conversers” (Works IV, 55). Plato embodied the “balanced soul” because his mind combined the Oriental and Occidental, an interest in the general as well as the particular. It is noteworthy that the author of Akhlak recognizes the authority of Plato as an idealist. He quotes from a dialogue in Tulwihat by Shafab odin Maktul. In this dialogue, Maktul does not respond to his inquirer’s question about Aristotle’s place in the history of philosophy, but when Plato is mentioned to him he can’t help “extolling his master Plato,” and then he goes to “great lengths in his praise” that his inquirer asks “whether any of us moderns had reached as high a rank. He answered, no, nor to a seventy thousandth part of his excellence. Thereupon I cited sundry philosophers of Islam, to none of whom he paid any attention, till I came to notice some of the school who look beneath the veil, such as Janid of Baghrad, Abu Jazid Bistami, and Sahal bin
Abdalla Tustery” (Ibid, 26-7). Furthermore, the above quoted passage reminds us of Emerson’s idealistic analysis of the history humanity. Emerson writes in “History”: “the thought is always prior to the fact; all the facts of history preexist in the mind as laws” (Works II, 3). In this statement, Emerson reduces history to ideals and names the mind as their seat. Similarly, the author of Akhlak explains that “from the insight exercised into the world of patterns,” history or “past and coming events” are reduced to “aspects.”

Even before his publication of the Essays, First Series, Emerson’s writings show instances of resemblance between his system of thought and that of the author of Akhlak. In the above quoted passage, the author of Akhlak acknowledges the affinity between man and nature. When his soul soars, his thoughts “are the spirits of the orbs.” Man becomes brothers with the stars. Emerson too, throughout his writings, extensively discusses this affinity between man and nature. Even in his first published essay, Nature, which came out four years before his documented introduction to Sufi literature, Emerson discusses this same doctrine. “The greatest delight” Emerson writes, “which the fields and woods minister is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable” (Works I, 10-11). The effect of this harmony between nature and mind on Emerson “is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right” (Ibid). We are alien in our ‘home’ unless we live this balance. According to Akhlak, when man rises to such height, he becomes more divine than the angels. Man’s perfection is more revered than the angels’ eminence. The author argues:
Eminence differs from perfection; being determined [like angels] by proximity on the chain of being to the common source [god] –by the prevalence of spirituality and the purity attending it; whereas perfection depends on mastery [discipline]. Although, therefore, being less subject to interpositions and more governed by severality, the angel may be the more eminent being, man, by reason of his mastery, and comprehensiveness, is the more excellent and perfect one. (Ibid, 21)

The author explains that this perfection is achievable by mirroring god. Such state a man cannot rise up to unless he translates his intuitive knowledge of the divine into work of perfection. “[A] complete imitation” the author writes, “can only be effected by adopting all the properties of the divine nature” (Ibid, 23). The ultimate goal is to achieve through this mirroring a union with the divine spirit. Emerson, again, in his early writing demonstrated his fascination in describing this sublime moment of oneness. “As a plant upon the earth” Emerson makes his analogy, “so a man rests upon the bosom of God; he is nourished by the unfailing fountains, and draws at his need inexhaustible power” (Works I, 64).

After Akhlak, Emerson read Firdausi’s Shah Namah in 1847\textsuperscript{16}. The title of the book means The Epistle of the King. It is an epic poem that merges history with mythology. It tells the story of Persian civilization from the time before creation to that of the conquest of the Muslims. The book was composed in the 11\textsuperscript{th} century; thus it mixes Islam with native elements from Persia. Following the Islamic tradition of

\textsuperscript{16} Cameron indicates that Emerson borrowed Shah Nameh from Harvard College library on July 26 of 1847.
introducing a book, Firdausi opens his book with praise to god the creator; next he praises wisdom. He writes:

Wisdom is better than aught else which God has granted to you.
Wisdom is the guide and is the heart’s enlivener; wisdom is your helper in both worlds. From it comes happiness and all human welfare; from it you gain increase and without it you experience loss. Thou, Wisdom, art the creation of the Creator of the world and knowest all things patent and hidden. Do thou, O man, ever keep wisdom as your counselor. When you have acquired an insight into any branch of matter, you will understand that science does not reach down to the root. (1)

Bruce Lawrence, in *Classical Persian Sufism*, does not name Ferdausi as a Sufi writer, as he did Hafiz, Saadi and Rumi; but he notes that Ferdausi wrote under the influence of Sufism. This observation can explain the tinge of Sufism that colors Ferdausi’s introduction of his historical work.

So far I have focused on Emerson in isolation from the contemporary general interest in the Middle East; thus it is worth referring to a few examples of what was circulated for the public about the Orient. The Library of Harvard, which was Mecca for every man of letters in New England, did frequently popularize the subject. For instance, in the “Bibliographical Notices of Harvard College Library,” which appeared in 1808 in *The Monthly Anthology, and Boston Review*, the author ends his article with this recommendation: “We close this essay, with recommending to the youth, who are
fond of oriental literature, the Asiatick Miscellany” (87). This statement shows first that Orientalism was a popular subject of interest that attracted young scholars; second, that one of the main sources available for readers interested in learning something about Orient and its cultures was magazines specializing in discussing oriental literature. Among these there was the _Asiatick Researches_ which was published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta between 1788 and 1839. I refer to this journal for two reasons: first, because it was mentioned in Emerson journals\(^\text{17}\); second, because it produced a fair amount of writings on Sufism and the Persian poets. In its third volume, which was published in 1801, the journal includes an article titled “On the Mystical Poetry of the East.” But before I say any word about this article, I want to give a brief description of this journal. A quick glance at this volume will show us that the scope of the Oriental subjects that was discussed in this journal is wide and reflects the diversified Orient that Emerson and his contemporaries used to read about. The subtitle of the journal attests to its vast range of interests: “Inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences, and Literature of Asia”; and the geography that it covers extends from North Africa to China. In this specific volume, the journal includes one article “On Egypt and the Nile from the Sanscrit,” another “On the Musical Modes of the Hindus” and still another “On the Mystical Poetry of the Persians and Hindus.” From the last one, in the introduction we read, “A figurative mode of expressing the fevor of devotion, of the ardent love of created spirits toward their Beneficent Creator, has prevailed from time immemorial in Asia;

\(^{17}\) It appears in Emerson’s pocket notebook, which is now known as the first of Books Small, on page 121. The entries of the notebook cover a period of time extends between 1840 and 1847. The reference to _Asiatick Researches_ was possibly entered at the end of this period (Journals VIII, 478).
particularly among the Persian theists, both ancient Hushangis and modern Sufis” (165). The article premises sameness in the mystical experience among all religions, including Christianity, but pays attention, as the title indicates, to the Persian Sufi poets—out of 18 pages, the author devotes only the last page to say a few things about Hinduism. In his discussion the author reviews several Sufi doctrines, and on one of them he says:

The modern Sufis, who profess a belief in the Koran, suppose with great sublimity both of thought and of diction, an express contract, on the day of eternity with beginning, between the assemblage of created spirits and the supreme soul, from which they were detached, when a celestial voice pronounced these words, addressed to each spirit separately, “Art thou not with thy Lord?” that is, are thou not bound by solemn contract with him? And all the spirits answered with one voice, “Yes;” hence it is, that alist, or art thou not, and beli, or yes, incessantly occur in the mystical verses of the Persians, and the Turkish poets, who imitate them, as the Romans imitated the Greeks. (171)

The doctrine is about the first covenant which god had with humanity before their existence. One of the goals that Sufis set in their spiritual journey is to reminisce

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18 From the Koran, the Sufis use verse 172 from chapter 7 as an evidence for this doctrine. The verse says: “And [remember] when thy Lord brought forth from the backs of the children of Adam their posterities and made them bear witness ‘Am I not thy Lord;’ ‘They said yea we bear witness.’ [remember]Lest you should say on the day of judgment ‘of this we were forgetful’” وَإِذَا أَخْذَ رَبُّكُم مِّن بَنِي آدَمُ مَنْ ظَهَرَهُمْ ذَرِّيَّةً وَأَشْهَدُوهُمْ عَلَى أَنْفُسِهِمْ أَنَّ إِلَيْهِ يُرِيدُ كُلُّ نَاسٍ ۖ أَنْ تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كَانَ مِنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ. “
about the dialogue that they had with Him before they were. In “Plato,” Emerson’s
discussion of the nature of knowledge comes close to this doctrine. Emerson writes

His [Plato] definition of ideas, as what is simple, permanent, uniform
and self-existent, forever discriminating them from the notions of the
understanding, marks an era in the world. He was born to behold the
self-evolving power of spirit, endless, generator of new ends; a power
which is the key at once to the centrality and the evanescence of things.
Plato is so centred that he can well spare all his dogmas. Thus the fact
of knowledge and ideas reveals to him the fact of eternity; and the
document of reminiscence he offers as the most probable particular
explication. Call that fanciful, - it matters not: the connection between
our knowledge and the abyss of being is still real, and the explication
must be not less magnificent. (322)

Emerson’s explanation of “the doctrine of reminiscence” comes right after he has
pointed out that all kinds of mysticism spring from one fount. He recognizes at the
heart of the mystic experience, regardless of its forms and rites, man’s intuitive
perception. Emerson considers Plato to be a universal mystic: he is East and West in
one. In the introduction of “Plato,” Emerson makes clear that the Greek philosopher
was indebted to East for his spirituality. He considers Plato’s travel to Egypt as
evidence of his initiation into the Oriental mind. This historical fact, according to
Emerson, explains the similitude between
Plato and the Oriental mystics, and this why at the very beginning of his essay on Plato, he writes, “Mahometanism draws all its philosophy, in its hand-book of morals, the Akhlak-y-Jalaly, from him. Mysticism finds in Plato all its texts” (296).

Emerson was not the first to recognize the universality of the mystic experience or that Plato learned his mysticism from the East. Such assumptions were already widely acknowledged. If we go back to the Asiatick Research article, for instance, we will find that its author points out right from the beginning that “‘Plato traveled into Italy and Egypt,’ says Claude Fleury, ‘to learn the theology of the Pagans at its fountain head’” (165). Then on the similitude of the all forms of mysticism, he says, after quoting two long passages from European writers, “If these two passages were translated into Sanscrit and Persian, I am confident, that the Vedantes and Sufis would consider them an epitome of their common system” (170). The author of the article, as I indicated earlier, pays especial attention to the Sufi poets, among whom he includes Hafiz, Saadi, and Ismat. As a sample of the Sufi poetry that he included, I have selected the following distich: “Call for wine, and scatter flowers around: what more can thou ask from fate? Thus spoke the nightingale this morning; what sayest thou, sweet rose, to his precepts?” (175). Several thoughts that this couplet contains remind us of some of Emerson’s Oriental themes. In these two lines we can identify the seeds of Emerson’s future discussion on fatalism in Islam, as discussed in “Fate”; inebriation by nature, as discussed in “The Poet”; and sensuous imagery, as discussed in “Persian Poetry.”
From this quick review, we can see how Orientalist magazines like the *Asiatick Researches* made knowledge about the spirituality of Islam available to the American interested reader. But even popular magazines and journals of general interests occasionally became platforms for Orientalists. They supplied the public with ‘delicacies’ from Oriental literature. For instance, in 1790, the first volume of the *New York Magazine* included a “Tale of Hafez.” In 1805, *The Literary Magazine, and American Register* published “On Persian Poetry and Hafiz.” In 1808, *The Wonderful Magazine, and Extraordinary Museum: Being a Complete Repository* published “A Wonderful Account of the Sect of Saadi, or Serpent Eaters.” In 1822, *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* published “On Arabian and Persian Literature.” We have to look at Emerson’s famous letter to his aunt as an expression of this general interest in the Orient. Because of this general interest and the paramount place that it assumed among the men of letters, Emerson felt enthusiastic to express his “reverence” for the “discoveries” which the public shared with the pioneers of 18th century Orientalism, such as Sir William Jones, Jean-François Champollion, Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron, and Antoine Galland; and perhaps with emphasis on their works on the literature and philosophy of the Middle East.

Emerson’s knowledge about Islamic culture started showing in his works in the early 40’s. In January of 1841, Emerson read a lecture, “Man the Reformer,” before the Mechanics’ Apprentices Library Association at the Masonic Temple in Boston. It is a call for the American citizen to fortify himself in the face of a corruption from which there could hardly be found a spot in society immune. Emerson’s program
resembles the Sufis’ because it targets the spiritual state of the mind. He says that “the community in which we live will hardly bear to be told that every man should be open to the ecstasy or a divine illumination, and his daily walk elevated by intercourse with the spiritual world” (Works I, 227). One of the ways that Emerson suggests for his audience to experience this “ecstasy” is by labor. Even poets and philosophers, he warns, should adhere to this principle, and if they decide to forsake it, their literature will degenerate. It is like what we read in “the ancient Egyptian mysteries” that “there are two pair of eyes in man, and its requisite that the pair which are beneath should be closed, when the pair that are above them perceive, and that when the pair above closed, those which are beneath should be opened” (Works III, 152). These two pairs of eyes are symbols of the division in man between matter and spirit. But his happiness is with the upper pair. Thus the labor of the soul even with meager means will eventually glow in spiritual success. Emerson’s next example in this lecture comes from Islamic history:

Every great and commanding moment in the annals of the world is the triumph of some enthusiasm. The victories of the Arabs after Mahomet, who, in a few years, from a small and mean beginning, established a larger empire than that of Rome, is an example. They did they knew not what. The naked Derar,19 horsed on an idea, was found an overmatch for a troop of Roman cavalry. The women fought like men, and conquered the Roman men. They were miserably equipped, miserably

19 In the battle of Yarmok, between the Muslims and the Romans, Derar fell in captivity. His sister, Khawla, disguises as a man and joins the army to release him. Gibbon mentions this story in volume V of his The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.
fed. They were Temperance troops. There was neither brandy nor flesh needed to feed them. They conquered Asia, and Africa, and Spain, on barley. The Caliph Omar's walking stick struck more terror into those who saw it, than another man's sword. His diet was barley bread; his sauce was salt; and oftentimes by way of abstinence he ate his bread without salt. His drink was water. His palace was built of mud; and when he left Medina to go to the conquest of Jerusalem, he rode on a red camel, with a wooden platter hanging at his saddle, with a bottle of water and two sacks, one holding barley, and the other dried fruits.

(Works I, 251).

But Emerson does not intend to turn his audience into disembodied spirits. He recognizes the demands of the material world, but hopes for a balance, like the one we saw in Akhlak. “The mediator between the spiritual and the actual world should have a great prospective prudence” (Ibid, 255). To support his point, Emerson quotes from “An Arabian poet”:

"Sunshine was he
In the winter day;
And in the midsummer
Coolness and shade." (Ibid, 255)

In “The Methods of Nature,” 20 which he delivered on August 11, 1841, Emerson again infuses his discourse –although in this instance it is done subtly– with the spirituality of Islam. The subject of the lecture is a critique of the materialism that

20 This lecture was delivered before the society of the Adelphi, in Waterville College, Maine.
industry has brought to man. People “[n]o matter what is their special work or profession, they stand for the spiritual interest of the world, and it is a common calamity if they neglect their post in a country where the material interest is so predominant as it is in America” (Works I, 192). And similar to the burst of spirituality that we saw in the former lecture, here too Emerson flavors his discourse with mysticism. “Not thanks, not prayer” he writes, “seem quite the highest or truest name for our communication with the infinite, –but glad and conspiring reception, –reception that becomes giving in its turn, as the receiver is only the All-Giver in part and in infancy” (Ibid, 194). At this moment of ecstasy, no man can “speak precisely of the things so sublime, but it seems to me [Emerson] that the wit of man, his strength, his grace, his tendency, his art, is the grace of the presence of God. It is beyond explanation. When all is said and done, the rapt saint is found the only logician” (Ibid). Such a man we should distinguish from the philosopher, who thinks that he has the key to nature but he doesn’t. His “new book says, ‘I will give you the key to the nature,’ and we expect to go like a thunderbolt to the centre. But the thunder is a surface phenomenon, makes a skin-deep cut, and so does the sage,” except, as Emerson shows in his Journals, for the saint, such as Hafiz. Once again Emerson anchors his spiritual discourse with a reference to Islamic culture.

21 I have pointed out earlier that in his entry of June 7 of 1841 in Journal E, Emerson includes many quotations from Zoroaster. This is followed with a paragraph that reflects Emerson’s frustration with books, including those from the Orient. He writes, “‘Come,’ say they, ‘we will give you the key to the world’ –East poet each philosopher says this, & we expect to go like thunderbolt to the center, but the thunder is superficial phenomenon [.] makes a skin-deep cut, and so does the Sage –whether Confucius, Menu, Zoroaster, Socrates; striking at right angles to the globe his force is instantly diffused laterally & enters not” (Journals VII, 457). But then Emerson makes an exception for Hafiz: “You defy any body to have things as good as yours. Hafiz defies you to show him or put him in a condition inopportune & ignoble. Take all you will, & leave him but a corner of nature, lane, a den, a cowshed, out of cities, far
In “The Method of Nature” too, Emerson reverts in his discussion to examples from the Islamic culture. In nature, he explains, “All is nascent, infant,” constant new beginnings (Ibid, 202). And nature is one whole. From these two observations, Emerson derives the method of nature in shaping the mind of man: he too should preserve the infancy and wholeness of his soul. “This ecstatical state” Emerson illustrates “seems to direct a regard to the whole and not to the parts; to the cause and not to the ends, to the tendency and not the act” (Ibid, 211). In man, this wholeness mandates that there be continuity between his knowledge and his acts; to further the point Emerson writes, “‘If knowledge,’ said Ali the Caliph, ‘calleth upon practice, well; if not, it goeth away’” (Works I, 222).

Later on in the same year, Emerson delivers another lecture at the Masonic Temple in Boston. His lecture was titled “Lecture II. The Conservative.” He writes “The Egyptian and Chaldeans, whose origin could not be explored, passed among the junior tribes of Greece and Italy for sacred nations” (Works, 189). He avails himself of “the vigor of Clovis the Frank, and Alfred the Saxon, and Alaric the Goth, and Mahomet, Ali, and Omar the Arabians, Saladin the Curd, and Othman the Turk,” whose inovation “sufficed to build what you call society, on the spot and in the instant when the sound mind in a sound body appeared” (Works, 195).


from letters & taste & culture; he promises to win to that scorned spot, the light of moon & stars, the love of men, the smile of beauty, the homage of art. It shall be painted, & carved, & sung & celebrated & visited by pilgrimage in all time to come [.] ( Journals VII, 457-8)
In June 22 of the same year, he writes to Lidian after she left with her friend Elizabeth Hoar on a recreational trip to Staten Island. Among the news that Emerson shares with his wife, he mentions “having finished a long bright poem for the Dial”; but the poem was not published and he now felt sorry that “Saadi must pine in obscurity three months more” (Letters II, 407). We have in this letter a piece of evidence that his poem “Saadi” which was published in the Dial in 1842, was written a year before.

Rarely does Emerson become explicit in his comments about the mysticism of the Islam, but in his letter to Cabot, dated August 7, 1856, he unveils his enthusiasm. The letter, except for the first four lines, is a compliment to the works of two German Orientalists: August Tholuck and Joseph von Hammer. Emerson’s compliment weighs tremendously in this study because of the critical insight that it provides us with for such a rarely discussed subject in Emerson scholarship. Because of its value I feel obliged to reproduce it fully here:

Concord, 7 Aug. 1856

Dear Cabot,

I am afraid you will never lend me any more books, since I keep them so long. The reason is, they are so good, that I cannot bear to give them up; and my eyes, in the last year, are bad servants, and I read little or slowly. The Edda is excellent with its strength & surprises, & tis wonderful that it has been allowed to sleep till within twenty years. The apprehensive, like the creative mood, must have long periods. And I
must think so too in regard to all this Oriental wisdom so newly imported into the West. Dcheladeddin Mewlana & Ferideddin Attar\textsuperscript{22} were deep men who knew as much of the soul & ethics as any Greek or Englishman, and yet our libraries have been stuffed with dull books of third-rate writers. It does not lessen the wonder that Tholuck’s book is dated 1825, & Von Hammer’s 1818. I knew pretty well the “Mystical” parts, as we rudely call them, in Von Hammer and am surprised he left such admirable things for T. to glean. But my special interest & thanks are moved by the traces of your own pencil through Tholuck, & the character of the notes. I admire the hints of this retentive man who only seems to have a right to speak, & wonder when he will break the long silence of these rare studies, Is not the fifth & the ninth year complete? And is it pride, or, is it a grander aim than our poor America allows that keeps him dumb? I believe the best, but meantime, I think you should read occasionally to private classes, as learned professors do, parts and results of your proceeding studies, and I wish heartily to be admitted of the class. R.W Emerson (28-9)

The letter is so rich with what it unveils to us of Emerson’s knowledge about Sufism. We learn from it that he conscientiously watched the American literary scene paying his full attention to the role of the Muslim mystics. He recognizes in Rumi and Attar

\textsuperscript{22} The names, as they appear in Tholuck’s \textit{Blüthensammlung aus der Morgenländischen Mystik : nebst einer Einleitung über Mystik überhaupt und Morgenländische insbesondere}, are Mewlana Dscheladdin and Feridoddin Attar. In arabic literature they are known as Rumi for Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi, and Attar for Faridoddin Attar. Both are 13\textsuperscript{th} century Sufi teachers.
authorities in matters of “the soul & ethics” on par with the ancient Greek and the modern English writers. But the most important point that we glean form this letter is that Emerson’s fascination with the Persian poets is founded on his understanding of their mysticism. “I know pretty well the ‘Mystical’ part” he says. And we get this sense also from the comparison that he makes between Tholuck and Von Hammer. He is surprised to find Von Hammer “left so much admirable thing for T. to glean.” We will not be able to understand Emerson’s reason for this comparison unless we learn something about Tholuck. He is an Orientalist, studied the languages and literature of the East, but more important distinguished himself in a long career of researching Oriental spiritualism. Annemarie Schimmel, in her *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, writes in his recognition: “A German professor of Divinity, F. A. D. Tholuck, produced the first comprehensive book on Sufism in 1821, called *Ssufismus sive theosophia persarum pantheistica*, and four years later an anthology called *Bluthensammlung aus der Morgenlandischen Mystik*” (9). Emerson in the letter was referring to the second book. But in both books, Tholuck discusses the mysticism of the East. It is still more interesting to know that Emerson showed interest in the German Orientalist fifteen years before this letter was written. In his journal entry of December 4 1841, he writes down two notes taken from the *Athenaeum*: one describes the reception of Schelling’s Lectures and the other says that “Prof. Tholuck is appointed Chaplain to the Court” (Journals VIII, 500). This old acquaintance with Tholuck allows us to interpret his question: “Is not the fifth & the ninth year complete?” as to indicate Emerson’s long awaited expectancy for the fruit of this
Orientalist to become known to the world. Emerson admires Tholuck for his ability to
penetrate the Oriental language and delve into its mysticism. He admires “this
retentive man.” Von Hammer worked on many Oriental texts before him, but he did
not have the right “to break the silence of these rare studies.” Emerson ends his
compliment with a proposal to Cabot to read to “private classes” from Tholuck’s
books, and he wishes “heartily to be admitted to the class.” Regrettably, Tholuck’s
name and works are never mentioned in any work on Emerson’s Orientalism. Such
lack of interest in the Orientalists who discussed the spirituality of Islam prevents us
from fully understanding its role in Emerson’s philosophy. Just to give an idea of the
place that Tholuck occupies in Sufi scholarship I refer to Arthur J. Arberry’s An
Introduction to the History of Sufism. Arberry finds Tholuck’s first book to be “of
great antiquarian interest to the historian of Sufi studies” (15). The book has a
tremendous value for its bibliography. From Arabic, Arberry names “two books of the
al-Ghazali,” and he adds

Ibn Khallikan and Al-Qazwini; a history of Cairo by al-Suyuti, a book
of Muslim sects by al-Isfara’ini, and anonymous treatise on Muslim
theology. His Turkish sources consist of translation of ‘Asis Nasafi’s
Al-Maqsad al-aqsa, later to be popularized by E.H. Palmer, and a work
entitled Miftah al-abrar wa-misbah al-anwar which he ascribes to
‘Attar. (16)

But what amazes Arberry most is the number of Tholuck’s sources from Persian
literature. Tholuck includes “the first half of Jala al-Din Rumi’s Mathnawi, the
Gulshan-I raz of Shabistari which E.H. Whindfield mad his special care, Jami’s Suhbat al-abrar, Tuhfat al-ahfrar, and Bahraristan, ‘Attar’s Jauhar al-dhat and Tadhkirat al-auliya, the first volume of Mirkhwand’s Raudat al-safa, and ‘Kitab Hussniye’ by one Asad al-Din” (17). In his letter Emerson mentions Ferideddin, who is Fariduddin ‘Attar, or simply Attar ‘whose Pandnameh was translated in 1819 by Silverstre de Sacy. In “Europe and European Books,” which Emerson published in the Dial in 1843, he mentions Sacy. Alarmed by the temporary domination of European authors in America, he writes:

Hard by, at the Place du Pantheon, Degerando, Royer Collard, and their colleagues were giving courses on Law, on the law of nations, the Pandects and commercial equity. For two magical sous more, we brought the programme of College Royal de France, on which we still read with admiring memory, that every Monday, Silvestre de Sacy lectures on the Persian Language (Works, 476)

Arberry, in his Introduction, names Sacy as one of the key figures who helped in spreading the word of the mysticism of Islam. He writes, “In France the illustrious Silvestre de Sacy included Sufism within the vast range of his interests” (15-16).

Furthermore, in his appendix of the Oriental books that came into Emerson’s hands, Christy mentions The History of Persia by John Malcolm. This same book also appears in Arberry’s Introduction, on which he comments: “This book contains the first long account, albeit a garbled account, of the principal doctrines of the Sufis” (11). I find it fruitful to quote from Malcolm’s book:
I have abstained from any description of the various extraordinary shapes which this mystical faith has taken in India…nor have I ventured to offer any remarks on the similarity between many usages and opinions of the Soofees and those of the Gnostics and other Christian sects, as well as some of the ancient Greek philosophers. The principal Soofee writers are familiar with the wisdom of Aristotle and Plato: their most celebrated works abound in quotations from the latter. It has often been assumed, that the knowledge and philosophy of Greece were borrowed from the east, if so, the debt has been repaid. An account of Pythagoras, if translated into Persian, would be read as that of Soofee saint. His initiation into the mysteries of the Divine nature, his deep contemplation and abstraction, his miracles, his passionate love of music, his mode of teaching his disciples, the persecution he suffered, and the manner, of his death, present us with a close parallel to what is related of many eminent Soofee teachers, and many lead to a supposition that there must be something similar in the state of knowledge and of society, where the same causes produce the same effects. (Malcolm, 300)

Critic usually cite the little Oriental vignette between Emerson and his aunt Mary as evidence of his earlier interests in the East, and emphasize that India and its mystic philosophy held the cynosure of his Oriental studies. In the 1930’s, Frederic Ives Carpenter’s *Emerson and Asia* and Arthur Christy’s *The Orient in American
Transcendentalism set the canon for every study that investigates the Oriental influences on Emerson’s philosophy. In their works, Christy and Carpenter discuss the influence of the Oriental thought and poetics on Emerson focusing their studies on Hinduism and Buddhism almost to the exclusion of the spirituality of the Middle East. And even when Carpenter decides to talk about the Persian poets, he strips them of their Islamic spirituality. Although they both acknowledge the influence of Sufism on Emerson, their discussion of this point does not exceed few short comments, and in Carpenter’s case it is even reduced to a footnote. But they both acknowledge Emerson’s fascination with Persian poetry, proposing a separation between Sufism and the Persian poets whom Emerson read. Robert M. Gay too makes a quick reference to Sufism in his *Emerson: A Study of the Poet as Seer*. He argues that the Plato in Emerson prevented him from surrendering to the mysticism and “nihilism” of the Orient, but “As he grew older, he fell under the spell of Sufism of Saadi and Hafiz, for a time—a softening of the intense and practical mysticism of the Near East, which won him by its airy and poetical pantheism” (77).

Scholars who study Emerson’s interest in the East will soon notice the attention that he paid to Persian poets and poetry. He “translated some 700 lines of Persian verse, excluding prose paraphrases” (Yohannan, 117). He wrote the preface to the Saadi’s Gulistan and “Persian Poetry” for the *Atlantic Monthly*, and a poem titled “Saadi,” in addition to a fair amount of quotations taken from “Firdousi, Enweri, Nisami, Dschelaleddin [Rumi], Saadi, Hafiz, and Dschami” who, Emerson

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23 Jami is a prominent master in the history of Sufism. He wrote several treatise on the subject such as, *Lawa’ih, Nafahāt al-uns min ḥadarāt al-quds, Baharistan, Layli va Majnun, Yūsuf va Zulaykhā,* and
tells us, “have ceased to be empty names; and others, like Ferideddin Attar and Omar Chiam, promise to rise in Western estimation” (*Works VIII*, 237). But regrettably, when these names appear in Emerson scholarship they are traditionally reduced by means of mere generalities to a single type, the Persian poet, as if poetry and geography are the only constituents that we are supposed to find in their works. Significant historical facts are for no reasons whatsoever submerged, blotting out the identity of each one of these Sufi masters. We rarely meet with a critic like Robert D. Richardson Jr., who acknowledges Sufism as the main identity for these Persian poets. “Hafez’s habits of mind,” he explains, “were congenial to Emerson in part because Hafez was a Sufi…it was the Sufism of Hafez to which he responded so deeply and so quickly” (423). We know as did the contemporaries of Emerson, that Sufism was introduced to Europe at the turn of the 19th century through the translations of Persian poets. In recognition of the Sufism of these poets, Schimmel writes, “Most of the information about oriental spirituality, however, was derived from the translations of Persian classical poetry –Sa’di’s Gulistan has been on the favorite books of European intellectuals since Adam Olearius produced its first complete translation into German in 1651” (8). These were recognized in Persia and the Islamic world for their shares in spreading Sufism. And when William Jones, Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron, August Tholuck, Silvestre de Sacy, or Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall decided to

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24 Attar is another Sufi master; of his books we can name: *Asranameh, Ilahi namah, Hilaj namah, Mantiq al-tayer* (*Conference of Birds*) *Ushturnamah, Musibat namah*, and *Tazkirat Awaliyah or Pandnamah*, which was translated by Silvestre de Sacy in 1819. Again Arberry names Attar in his book.
translate any of their works, they did so because of the homage that the people not just in Persia but throughout the Islamic world paid to them. When Bruce Lawrence counted the 7th century masters of the Sufi orders in Persia, he named Farid al-Din ‘Attar, Jalal al-Din Rumi, Muslih al-Din Sa’di among others (Lewisohn, 28). In discussing the influence of Sana’i, a Sufi master, on Attar, J.T.P. Bruijn refers to Musibat-nama, a poetry book by Attar. Bruijn writes, “Elaborating his reference to the literal meaning of his predecessor’s pen name (Sana’i= ‘the man of splendour’) Attar goes on to point to similar celestial associations implied in the names of other Persian poets, such as Azraqi (‘the blue one’), Anvari (‘the most luminous one’) and Firdawsi (‘the paradisical one’)” (Ibid, 376). That they were Sufi before they were poets was not a hidden fact from critics. In his discussion of the influence of Sufism, Christy rightly explains, “The Persian poets whose works were read in Concord were inextricably connected with this system [Sufism] – so much so, in fact, that understanding the one, it is necessary to understand the other” (34). But strangely this statement does not blossom into an argument; instead, he dismisses it stating “the Sufi sect within its fold, Mohammedanism was historically and essentially allied to the dualism of the Hebraic mind… For this reason an attempt to find a philosophical or religious affinity between Transcendentalism and Mohammedanism is useless” (183).

Once Christy strips Persian poetry of its theosophy, he concludes that its value “therefore, is it be found only in the realm of poetry” (Ibid). After this reduction, Christy now can expose its “inconsecutiveness” and attack its sensuous symbolism. In fact, Christy’s discussion of “Persian Poetry” verges on becoming a tirade,
reproaching Emerson for writing it. From Hinduism and Buddhism, he constructs the premise of his argument, debating that “compensation” and “monism” are the only doctrines that shaped Emerson’s philosophy. Since Persian poets are Mohammedan in the first place, they are thus fatalist and dualist, and have to be marginalized. Christy’s strong conviction unfortunately caused him sometimes to compromise the objectivity of his argument. He tended sometimes to quote half statements to further his discussion; for instance in explaining the nature of Hafiz’s imagery, he asks “With such emphasis laid on the images, one wonders why he [Emerson] does not say more about them, especially as they are crucial in the interpretation of Sufi thought” (142). His ready answer comes from Emerson, but as I said, a half statement. He writes, “He candidly confessed the reason: ‘We do not wish to strew sugar on bottled spiders, or try to make mystical divinity out of the Song of Solomon, much less out of the erotic and bacchanalian songs of Hafiz’” (Ibid). Then he paraphrases Emerson’s statement saying “In other words, there was the venom of the scorpion in the subtle eroticism of Persian poetry. To interpret its symbols as a large section of the Christian Church has interpreted the Song of Solomon –in terms of Christ and his Bride –was to gild the bestial” (Ibid). With this Christy ends his discussion of symbolism in Persian poetry, refusing to complete Emerson’s statement: “But the love of the wine of Hafiz is not to be confounded with vulgar debauch. It is the spirit in which the song is written that imports, and not topics. Hafiz praises wine, roses, maidens, boys, birds, mornings, and music, to give vent to his immense hilarity and sympathy with every form of beauty and joy; and lays the emphasis on these to mark his scorn of sanctimony and base
prudence” (Works VIII, 249-50). With the conjunction “but,” Emerson obviously wanted to qualify what came before it. We should read the whole paragraph to mean that Emerson does not want to “sprinkle sugar” because the nature of Hafiz’s imagery is symbolic. Meaning is not intended to be forced on them because it is born out of them.

When Carpenter discusses the influence of Persian poets, especially Hafiz and Saadi, he too divorces them from their religious culture. He paints for us an image of rebellious poets. He argues that their “intellectual liberty” was born “from their reaction against the relentless fatalism of the Mohammedan religion” (164). The corollary of this premise later on becomes a dilemma in Carpenter’s argument. He somehow confesses his inability to explain the conflict between the poetics of the Persian poets and Mohammedanism. He writes

What gave both Hafiz and Saadi the courage to free themselves from Fate, and to express the joy of life; to leave the Koran and to devote themselves to the expression of pure beauty, and yet to save themselves from an absolute hedonism, is something which is hardly very explicit in their poetry, and yet is always there. (173)

Instead of resorting to a proper biographical and historical explanation, Carpenter decides to be creative and writes, “In the Emersonian phrase it is simply the virtue of Self-Reliance” (Ibid). It is seems that the whole of Carpenter’s discussion is built on this assumption: Emerson presented the Persian poets as mirror images of his ‘self.’ In a comment on the Poem “Saadi”, Carpenter says, “If the name, ‘Emerson’ were
substituted for ‘Saadi’, the description would probably be even more accurate and true than as it appears on Emerson’s page; -for Saadi, it must be remembered the ideal which Emerson set up for himself” (193). But Hafiz and Saadi were not of Emerson’s invention, they were the most discussed Persian poets in the American press years before Emerson was born.25 By dumping empty rhetoric on the spiritual fount from which their every utterance was made, we will always come up with incomplete explanation for their real estimation in Emerson’s mind. After all, Emerson distinguished “The Persian and the Arabs, [who], with great leisure and few books, are exquisitely sensible to the effect of poetry” from “the genius of the Hindoos” (Works VIII, 239). What attracted him to Persian poetry was “the insight of a mystic, that sometimes affords a deeper glance at Nature” (Ibid, 244).

The reductive treatment of the Persian poets continues to force its rhetoric on modern critics. In American Literature and Orientalism, Marwan M. Obeidat does not produce any substantial development to what Christy and Carpenter had to say about Emerson and the Islamic culture. He repeatedly confirms the points that his predecessors raised in their books. When he discusses Representative Men, Obeidat says, “Though it did not offer much space for specific Islamic material, the book contained references to it, especially in the essay on ‘Plato’” (71). Then he quotes the opening statement of “Plato”26 and concludes that by including Omar’s statement, Emerson “brings East to West whereby certain boundaries and categories are

25 In 1790, the first volume of the New York Magazine included a “Tale of Hafez.”
26 Emerson starts “Plato; or, the Philosopher” with “Among secular books, Plato only is entitled to Omar’s fanatical compliment to the Koran, when he said, “Burn the libraries; for their value is in this book” (Works IV, 39).
established, associations and distinctions created” (Ibid). Obiedat decides to leave, following the footstep of the Christy and Carpenter before him, the question of interest of Emerson in Islamic spirituality unanswered, and generate instead a system of binary opposites to discuss in his article. Plato is a combination of East and West, of unity and variety, of action and immobility. At this point, Obiedat’s treatment of presence of the Islamic culture in Representative Men seems to be completed. But there is more in Representative Men that speaks directly to the Islamic spirituality. In “Swedenborg; or, the Mystic,” there is a strong evidence of Emerson’s fascination with Sufism.

Emerson opens his essay describing four different classes in society: the “producers,” the “poets,” the philosophers, and “a class who lead us into another region, –the world of morals or of will” (Works VI, 93). The last class holds the highest rank in Emerson’s order. In “[t]he atmosphere of moral and sentiment” of this class there “is a region of grandeur which reduces all the material magnificence to toys, yet opens to every wretch that has reason the doors of the universe. Almost with a fierce haste it lays its empire on the man” (Ibid, 94). Emerson’s subject in this essay is ‘mysticism,’ and he aptly opted to select his examples of illustration from Islamic mysticism. To explain what he meant by this mystical region of moral sentiment, he quotes from the Koran: “God said, The heaven and the earth and all that is between them, think ye that we created them in jest, and that ye shall not return to us?” (Works IV, 94). Emerson’s interpretation of the verse corresponds with the Sufi hermeneutics by turning the verse into an example of divine personification, rather than taking its apparent meaning that man was created to work in this life and to be judged by his work in the hereafter.
According to Sufism, God’s action is continuous, thus his creation is continuous. But since the act is the other side of the will, thus the act of creation becomes an immediate manifestation of the will. This mystic vision explains why Emerson follows the quoted verse with this comment: “It is the kingdom of the will, and by inspiring the will, which is the seat of personality, seems to convert the universe into a person” (Ibid, 94-5). Emerson’s selection of Islamic mysticism to be his introduction to his discussion of mysticism is indicative of the place that Sufism holds in his theory on mysticism. At this critical point, he does not resort to Hinduism, but to Sufism.

Into this divinely animated world, the mystic is invited to hold communion with the Will of the universe. But this invitation is private, and Emerson quotes again from the literature of the Koran to explain what he means by such restriction. “The Koran” he writes “makes a distinct class of those who are by nature good, and whose goodness has an influence on others, and pronounces this class to be the aim of creation: the other classes are admitted to the feast of being, only as following in the train of this” (Ibid, 95). Emerson appreciates the Koran’s favoritism or interest in the mystics, and afterwards he turns to Persian poetry to quote two lines of verse to further the concept behind this sentiment. “Go boldly forth, and feast on being’s banquet; / Thou art the called, –the rest admitted with thee” (Ibid, 95). The secret for such privilege does not lie in some secret found in a book; but in the flood of light that fluxes into the heart of the mystic once he opens up to the soul of the universe. At this point, Emerson resorts to Sufi literature and cites the following anecdote: “The
Arabians say, that Abul Khain\textsuperscript{27}, the mystic, and Abu Ali Seena\textsuperscript{28}, the philosopher, conferred together; and, on parting, the philosopher said, ‘All that he sees, I know;’ and the mystic said, ‘All that he knows, I see’” (Ibid, 95). On page 80 of Journal Y of 1845, we read the same dialogue, but with a few spelling variations as quoted from Akhlak-i-Jalaly.

In “Goethe; or, the Writer,” we have another occasion where Emerson’s Representative Men shows the author’s interests in the mysticism of Islam. But with Goethe, the reference is indirect. After differentiating between two temperaments, “speculative” and “practical,” Emerson tells us that he finds in Goethe the example of the poet who succeeds in seeing unity (speculative) in the variety (practical). Formerly in “Plato,” Emerson elaborated on these temperaments and argued that while Asia is identified with a bent for a speculative mind, Europe inclines toward a practical one. Goethe is a poet who escaped the fatality of this dichotomy. He holds in his mind both types of the moral sentiments. He is East and West in one. With his poetry, he reduces the particulars of Western mind to their original unity. His speculative mind grants him the power to “unite the detached atoms again by their own law,” and “[a]mid littleness and detail he detected the Genius of life, the old cunning Proteus, nestling close beside us, and showed that the dullness and prose we ascribe to the age was only another of his masks” (Works IV, 273). In this imagery, Emerson uses Greek mythology to explain the oneness that Goethe perceived in life. But his next source to

\textsuperscript{27} His full name is Abu Sa’id Ibn Abil Khair. He is a Sufi poet 967-1049. He was the first to write in Ruba’iyat [quatrains], which late Omar Al-Khayyam would make it famous.

\textsuperscript{28} His full name is Abu Ali al-Hussain Ibn Abdallah Ibn Sina, and in the West is known as Avicenna. He is a philosopher 980-1037.
further this point comes from Sufism. He quotes a line from *Akhlak-I-Jalay*, “His very flight is presence in disguise” (273). The notes in the *Works* do not name the source of Emerson’s verse, but if we go to *Journal Y* of 1845, we will find this same line can be found on page 83 (*Journals IX*, 286). The verse expresses the same notion of oneness behind the many deceptive forms of Proteus, but here the image is spatial. The here and there are one. “Goethe” he writes “was the philosopher of this multiplicity; hundred-handed, Argus-eyed, able and happy to cope with the rolling miscellany of facts and sciences, and by his one versatility to dispose of them with ease” (Ibid, 271). Not just in Germany, but in this whole world as a human condition. He is intrigued by “the encyclopaedical manner in which modern erudition, with its international intercourse of the whole earth’s population, researches into Indian” and every other field of intellectual activity (Ibid, 272). In the realm of moral sentiment, he recast his desire to transcend the “provincial limitations” in works of art, of which we can name *West-East Divan*, which was fashioned after the Persian Sufi poetry.

“Persian Poetry,” which was first published in April 1858, is an essential text for any study investigating Emerson’s understanding of the spirituality of Islam. The author expresses his admiration for Persian poets right from the beginning of his article. And I don’t think that when he says “That for which mainly books exist is communicated in these rich extracts [the translations of the Persian poets],” he means to pay his compliment out of the courtesy that the occasion calls for. His praise rises from a genuine sentiment that he always cherished for the Persian poets. He admires the “Oriental life and Society” for the simplicity that permeates them. The comments
that he afterwards makes about life in the East, “leaving out of view, at present” India, attest to his vast reading about the history and culture of region. Life in the east is built on extremes, but it is fundamentally simple. “Religion and poetry” Emerson says “are all their civilization” (Ibid, 238). The long quotation that Emerson included in the next paragraph comes from Sir Austen Henry Layard’s Discoveries among the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon, which was first published in 1853. In this book Layard describes the life in Mesopotamia, or Iraq. Emerson read Layard’s book approximately four years before he wrote the article. His Notebook T shows two entries, which might have been made around 1854, about the book; one of them includes a letter which “a Turkish Cadi wrote to a friend of Layard’s in reply to some inquiries about the commerce population & antiquities of the old city in which he was living” (Journals VI, 370). The letter draws a fatalist character of the Cadi (judge), in perfect concordance with Emerson’s statement in “Persian Poetry”: “The religion [Islam] teaches an inexorable Destiny” (Works VIII, 238). There won’t be a reason to explain why Emerson would include a lengthy quotation from Layard’s book unless he conceived that both Arabia and Persian share the same culture. Half of the myths that he named –Solomon and Queen Sheba, Karun, Tuba, Leila and Medschnun – in his discussion of Persian poetry come from Islamic literature, whereas the rest are Persian. In his discussion of its poetics, Emerson names several characteristics of Persian poetry: gnomic verses, lively imagery, and mysticism. Emerson’s comments on Hafiz’s poetry, which make up most of the essay, show us that he understood the rhetoric of Sufism. Emerson was right in pointing at the intrinsic conflict that
constitutes Hafiz’s poetry. He correctly argues that Hafiz’s emphatic use of sensuous imagery was “to mark his scorn of sanctimony and base prudence” (Works VIII, 250). He senses the felicity that colors Hafiz’s imagination, but understands that “not the dervish, or the monk, but the lover, has in his heart the spirit which makes the ascetic and the saint” (Ibid, 248). According to Sufism, the seat of wisdom is the heart, not the mind.

Emerson sees Hafiz in par with the West’s classical poets, but “his extraordinary gifts adds to some of the attributes of Pindar, Anacreon, Horace, and Burns, the insight of a mystic, that sometimes afford a deeper glance at Nature than belongs to either of these bards” (Works VIII, 244). Very often, Hafiz accompanies his mystic experience with imageries of cup-bearer and wine. But intoxication should not, as Emerson correctly understood, be taken literary. It symbolizes the station to which the mystic’s self-negation reaches. It is a moment of revelation, of union. Emerson adopts this imagery in “The Poet.” He calls poetry “God’s wine,” but at the same time tells us that the poet’s “cheerfulness should be the gift of the sunlight; the air should suffice for his inspiration, and he should be tipsy with water” (Works III, 29). When the poet becomes one with nature, “he speaks somewhat wildly, or ‘with the flower of the mind;’ not with the intellect used as an organ, but with the intellect released from all service and suffered to take its direction from its celestial life; or as the ancients were wont to express themselves, not with intellect alone but with the intellect inebriated by nectar” (Ibid, 27). And if “the imagination intoxicates the poet, it is not inactive in other men. The metamorphosis excites in the beholder an emotion of joy.
The use of symbols has a certain power of emancipation and exhilaration for all men” (Ibid, 30). The poet like the mystic, shares his union with those who rise up to his state.

Emerson concludes “Persian Poetry” with a poem taken from a book by Farid al-Din Attar. He names the Persian Sufi teacher as the author of “Bird Conversations”; but the description that he gives fits exactly Attar’s Conference of Birds. Emerson describes his source as “a mystical tale, in which the birds, coming together to choose their king, resolve on a pilgrimage to Mount Kaf, to pay their homage to the Simorg” (Works VIII, 263). In his introduction to the Conference of Birds, Dr. Badi’ Muhammad Jumu’a writes the following summary: “The first chapter of the book starts with the birds holding an immense gathering to discuss their search for a lord that enlightens them. In the second chapter, the Hoopoe speaks to them about the Simorg and encourages them to go on a journey looking for him. But when the majority of them realize the hardships that they will meet on the road, they excuse themselves” [my translation] (32). Since there is one book by Attar that describes a journey by a group of birds to Simorg, and since Emerson’s description resembles Dr. Jumu’a’s summary, we can conclude that Emerson in conclusion of “Persian Poetry” was referring to the Conference of Birds.

In this allegorical tale, not all of those who decide to take the spiritual journey of knowledge stay their path. While the birds are now on the move looking for Simorg, more birds repeatedly excuse themselves, and others get lost along the way.

29 “Simorg” is a Persian word. Its meaning, according to Persian mythology, is connected with the Tree of Life which lives in the sea of Farkash. But in Attar’s book it stands for the God.
“Finally when the journey comes to its end only a few birds arrive at the destination” (Ibid, 33). Attar names thirty birds that succeed in reaching Simorg; Emerson, on the other hand, names three. Emerson scholarship does not provide us with the name of the source from which Emerson quoted the poem. The only translation of Attar’s text that was available prior to Emerson’s writing of this article would be *Mantic Uttair; ou la langage des oiseaux poème de philosophie religieuse* by Garcin de Tassy. We can conclude from the inaccuracy of the title that Emerson mentioned in his article that the text that he read was not in English.  

Attar lived in the 12th century, and was the most eminent Sufi of Persia in his time. Emerson was right in calling the book “a mystical tale,” and it can stand as “a proof of the identity of mysticism of all periods” (Works VIII, 263). The book is an allegory; it describes the journey that the seeker takes from the state of separation from god to the state of annihilation and then finally union. The birds, Sufis in the state of seekers, meet and decide to search for their creator. The hoopoe, a wise bird, who stands for the teacher, tells them that they should search for Simorg, who stands for god. Since only the Hoopoe knows the path to Simorg, the birds elect him as their guide, or master. The birds have to go through seven valleys, which stand for seven stations, before they reach the Mount of Kaf, where Simorg will be found. Dr. Jumu’s writes, “Attar has designated every station of the Sufi path with ‘valley’, and the number of the valleys in his narrative is seven” (50). They figure in the book as

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30 Tassy’s translation was done in prose, and what we seen in the “Persian Poetry” is a mimicry of the Attar’s original verse form. This variation can be explained by either suggesting the presence of another, but now extinct, translation that preserved the verse form; or, which is more plausible, Emerson tried to be faithful to the original by versifying the prose version.
chapter-titles, so the seekers journey from “the valley of quest, to that of love, to that of gnosis, to that of self-sufficiency, to that of oneness, to that of amazement, and last to that of poverty and annihilation” (Ibid). In his book, Attar provides us with sufficient details of the valleys and the rough paths that lead to them. He also “explains to the seeker the manners that should be followed at each of the seven valleys. The journey ends with the valley of poverty and annihilation, where the seeker is annihilated in the Being, and his movement becomes like that of a water drop after it has been united with the sea” (Ibid).

Emerson’s selection of the last chapter of the book for his reader stands as a clear evidence that he was interested in including a morsel of Sufism, and not merely its poetry, for his readers. He chooses the moment when the birds become one with the Simorg. The scene starts when the birds are let into his presence,

They saw themselves all as Simorg
Themselves in the eternal Simorg.
When to the Simorg up they looked,
They beheld him among themselves;
And when they looked on each other,
They saw themselves in the Simorg.
A single look grouped the two parties,
The Simorg emerged, the Simorg vanished,
This is that and that is this,
As the world has never heard. (264)
In the midst of their astonishment, they, “speechless,” asked the “Highest/ To unlock Thou and We” (Ibid). The answer immediately comes to them: “The Highest is a sun-mirror;/ Who comes to Him sees himself therein” (Ibid). After comparing what Emerson included in his article from Attar’s book with the English translation31 of the French rendition, and going back to the Arabic text, I found that Emerson included his own re-writing of the union scene. The English edition and the Arabic one proved to be close to each other, whereas Emerson’s shows a significant number of omissions. I suppose that Emerson made allowance for such omissions to include more in the little

31 In the French edition, when the birds become near Simorg’s domain, the chamberlain addresses them: “O you whose minds and hearts are troubled, whether you exist or do not exist in the universe, the king has his being always and eternally. Thousands of worlds of creatures are no more than an ant at his gate. You bring nothing but moans and lamentations. Return then to whence you came, O vile handful of earth” (130). But they persist on seeing Simorg. This prove to be a test for them, and since the passion of their love won’t let them move, the chamberlain open the gate. “Now was the light of lights manifested, and all of them sat down on the masnad, the seat of the Majesty and Glory. They were given a writing which they were told to read through; and reading this, and pondering, they were able to understand their state. When they were completely at peace and detached from all things they became aware that the Simurgh was there with them, and a new life began for them in the Simurgh. All that they had done previously was washed away. The sun of majesty sent forth his rays, and in the outer world, contemplated the face of the Simurgh of the inner world. This so astonished them that they had become the Simurgh. At last, in a state of contemplation, they realized that they were the Simurgh and that the Simurgh was the thirty birds. When they gazed at the Simurgh they saw that it was truly the Simurgh who was there, and when they turned their eyes towards themselves they saw that they themselves were the Simurgh. And perceiving both at once, themselves and Him, they realized that they and the Simurgh were one and the same being. No one in the world has ever heard of anything to equal it.

Then they gave themselves up to meditation, and after a little they asked the Simurgh, without the use of tongues, to reveal to them the secret of the mystery of the unity and plurality of beings. The Simurgh, also without speaking, made this reply: ‘The sun of my majesty is a mirror, he who sees himself therein sees his soul and his body, and sees them completely. Since you have come as thirty birds, si-murgh, you will see thirty birds in this mirror. If forty or fifty were to come, it would be the same. Although you are now completely changed you see yourselves as you were before.

‘Can the sight of an ant reach to the far-off Pleiads? And can this insect lift an anvil? Have you ever seen a gnat seize an elephant in its teeth? All that you have known, all that you have seen, all that you have said or heard—all this is no longer that. When you crossed the valleys of the Spiritual Way and when you performed good tasks, you did all this by my action; and you were able to see the valleys of my essence and my perfections. You, who are only thirty birds, did well to be astonished, impatient and wondering. But I am more than thirty birds. I am very essence of the true Simurgh. Annihilate then yourselves gloriously and joyfully in me, and in me you shall find yourselves.’

Thereupon the birds at last lost themselves for ever in the Simurgh—the shadow was lost in the sun, and that is all” (131-2).
space that he had. The changes show that they were done with a due care to preserve
the tale’s mystic contents, but on the narrative level they affected it greatly. Emerson’s
last 12 lines are delivered by the Chamberlain, not Simorg, and are supposed to come
before the dialog between the birds and Simorg started. Also instead of thirty birds,
Emerson’s version has just three. Perhaps Emerson preferred not to crowd the scene of
union with many seekers. With only three birds, the union scene can be more effective
on his reader.

Emerson recognized the Sufis’ doctrine of annihilation and their spiritual
journey through a system of spiritual stations long before he wrote “Persian Poetry.”
Even in his first published essay, *Nature*, Emerson incorporates these doctrines in his
rhetoric. I know that there is no document that can support this observation, but
documentation is not the sole proof of influence. I have pointed earlier that Emerson
proved in his letter of 1856 to Cabot that he read Tholuck’s *Blüthensammlung aus der
Morgenländischen Mystik* thirteen years before the records of Boston Athenaeum
showed that he borrowed it in 1869. Emerson’s sources of reading about Middle
Eastern literature extend beyond Harvard College Library and Boston Athenaeum.
Other sources were definitely available to him, such as friends. We know for sure that
he frequently borrowed books on Middle Eastern literature from Henry David
Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, J. E. Cabot, and Theodore Parker. In a reply to Emerson’s
letter to Parker, dated June 11, 1849, the latter writes: “You wanted some books on
Persian and other oriental literature the other day. I have since received fm Germany
Ruckert’s Hamasa, (the Arabian Anthology) you know) 2 vols. 8vo & Graf’s

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32 Emerson inherited from Thoreau a considerable number of Oriental books.
(German) translation of Sadi, both of which are at your service if you want them” (Letters VI, 151). I have also indicated earlier that Emerson used to borrow Oriental books from Cabot. Here is another letter from Emerson to Cabot, demonstrating the former’s indebtedness to his friend for letting him borrow books about Middle Eastern literature. On September 26 of 1855, he writes: “I fear you will lend me no more books, after straining your good nature as I have done by these. I will not add to my offence by detailing the causes that have hindered their return to your shelves. Meantime, I am heartily thankful for the books. I did not find my way into Hegel as readily as I hoped, nor was I as richly rewarded as probably better scholars have been. The Eastern poetry I looked through, but find the Persian still the best by far, and shall stay by Von Hammer with all the more content” (Letters IV, 531).

Pointing, therefore, to a specific date as a starting point from which Emerson became acquainted with Middle Eastern literature will be almost impossible. What we have of documentation is not enough. The Middle East, as I have shown, grew with Emerson; and throughout it corresponded with the author’s philosophical growth. Before 1822, it was historical, but after his reading of Degerando’s book in that year his Middle East gradually grew philosophical. Thus any resonance of a Middle Eastern thought in his writing after 1822 is a legitimate ground to argue that what we have is an instance of plausible influence. In Nature, which was published in 1836, for instance, we come across moments where we are reminded of Sufi rhetoric.

In the woods too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life, is always a child. In the woods, is
perpetual youth. Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousand years. In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, –no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, –my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, –all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.

(Works I, 10)

This passage can be considered as a spiritual synopsis of the whole argument in Nature. In it, Emerson describes a journey of return to a state of infancy, the goal of which is a union with the Creating spirit. But to achieve this goal man has to go through total self-negation. I find every point of this synopsis corresponds with a Sufi concept. The moment of annihilation, according to the Sufis, is a moment of ecstasy. The self bathes with glee when she strips of all the ties that bonds her with society, and Emerson matches it with “The name of the nearest friend sounds foreign and accidental” (Ibid). Infancy, in Sufism, as the article of the Asiantick Researches showed, is the seat of the first covenant, and the seekers journey in life back to it. The culmination of Emerson’s scene is a declaration of union: “I am part and parcel of
God,” which in many ways echoes with the concluding scene from Attar’s *Conference of Bids*, or with Al-hallaj’s dialogue in the *Tawasin* where he says:

I saw my Lord with the eye of my heart

I said: “who are You?” He said: “You!” (Ar-Rahman, 35)

Or, where Hafiz says

I am a kind of parrot; the mirror is holden to me

What the Eternal says, I stammering say again (Works VIII, 254)

In the preface to the *Gulistan*, Emerson makes an insightful observation on the language that Sufis used. He writes that in their dialogues “They wish to measure wit with you, and expect an adroit, a brilliant, or a profound answer. Many narratives, doubtless, have suffered in the translation” (viii). This statement attests to Emerson’s exploration of the linguistic nature in the mystic language. He is aware that so much of their poetics was lost in the rendition, and seems to understand the significant role that they cherished for the mastery that Sufis always showed in their intricate playfulness with form and meaning. In explaining the intricacy of Sufi language, Schimmel writes:

It might be likened to the structure of an arabesque that grows out of a simple geometric pattern into complicated multiangled stars, or out of a flower motif into intricate lacework. A tendency to enjoy these infinite possibilities of the language has greatly influenced the style of Arabic poets and prose writers, and in many sayings of the Sufis one can detect

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33 His full name is Abu al-Mughith al-Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj. He is an early Persian Sufi rewriter 858-922.
34 In the Arabic version we read "قلت", which means “I said.” In Ar-Rahman’s edition, we read “saw,” which is definitely a typo.
a similar joy in linguistic play; the author indulges in deriving different meanings from one root, he loves rhymes and strong rhythmical patterns, features inherited by the mystics of the Persian, Turkish, and Indo-Muslim tongues. (13)

Emerson was not far from this understanding when he said the “Preface” that the rhetoric of the Persian poets is a playful admixture of a few images “molten into arabesque” (IV). For its simplest form in the mystic language, the arabesque can be seen in the game of form and meaning, in the play of homophones, homonym, and homographs. In Emerson’s transparent eyeball metaphor, we have a good example of this kind of the arabesque. Emerson writes: “Standing on the bare ground, my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite apace, -all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing, I see all, the current of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part and parcel of God” (Works I, 10). Emerson plays his pun on the homophones of “I” and “eye”. Through this pun, the persona experiences the mystic transformation from being to nonentity, form the “I” that stands in relation to time and place, to mere perception free from the now and here. In this metamorphic moment the “I” is represented metonymically by the “eye.” But this apparent reduction is at the same time the means for the soul to expand boundlessly; the sphere of the “eye” extends to become a match to the circulating Universal Being, until finally the original “I” becomes lost in the circle. The sphere of the eye and the “circumference” are only temporal realization of the archetypal circle. The annihilation of the self is produced when it becomes lost, or one with this circle. In
“Tasin of Circle,” Al-Hallaj uses the same geometrical concept to describe this fusion:

“The first door represents the one who reaches the circle of Truth. The second door represents the person who reaches it, who after entering it comes to a closed door. The third represents the one who goes astray in the desert of the True-Nature of the Truth” (30). In this desert, the “I” becomes part and parcel of the Truth.

Emerson did not only hold a common knowledge about the spirituality of Islam, he was genuinely intrigued by its philosophy. His fascination with Sufism, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, dated back to the early 1820’s when he was first introduced through Degerando’s *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie* to its mystical system. This interest was sustained to the end of his life. Just a few years before he died he obtained Alghazali’s *Alchemy of Happiness* in 1873. In between, his interest never abated; on the contrary it was always on the increase, till we see him fulfilling his obligation towards it by introducing it through Saadi’s *Gulistan* to the nation. Emerson’s reading about Islamic culture was wide and rich; he collected his knowledge from what his contemporary Orientalists wrote about its history and thoughts, and also from their translations of its literature. I have shown that he was familiar with the three main Orientalists who focused on Sufism: Augustus Tholuck, Silvestre de Sacy, and John Malcolm. These Orientalists recognized the Sufi spirit that informed the Persian poetry, and Emerson learned from them how to properly appreciate it. I showed also that he developed a critical sense to discern the merits of Tholuck over Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall. To this historical presentation, I want to add that I still feel that there is more to be said. I don’t claim that with this work I have
completely covered every little corner that might hide a clue about Emerson’s ties with Sufism. I have to reiterate that the story of the spirituality of Islam and Emerson is still awaiting more work. My goal was to point out that there is a facet to Emerson’s writing that has for a long time been neglected, and I hope that with this research it will win some enthusiasts. The footnotes and indexes are the best that can speak on the state of scholarship. These research tools many a times failed me; and this can be simply explained by the fact that this road is still untraversed.

Undoubtedly Sufism was one of the veins that informed Emerson’s philosophy and language. From this emerge a very direct imperative: understanding Emerson’s works fully and completely entails an understanding of Sufism. Thus, in addition to what awaits this scholarship of historical investigation, there is also a need for a work on the parallelism between Emerson’s and the Sufis’ language and rhetoric. Such a direction in the scholarship can help fill in the gaps that the historical investigation might leave unanswered. Emerson was a moving figure in the American literary scene, and when we make such a lofty claim about his interests in the spirituality of the Middle East, the repercussions will reach many eminent American writers; writers like Hawthorne and Poe.
CHAPTER 3

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE AND THE ORIENTAL TALE

In his prefatory materials, Hawthorne is always inclined to favor his selected reader with a biographical account of either the text produced or the self that produced it. Such a persistent interest in exposing incidents of a personal nature to the public eye has led some critics to pronounce him, according to his letter to Horatio Bridge, “egotistical, indiscreet, and even impertinent” (Hawthorne, Tales and Sketches, 1154). In defense of Hawthorne, we know that he was not senseless, as accused, to the critical position, that a writer of his magnitude very often finds himself in. He knows the etiquette of authorship, and fully understands how delicate it is to tread the very thin line between the private and the public spheres. At a moment “of perfect sympathy” between a writer and his reader, Hawthorne does not let down his guard but still diligently keeps the inmost part of his self “behind its veil” (Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter, 87). Eight years later, he still remembered that accusation and wrote, teasing his critics, in the preface to The Marble Faun that his sympathetic “Reader” had always “encouraged me to be egotistical in my Prefaces, careless though unkindly eyes should skim over what was never meant for them” (Hawthorne, Marble Faun, 4).
Defending his critical position, he writes to his friend Horatio Bridge that whatever biographical tale he chooses to tell in his introduction, he means with it “to pave the reader’s way into the interior edifice of [his] book” (Hawthorne, *Tales and Sketches*, 1154). We see this in his preface to *The Blithedale Romance*, where Hawthorne explains to his reader the role of his life experience at Brook Farm in writing the romance that follows; while his sketch, “The Custom House,” comes directly from his anguish over dormant imagination during the years that he spent at the Port of Salem as its surveyor. Many critics find a system of correspondence between the crisis of the persona of the sketch and the heroine of the romance that follows, *The Scarlet Letter*. Both suffer the consequences of an invasive public life on their imagination. With the preface to *The Marble Faun*, he speaks of his “residence of considerable length in Italy” as his primary source of inspiration for the book (4).

On the fringes of the biographical sketch of his preface, more often than not, lies a metaphor that evokes ideas of mixing and interposing, which creates a twilight atmosphere that facilitates a romantic communion between the writer of the sketch and his reader. This peripheral metaphor stands for the author’s notion of intermediary as a condition of creativity. It assumes a central role once we understand that it suggests a platform for Hawthorne’s explanation to Bridge. It imparts the introductions with a system of thought that opens to the reader the “way into the interior edifice of [the] book” (Hawthorne, *Tales and Sketches*, 1154). In the preface to *Twice-Told Tales*, in line with this suggestion, he warns his reader that the book “requires to be read in the clear, brown, twilight atmosphere in which it was written; if opened in the sunshine, it
is apt to look exceedingly like a volume of blank pages” [my emphasis](Ibid, 1152). The metaphor of umbrageousness, when elaborated on, can be read as the author’s way of putting down a working definition that explains the nature of the romance as a genre. This metaphor operates as a threshold, a corridor, or site of betwixt and between that invites a better understanding of the complexity of the romance.

Furthermore, since this metaphor is founded on the blurred out outlines of the sign and consequently manifests the narrator’s intention of risking the definitude of its meaning, then we have grounds to suggest that implicit in the author’s metaphorical explanation of the nature of the romance, there is a valuable postulation that he wants to make about the mechanism of language, a postulation whose theoretical value cannot be underestimated.

In the context of this metaphor of betwixt and between, as we see in the example of the preface to The Blithedale Romance, Hawthorne invokes the Middle East as a mediating agent that facilitates the transformation of the elements in the twilight zone. In this preface, he prophesies that were the Howadji1 (George William Curtis’s Middle East traveler) to come to America he “might find as rich a theme” and even “a more novel one –close at hand as it lies –than those which he has since made so distant a pilgrimage to seek, in Syria, and along the current of the Nile” (3). From this invitation, this chapter establishes the Middle East as an essential paradigm in Hawthorne’s romances. It aims at describing the poetic and rhetorical significance that this specific locality assumes in his works. In its analysis, the argument in this

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1 Howadji is a fictitious character in William Curtis’s two travel books Nile Notes of a Howadji (1851) and The Howadji in Syria (1852).
chapter does not derive its methodology from a narrative of binary opposites between East and West. Instead, it focuses on instances of merging and mixing between East and West as they are practiced in Hawthorne’s fiction. It borrows from Homi K. Bhabha’s analysis of hybridity and pays attention to his explanation of the dynamics that permeates every hybrid site. Such analysis undoubtedly can lead to a better understanding of the self that the romance revolves around. In describing the significance of this concept to cultural studies, Bhabha says:

The move away from the singularities of “class” or “gender” as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions –of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation –that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These “in between” spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood –singular or communal –that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.

(“Locations of Culture,” 1332)

The East, in Hawthorne’s fiction, figures as an instance of an “in between” cultural experience. The mixing of identities and locations forces the question of history out
and transforms the present into a site of power, of becoming [to use Emerson’s expression]. My method of analysis also borrows from Victor Turner his concept of “liminality” to explain the metamorphoses that these moments of mixing promise to accomplish in Hawthorne’s texts. However, even when this study turns to history, it is not interested in reconstructing narratives, but in pointing to certain instances of “rupture,” (I am using Foucault’s term), specifically the discovery of oriental texts at the turn of 19th century, and using them as a sufficient context for the oriental discourse that prevailed in the writing of Hawthorne’s narratives. Finally, from Bakhtin’s analysis of the discourse of fiction, I make use of his “heteroglossia” and “dialogism.” I consider the Middle East to represent a voice among the diverse voices that inform Hawthorne’s novelistic discourse. In the following pages, I will show that the presence of the Oriental in Hawthorne’s books is dialogically related to the nation’s political, social, religious, and historical discourses.

In the betwixt and between metaphor that describes the romance’s nature, Hawthorne persistently suggests a middle ground on which the real is fused with the imaginative. We encounter this metaphor in the prefatory passages of The Blithedale Romance, Twice-told Tales, and The House of the Seven Gables, also in “The Custom House,” and in “The Old Manse.” The fact that this metaphor recurs in several places establishes its significance to the author, but more importantly it sheds some light on his philosophy of Arts. The space that this metaphor creates allows Victor Turner’s theory on liminality to operate as a suitable critical device for its analysis. The romance that Hawthorne defines can be studied as a cultural rite that stands between
the regularities of life’s structure and the “anti-structures” that threaten its continuity. Turner argues that the disruptive world, which the rites of initiation, as can be demonstrated in some African tribes, create for its initiands, still maintains—we will see later how the romance, as Hawthorne illustrates its ways of operation, works in a similar fashion – its own sense of organization but “seems to rest on principles different from those governing quotidian social life” (133). Furthermore, Hawthorne’s romances, like the typical rites of initiation, express their concerns with possibilities, not merely with what seems to be the case at the given moment in terms of the authoritative assumptions of the given culture. They are concerned with variants, with alternatives, with that which is nobler or baser, more beautiful or uglier, purer or more corrupt, than the current dominant social construction of reality accepted as fact, as culture’s indicative mood. They are inherently skeptical of the received wisdom, the worldly wisdom. (Turner, 135)

My argument does not claim originality in suggesting such an anthropological approach to the analysis of the romance, or literature in general; Turner in his work does point to the fact stating that “Analysis of rites of passage in Central and East African sociocultural systems, followed years later by study of theater and narrative in the literate cultures of large-scale societies” (Ibid, 135). But Hawthorne’s metaphor, with its interests in creating a betwixt and between social space and invoking alternative social forms through the Oriental other, provides an even more complex example for Turner’s anthropological theory.
For an example of the Hawthorne’s metaphor of the space in-between, let us take the moonlit room, which appears in “The Custom House” sketch. In this sketch, he creates a little drama that places the imaginative perception of the space betwixt and between in its right place for the romancer. In the desolate second story of the Custom House, the narrator discovers the scarlet letter and the scroll that contains its history. Such discovery mystically awakens in him a now dormant natural drive for story telling. His instinct tells him that a story of the history of Hester Prynne has to be told, but he fails miserably. As long as he stays in his office at the Custom House, all his attempts to rekindle his imagination fail. He expiates extensively on what to his alleged conviction amounts to no less than intellectual degradation, which has been brought on him by the public office he now holds. His “intellectual forge” is now turned cold and the glossy surface of his imagination has become “a tarnished mirror” that constantly fails to inspire the people of his fancy with life. He fathoms the abyss of his crisis by his failure “when, late at night, [he] sat in the deserted parlour, lighted only by the glimmering coal-fire and the moon, striving to picture forth imaginary scenes, which, the next day, might flow out on the brightening page in the many-hued description” (Hawthorne, 110). He concludes that if his fancy, surrounded with such an inspiring milieu, still resists coming up with any creation, he must readily consider it “a hopeless case.” In this little drama of frustration, the moonlight represents “a medium the most suitable for a romance-writer to get acquainted with his illusive guests” (Ibid, 110-1). The intermediary station which the author grants to the moonlight agency becomes a paradigm in his theory of art. In all the prefaces that he
wrote, we encounter metaphors of the same tenor, although with different vehicles. In the *Blithedale Romance* it is a spatial metaphor presented to us in the image of a “theater, a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel, where the creatures of the brain can play their phantasmagorical antics, without exposing them to too close a comparison with the actual events of real life” (Hawthorne, 3), while in *The House of the Seven Gables* it becomes an altitudinal metaphor that speaks of the romancer’s freedom in selecting for his text “both its fashion and material.” The vehicle of the metaphor changes still one more time in “The Old Manse,” where it becomes an umbrageous zone where “The glimmering shadows, that lay half-asleep between the door of the house and the public highway, were a kind of spiritual medium” (Hawthorne, 1123). This paradigm of intermediary signifies a deliberate act of disassociation with the regularities of life. Removed in this fashion from the imposition of reality, the objects of the author’s intention acquire power of their own.

In illustrating the transformational power of the in-between metaphor in “The Custom House”, the author points to the spiritualizing effect that the moonlight has on reality: Seen in the moonlight, the objects of “the little domestic scenery” assume new identities: they “are so spiritualized by the unusual light that they seem to lose their actual substance and become things of the intellect” (111). An anthropological analogy can be drawn between the masked and painted body in African rituals and the “spiritualized” objects of reality in Hawthorne’s romances. In both cases masquerading life does not entail a complete severance from the orderly structure of reality, otherwise the outcome would be a total chaos. Turner argues that behind the
apparent chaotic form of the rites, there is control and organization, but of a nature completely alien to the received order. A common event can be transformed by the power of the ritualism into a sacred event. Similarly Hawthorne recognizes in the romance such independence when he says that the romance “must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably, so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart –has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer’s choosing or creation” (The House of the Seven Gables, 1). The romancer masquerades events from life with the coloring of his fancy to make them object of special interest to the intellects. And in Hawthorne’s case, as I will show in this chapter, the Middle East is a recurrent masquerading show that appears in this works. Behind the Oriental mask, we are meant to see the American face. The mere act of masquerading grants the work its aesthetic value and invests it as well with social power. The middling space, “between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other” (111), is a socially empowering site. The narrator of “The Old Manse,” residing beyond the magical effect of the gate-posts of his dwelling, in a twilight zone, is transformed by the power of this site into a national commentator, giving his reader a piece of advice of lethargy, which had it been given outside the gate-posts of his dwelling it would amount to no more than a piece of nonsense. He, a descendent of the Puritan culture, fully understands that idleness is a sin. Ironically, the grand idea that he cherishes for his age “would be, that the great want which mankind labors under, as this present period, is –sleep” (1145). But soon he humorously hastens to apologize,
commanding his reader not to quote this idea against him. In his defense, he attributes this strange idea of languor to the liminal world of the old Manse. “There were circumstances” he explains “around me, which made it difficult to view the world precisely as it exists; for, serene and sober as was the old Manse, it was necessary to go but a little way beyond its threshold, before” (1145) he is brought back to the regularity of life. Strange as it may look, his irony on ‘sleep,’ when looked at in the context of its liminal world, becomes the narrator’s challenge to a Puritan culture that thrived in the history of New England on senselessly cold obsession with industriousness. Furthermore, “Idleness,” as used in Hawthorne’s discourse, derives its symbolic meaning from the East. His career as a story-teller partakes of this characteristic and places it in a dialogical relation with the character of the Puritan culture. The family tree of hard working Puritans, the narrator of “The Custom House” tells us, is topped by “an idler like myself” (92).

But before I start my analysis of the Orient in Hawthorne’s writings, I will have to explain the philosophical ground on which his intermediary metaphor stands. It argumentatively engages the linguistic theory of the period. Emerson, in Nature, summarizes the age’s philosophy of language in a chapter titled “Language.” Emerson starts with pictorial explanation of language, and he attaches three categories of symbolism to its work. We learn that in his system of symbology “1-Words are signs of natural facts. 2- Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts. 3- Nature is the symbol of spirit” (19). When Emerson elaborates on the meaning of these three platforms of symbolism, he takes interest in social influences so far as they
inspire language with abstract meaning. In proverbs, for instance, we have myriad examples of natural facts married to the human mind. In few words, man’s history is reduced to concise expressions of social wisdom, such as “Long-lived trees make roots first” (24). However such interests, contrary to what Hawthorne thinks, ultimately lose their social significance for a realm of idealism. The trifle of man’s affairs on earth vanishes once we question the ontology of symbolism. In front of such a grandiose inquiry, “[t]he visible creation is” seen, Emerson explains, as “the terminus of the circumference of the invisible world” (25).

But, for my current investigation, there is a more important point to make from Emerson’s discussion on the nature of language. The fact that his chapter on language falls right in the middle of his book makes us ponder whether the book does not metaphorically describe man’s perceptive journey in nature, which can simply be divided into two major stages: the physical world and the metaphysical; and which corresponds respectively with two platforms of perception: “understanding,” and “Reason.” In Emerson’s cosmology, “Reason” exists in a firmament higher than “Understanding,” and the journey of man is teleologically set for him to go from down to up. He ascends/transcends from the mundane face of “Commodity” to the divine physiognomy of “Idealism.” But there, as I have pointed out earlier, in the middle of the journey, “Language” stands as a limen. Language derives its power from its intermediary station. Emerson recognizes in language such power, and in “Self-Reliance,” he explains its dynamics as it “ceases in the instant of repose; it resides in the moment of transition from past to a new state” (152). It is the meeting ground that
facilitates the metamorphosis of perception. When Emerson declares: “This one fact
the world hates, that the soul becomes” (153), he surely implies the power of language
as the soul’s sole mechanism of becoming. To this effect, he notes the significance of
“the use of the outer creation, to give us language for the beings and changes of the
inward creation” [my italics] (Emerson, 19). The blossoming of the creation inside
depends on the creation outside; but they are far apart, and the only bridge that can
connect them to each other is language. Emerson sees that exclusively in the
liminality of language can the possibility for any “Understanding” or “Reason”
experience avail itself to man. Indisputably, Emerson borrows from both Locke and
Kant the representational nature of language: from the first we see the immediacy he
expresses in “Words are signs of natural facts,” and from the other we understand his
definition of “Imagination” as “the use [creation] which Reason makes of the material
world” (Emerson, Nature, 35). However, such borrowings figure in his work only as
boundaries to the realm of language, the limen of man’s experience of nature. The
ultimate goal that Emerson envisions for man’s journey in life is a union with nature,
which can be expressed by reattaching the word to its primitive sense and marrying it
to man’s will, or intentionality. The utterance becomes a rite that initiates man into the
divinity of nature, or what he calls “spirit.” The teleology that Emerson perceives for
man’s journey in nature eventually severs him completely from the surface of earth
and sends him flying among the forms as they exist in the mind of God.

2 In exploring the continuity that Emerson’s statement depicts among the three italicized phrases, we
identify Emerson’s understanding of the continuity between John Locke and Emmanuel Kant; between
the emphasis on the ontological presence of world outside the mind, and the perceptive/psychological
presence of the world in the mind.
There is a history, Emerson argues, for every word. To this effect he says, “[a]s we go back in history, language becomes more picturesque, until infancy, when it is all poetry” (21). To describe its primordial form, Emerson uses the Lockean representational theory of meaning: a word triggers a mental image in the mind of the reader or listener which in turn invokes a meaning by the mere fact of correspondence between the image and the word. In this simple theory of language, the words stand innocent from all values that control our social life. There is prophetic immediacy between the word and the world. But, “[a]ll the facts in natural history taken by themselves,” Emerson further explains “have no value, but barren, like a single sex. But marry it to human history, and it is full of life” (21). Emerson does not talk here about stratification and dialogism in language, and he is not interested in the influence of some specific social element, such as class, profession, minority, sex, etc. Nonetheless, his conjugal metaphor of the history of man to language indicates a social aspect of language. But still such suggestion blurs out any specificity of the social experience because his primary interests lie in pinning the word to its primitive sense. Emerson aims at finding the timeless meaning of the word, but with our modern linguistic theories we doubt the possibility of such aim. “Only the mythical Adam,” Bakhtin argues, “who approached a virginal and as yet verbally unqualified world with this first word, could really have escaped from the start to finish this dialectical inter-orientation with the alien word that occurs in the object. Concrete historical human discourse does not have this privilege” (279). In Emerson’s system, the Adamic word has immediacy with the world that grants it a unique position. Once
layers of falsehood start to grow on the word, it loses its original prophetic aspect. To salvage language, he proposes that “wise men pierce this rotten diction and fasten words again to visible things” (27). Emerson eventually downplays the significance of the social factor in a history that starts with a prophetic mission and ends up with a divine revelation. In this history, symbolism resides at the heart of linguistics. “There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet” (Emerson, 10). The spiritual force of Emerson’s poet –someone like him – abrogates the apparent diversity of the world. The differences that we see even in opposites melt out, unveiling the oneness of the signified. In a moment of such high inspiration, Emerson declares, “Fear and hope are alike beneath” this show of diversity; then he adds identifying nature’s final effect with “the ultimate fact which we so quickly reach on this, as on every topic, the resolution of all into the ever-blessed One” (152-53). What we see in Emerson’s description of language is an adamant interest in reducing it to the sole purpose of communicating one single meaning, the Over Soul. In this system, the poet’s office too is reduced to reshuffling the cards of symbolism to produce new associations. Originality in language can be simply measured by the intimacy its symbolism hold with meaning. Based on this theory, Emerson makes his prophecy of new poets and poetry: they announce their advent in their delivery of fresh symbolism.

Against this ahistorical and asocial theory of language Hawthorne postulates the argument of his prefatory materials. Hawthorne considers the romance a linguistic practice that demonstrates and proves that meaning cannot be ontologically
metaphysical. He refuses to speculate on the value of language away from its social context. Language, as Hawthorne viewed it, does not exist in vacuum; it is fundamentally a social fact that derives its power of significance from the motley texture of the human experience, in its widest form. With such a massive recognition of endless sources for language, he does grant history, class, religion, psychology, gender, politics and above all geography equal shares in the construct of meaning. But we should note also that in such bursting swell of meaning, Hawthorne’s linguistic theory is fixated on the dialogical relations that connect the factors of the human experience into one pool of meaning. The endless tugging and pulling among these factors – private and public, individual and state, past and present, morals and ethics, etc. – threatens the stability of Hawthorne’s text, and undermines the myth of the finality of one single meaning. Of these factors, as I have already implied, the Orient assumes a primary role in my study of the dynamics of significance in Hawthorne’s romances. On the wide range of its field, the Middle East assumes a central space.

On the intermediary ground of the romance, the established dichotomy of here and there collapses onto each other, liquidating their concrete separatedness into an every shifting sign of location. In “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin introduces his dialectical analysis of language. He finds the discourse of the novel to be hinged on the author’s intention of including elements from the social heteroglossia. To Bakhtin, such intentionality counts as a primary “force that stratifies and differentiates the common literary language” (292). To this effect he says:
languages live a real life, they struggle and evolve in an environment of social heteroglossia. Therefore they are all able to enter into the unitary plane of the novel, which can unite in itself parodic stylizations of generic languages, various forms of stylizations and illustrations of professional and period-bound languages, the languages of particular generation, of social dialects and others (as occurs, for example, in the English comic novel). They may all be drawn in by the novelist for the orchestration of his themes and for the refracted (indirect) expression of his intention and values. (292)

Hawthorne’s inclusion of the East on American soil reveals his intention of including the oriental discourse of his time in the heteroglossia of his romance. It stands in a dialogical relation to every domestic aspect in his works. As a romancer, he borrows from life what the American public had been saying and circulating about the Middle East since the Revolution. The continuous production of the East in America from the Revolution to mid 19th century provided him, like any American, with some knowledge about the East. The oriental discourse by then was widely diversified, but still entwined its Oriental spirit around every thread of the American fabric. The publication of Oriental texts, the Arabian Nights and all its forms of adaptation, translations, travel books, plays, archeological works and the deciphering of the

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3 After the American Revolution, one the major international crises that the new republic had to face was the navigation on the waters of the Mediterranean. The regencies of the North Africa demanded tributes from all the nations that used them. Before the Revolution, the British flag protected the American ships; but after the Independence, the American ships became targets for the regencies. American citizens were consequently held captives for years. Later on, when William Eaton in 1805 conquered Derna (East of Tripoli), America gets to learn, for the first time, its imperial identity.
hieroglyphic, interior designs, architecture, commerce, captives and war, congressional bills and the building of the navy, monotheism, Sufism, pottery and carpeting, clubs and societies, magazines, all played roles in painting a multi-colored image of the Middle East. Not only did these platforms articulate thoughts about the East, but they also allowed the East to become part and parcel of the American scene. Thus, on the geographical map of Hester Prynne, Zenobia, or Ilbrahim, the American scene is intentionally reconstructed with a significant portion of the East covering its landscape. In posing a simple question about the geographical identity of Hawthorne’s Hester, Zenobia or Ilbrahim, whether they stand as pure American citizens or Oriental figures, we can point to the dialogical nature of Hawthorne’s fiction. They are essentially Americans, but hiding behind an Oriental mask. Their Orientalism in a sense becomes a liminal site that helped them make statements about their America.

In order for us to investigate the purpose and value of the making of the East part and parcel of the American narrative, and extrapolate a meaning and a role for the East in Hawthorne’s fiction, we need to focus on the dialogism that regulates the tension between them. Like the intermediary metaphors that we have encountered in the author’s introductions, the East on the American landscape becomes an illusive site. Its intentional dislocation from its original place and then its relocation on alien geography blurs out its characteristic outlines. The here and there are entwined like two lines of the Arabesque. The dialectical tension between them creates their own textual significance, or what critics like Sandra Naddaff identifies as the self-reflexivity or self-referentiality of the Arabesque. But this self-reflexivity is of a
slippery nature because of the continuous incursions of its antitheses on each other. On this discursively founded system of significance, stand Hawthorne’s romances. Let us go back to his preface to *The Blithedale Romance*, where he proposes to us “a theater, a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel” as a ground for his drama. On this theater “the creatures of his brain may play their phantasmagorical antics, without exposing them to too close a comparison with the actual events of real lives.” What this description implies is a tension between two realms: the “Faery Land” and the land of reality. This dialogical tension is never reconciled in the romance. Some rupture continuously threatens what we might think of as reconciliation, but never happens. Such hybridity does not in any sense suggest the elimination of either one of the constructs. On the contrary, Hawthorne relentlessly emphasizes that each one is important for the full significance of the other. To complicate his metaphor of likening the romance to a stage even further, he recommends, towards the end of the preface, the American scene to the Howadji’s romantic wanderings. When Hawthorne invites the Howadji, he wants this Oriental character to reproduce the American scene in oriental style, or the creator of this Oriental character, George William Curtis, to produce his orient narrative at home. Either way, Hawthorne considers the East as part and parcel of his romance. Its outcome cannot be different from the “theater” that he suggested earlier in the preface. He finds in the hybrid nature of the romance the right atmosphere that “The American romancer needs” (2). And he considers the Orient an essential constituent for such production. The Orient in the romance, thus, becomes a
methodology of representation. It is an episteme in the American novelistic discourse, and the dialogism that ties it with the American scene forms a cultural limen for the American romance.

But for this limen to be formulated Hawthorne still needs to select from the American scene a topic that expresses a public concern. A phobia of some sort, which plagued the public life in the 30’s and 40’s of the 19th century, inspired his responsibility as an American fiction writer. A fear from the forceful imposition of all forms of associations and organizations on the freedom of the common citizen was a constant topic discussed in newspapers and magazines. Even journals dedicated for furthering associative organizations and policies become vocal of such fears. For instance, the Harbinger, Devoted to Social and Political Progress, wrote in 1845: “If we must comprehend the unity of the whole, before we can decide what is due to each component part, if Association only can explain Individuality; so too, on the other hand, our idea of true Association, of the collective destiny of Man, comes mainly from our knowledge of the individual” (“Individuality and Association,” 265). Eight years prior to this article, The Boston Quarterly Review, another associative American platform, published the manifesto of The Boston Association of the Friends of the Rights of Man, in which we read

Our Objects are to ascertain in detail and to determine with precision what are the rights of man and of society; to ascertain and fix the boundaries of the legitimate province of government; to keep government within its province; and lastly, to labor for such reforms in
governments, in the individual, and in society, as will secure to every
member of the community the opportunity and the means to be and to
do, what is fitted to be and to do, by the nature and faculties with which
he is endowed. ("The Boston Association of the Friends of the Rights
of Man," 200-1)

Hawthorne shared with the media their fears, and he too perceived that individuality
was facing a great peril in a tumult of parties’ conventions and election campaigns. It
is true that democracy, the corner stone of the Republic, was founded on the power of
the masses, but he, and many writers with him, now saw it falling apart by
partisanship. The nation seemed to him walking away from the simple ties of human
sympathy into the labyrinth of political eloquence. Such a gloomy sight caught
Hawthorne’s imagination, and on such a dreadful landscape he invoked his Oriental
characters. On this hybrid site, Hawthorne locates the reformatory frontier of his
America. It is a site of “becoming”, a site that makes it possible for anti-structures to
rise and future social ideas to take shape.

Hawthorne’s interest in establishing the world of his fiction on a land of
Eastern-American hybridity appears in the first works that launched his career. In his
second collection, Provincial Tales, which was written in 1829 but unfortunately
never published, we have an early example of a Hawthornian narrative engaging the
Middle East, “The Gentle Boy”⁴. In this short story, Hawthorne presents his reader

⁴ It is noteworthy to mention that at such an early stage of Hawthorne’s career, and for several years
afterwards, he was known to his readers by this tale, and editors usually referred to him as “the author
of ‘The Gentle Boy.’” Five years after the publication of this short story, in 1834, the editor of The
New-England Magazine, in his reviews of that year’s volume of The Token, and after naming all
with a historical narrative that borrows its material from instances of persecution committed against the Quakers during the 17\textsuperscript{th} Century in New England. The story’s events revolve around a tension resulting from a conflict between two fanatic sects: Quakerism and Puritanism. The moral meaning of the tale addresses human sympathy, beyond the reach of bigotry, which can be justly termed the offspring of religious fanaticism. Many critics have pointed to the significance of the moral question that this short story raises. To many contemporary readers of Hawthorne’s time, “The Gentle Boy” was read as an allegory of the political fanaticism that became epidemic in the nation. The analogy of exclusivity between religion and politics was part of the discourse that permeated the press of the period. In 1828, a year before the publication of the story, \textit{The Spirit of the Pilgrims} magazine wrote on the subject:

There is a powerful partiality in man for his own way; so powerful, that he is not satisfied with his own liberty of doing as he pleases, but desires to bring others into a \textit{conformity} to his pinions and conduct.

This predilection is often so great, as to render his own way, in his own opinion, \textit{exclusively good}; and all other ways, not only inferior, but worthless, and even pernicious. This is not, as some have pretended, a defect peculiar to religious persons and denominations, but on which is common to the race. The philosopher regards his own system of philosophy, as \textit{exclusively true}, and all other system as absurd. The authors that were included in it, he adds, “To these we may add Miss Gould, Mrs. Hale, Mrs. Sigourney, and an anonymous writer of some of the most delicate and beautiful prose ever published this side of the Atlantic, –the author of “The Gentle Boy” (331). It raises our curiosity to know why this specific tale, in which the East definitely plays a thematic role, became the author’s passport to publicity.
physician not only regards his own theories and practices, as better than those of others; but, often, he regards all others as absolutely pernicious. The politician has his own plan for promoting the national prosperity, and frequently regards every other as absolute destruction.

(169) [my emphasis]

The rhetoric of the italicized terms perfectly reflects, as I will show in the following discussion, the morality of Hawthorne’s story. They even mirror his language; but as I have pointed above, the meaning of the tale is clothed in a narrative of religious bigotry. Michael Colacurcio, in his The Province of Piety, provides us with an extensive account of the religious foreground that Hawthorne chooses for his narrative. He reads “The Gentle Boy” as Hawthorne’s dramatic confutation of a social system that existed in the Puritan age of New England, where a zealous religious sentiment bred a “pernicious” concept of “exclusivity” in both sides, the Quakers and the Puritans. Every party used rhetoric and eloquence to assert their privilege of possessing ‘right’ ‘good’ ‘happiness’ and even God. Consequently a vehement antipathy was borne, and it went out of control to result at the end with the tragic event with which the story begins. What interests Hawthorne in this intolerant milieu is a middle ground on which all the animosities could be resolved. The narrator points to its place in the narrative when he says, “[t]he two females [Dorothy and Catherine], as they held each a hand of Ilbrahim, formed a practical allegory; it was rational piety and unbridled fanaticism, contending for the empire of a young heart” (122). The meeting ground, as presented in this image, is the boy. And what gives him advantage
over all the other personages of the tale is the purity of his mind and passions. He is not yet plagued by religious enthusiasm. Although he is so much attached to his Quaker parents, we cannot explain this attachment in terms of religious zeal. We have to note that he is only a child of six years. Rather, and this is Hawthorne’s crucial point, we have to allow his instincts of natural love for his parents to do that. The laws of perception that explain to him all the social acts of his surrounding can be summed up in two rules: love and hatred. When Tobias Pearson invites the forlorn child to the warmth of his fireplace, the child says, “[m]y father was of the people whom all men hate. They have laid him under this heap of earth, and here is my home” (111). What brings Ilbrahim to the “dreary lodging,” his father’s burial, in the first place is his simple desire to be close to his father. He, to Hawthorne’s and our interest, sees the world through the innocent eyes of a child. “His mind,” the narrator explains, “was wanting in the stamina of self-support; it was a plant that would twine beautifully round something stronger than itself, but if repulsed, or torn away, it had no choice but to wither on the ground” (123). His survival is dependent on the sympathy that he receives from the people around him, regardless of their religious orientation. This explains his fast readjustment when he moves in to live with Tobias and Dorothy. They lavish him with parental love and his body and soul flourished in this sympathetic home. Ilbrahim is perceptive of the simple passions that lie at the heart of all social interactions, and his experience in Boston teaches him that he is not allowed
all forms of sympathy, even of that which people freely offer to a bereaved child. He
does not join the boys in the play grounds because he knows that they don’t include
him in the economy of affection and compassion.

The climax of the narrative starts when a boy from the settlement injures
himself from a fall. The Pearsons take him in and nurse his injury. Ilbrahim wraps the
unfortunate boy with his compassion. And from comparing “his own fate with that of
the sufferer” he concludes that “different modes of misfortune had created a sort of
relationship between them” (127), some sort of a bond of sympathy. But then comes
the climatic scene, a heart-breaking one, in which Ilbrahim gets rewarded for his
compassionate nursing of the “invalid” with a savage beating. Thinking that he has
won the sympathy of the boy whom he nursed, he decides one day to go the play
grounds to join the boys. He goes because now he has “no longer to fear a repulse
from their society” (128). But the moment he drew near, “they rushed upon the poor
Quaker child. In an instant he was the centre of a brood of baby-fiends, who lifted
sticks against him, pelted him with stones, and displayed an instinct of destruction”
(128). Ilbrahim pleads with his eyes for some help from the boy whom he loved, but
the response comes as a shock to our basic sense of human sympathy. The boy “lifted
his staff, and struck Ilbrahim on the mouth, so forcibly that the blood issued in a
stream” (128). It profoundly jolts us to see innocent love sacrificed in this brutal
fashion at the altar of religious bigotry. The contrast between the loathsome zeal of the
boys and Ilbrahim’s search for sympathy pertains directly to Hawthorne’s theme of
this tale. His narrative advocates the belief that at the bottom of the human soul there
exists a ground for sympathy that transcends all the dictates of political and religious affiliations. The individual’s, as well as the States’, goal is to protect the sanctity of this sacred spot; and any imposition, regardless of its origin, is doomed to produce numbness in society, the first step towards its demise. Hawthorne’s use of religious fervency is allegorical, as his narrator previously pointed to us, of any form of violation to human sympathy. The instinct of simple human affection of the characters in this narrative lies dormant underneath a desensitizing coating of Puritanism or Quakerism, waiting to be awakened by the innocence of a child. Colacurcio traces the source of this instinct of simple human sympathy in Hawthorne’s narrative to Roger Williams, who was “a Seeker and not a Finder of the New Jerusalem” and who warned in his sermons against the root of religious persecution, the unification of church to state (171). With this ecumenical sentiment acting as a teleological force in the story, its resolution becomes identical with its reconciliation. To affect this optimistic ending, all the characters have to go through transformation, from the gloom of religious prejudices to the light of compassionate sympathy.

The story of transformation starts with the character of Tobias Pearson, whom the narrator tells us was a zealous supporter of the Puritan cause in England, where he “had borne some share [of the civil war] as a cornet of dragoons under Cromwell” (114). His history in England earned him the offices of “a Representative to the General Court, and an approved Lieutenant in the train-bands” in Boston (115). Hawthorne does not select a common Puritan for his narrative; he chooses one with a glorious past and present. The outstanding stature which Pearson enjoys symbolizes
the coating of Puritanism now wrapping around his heart. But this diehard puritan is still susceptible to the quakes of human sympathy. The sight of Ilbrahim moaning over a recently dug grave moves his heart and urges him to aid the forlorn child. But when he learns that the boy belongs to the Quaker sect, he recoils. A moment before, he sympathetically laid his hand on Ilbrahim’s shoulder, but now he relinquishes “it as if he were touching a loathsome reptile. But he possessed a compassionate heart, which not even religious prejudice could harden into stone” (111). The conflict between culture and nature in Pearson’s mind is ended with the triumph of the latter, and he subsequently leads the boy to his hearth. Dorothy, his wife, who is “gifted with even a quicker tenderness than her husband,” hastens to tell the child “I will be your mother” (114). The motherly heart of Dorothy too proves to be stronger than the laws of her exclusive community.

Ilbrahim effects other transformations. He invokes in his mother, Catherine, the passion of maternity which has been lying dormant for a long period of time. For many years she has followed “the dictates of wild fanaticism” (121). Her life was an endless story of persecution, and “her voice had already been heard in many lands of Christendom; and she had pined in the cells of a Catholic Inquisition, before felt the lash, and lay in the dungeons of the Puritans” (124). Her enthusiasm for her Quaker sect drove her away from her duty as a mother. Her heart was “dead,” but now with the sight of her son, “it leaps as in the first moment when [she] pressed [him] to [her] bosom” (121). Her embrace to her son unveils to her what her zeal for the sect has done to her nature. “[I]t would seem” the narrator explains, “that the indulgence of
natural love had given her mind a momentary sense of its errors, and made her know that she had strayed from” the duty of motherhood (121). The sight of Catherine holding her son develops wonderful effects even on the hardheaded Puritans. A jolt of sympathetic passion quakes their hearts too that their animosity momentarily fades away. The sight “did not fail to move the sympathies of many who mistook their involuntary virtue for a sin. Sobs were audible in the female section of the house. And every man who was a father, drew his hand across his eyes” (121-2). Ironically this triumph of human nature does not live long, only a moment and then it dies away by the end of the scene.

The narrator saves the most dramatic transformation for the final scene. By the end of the story we learn that King Charles had finally issued his decree to stop the bloody persecution in the colonies. Catherine’s rejoicing, however, does not live long. She comes to the Pearsons to claim her son, but only to find him expiring in Dorothy’s arms. He manages, however, to tell his mother, “I am happy now” before he let out his last breath. “[B]y the sundering of all the human ties” Catherine’s fanaticism now becomes even wilder (138), but not for long. Ironically as time passes a new spirit of compassion prevails in the land, and the once hardhearted Puritans, who previously hanged Catharine’s husband and banished her to the wilderness, now “eye[s] her with pity rather than with wrath” (138). Finally when she dies, they “follow[ed] her, with decent sadness and tears” to her grave next to her son (138).
The moral of the story is very clear: it calls for the protection of the sanctity of most sacred seat of passion in our minds, sympathy, from any cultural invasiveness. The “practical allegory,” which our narrator previously pointed us to, of the two females, Catherine and Dorothy, holding each a hand of Ilbrahim, as if they were “contenting for the empire of a young heart,” speaks directly to this moral. But there is more for us in this “practical allegory.” The contended-over “young heart” has more than youth and innocence for its semantic structure. There is geography, there is the Middle East. Hawthorne uses it in the narrative as a paradigm of liminality that allows the gentle boy to grow into a hero of human sympathy.

The name of the main character, “Ilbrahim” (the Arabic version of Abraham), invokes the Middle East in our minds and puzzles us in our attempt to solve the mysterious existence of this Arabic name on the American landscape of the tale. Let us back up to the opening scene of the narrative. Hawthorne chooses an umbrageous setting to introduce this “outlandish” name to us. “On the evening of the autumn day,” with a clear sky, the story begins, initiating us into a zone whose “lingering twilight was made brighter by the rays of a young moon, which had now nearly reached the verge of the horizon” (109). In such a moonlit milieu, Pearson’s imagination, ours as well, becomes agile and lures him to take a far leap into a world of fancy when he starts doubting whether the moans that he has just heard came from a human being or from some chimera of the dark. But this is not a fairy tale, and Pearson brings us back to reality when he concludes that it is “the wailing of a child” (110). Soon, after he locates the boy, his assurance of reality is shaken for the second time, but this time it is
not due solely to a natural or atmospheric effect. When the child tells Pearson that “they call me Ilbrahim,” the narrator reports to us the quakes in Pearson’s mind, “[t]he pale, spiritual face, the eyes that seemed to mingle with the moonlight, the sweet, airy voice, and the outlandish name, almost made the Puritan believe, that the boy was in truth a being which had sprung up out of the grave on which he sat” [my emphasis] (111). Pearson, who is rooted in the American landscape, doubts the reality of the boy due, partly because of the hour, and partly because of his “outlandish name.” The sudden geographical burst in the provincial landscape confuses our character’s sense of reality, but after a moment of hesitation he regains his sense of reality and affirms himself that Ilbrahim is not a chimera born out of the gloom of the hour. The correlation, in effect, between the “outlandish” name and the shadowy setting emphasizes the liminal status that the narrative endows the name with. In the context of Puritans/Quakers hostility, the “outlandish” name invokes alien visions of affection and sympathy to a society bleeding from an ongoing conflict founded on zealous bigotry.

The role of the Middle East acquires still further significance in the narrative when the narrator opens a retrospective vista on the history of Catharine. Her past is summed up to us in a few lines that tell an unremitting story of persecution; in the Old Continent she “had pined in the cells of a Catholic Inquisition, before she felt the lash, and lay in the dungeons of the Puritans” (124). Every time she went on her mission in the “lands of Christendom” she was subject to pain and suffering. But her rewards were of different nature when her mission extended “to the followers of the Prophet.”
Only there, “she had received the courtesy and kindness, which all the contending sects” of the West “united to deny her” (124). She and her husband resided in Turkey for a while, where “the Sultan’s countenance was gracious to them” (124). And in that part of the Middle East, Ilbrahim was borne, and was designated with his oriental name “as a mark of gratitude for the good deeds” that the Sultan had favored them with (124). The cultural contrast between the hospitable East and antipathetic West at the very middle of the narrative puts some emphasis on the central significance of the East to the moral of the story. The semantic content of the boy’s name is born from the dialectical state it holds in the text; he is a Western boy with an Arabic name.

The significance of the oriental origin of the gentle boy’s name has not been passed unnoticed by critics. Colacurcio points to the oriental aspect of the name, but for him the significance of geography diminishes once the attention is given to its biblical significance. To Colacurcio, the significance of the name lies in its ability to invoke the image of the oldest of patriarchs, Abraham. From a biblical history vantage point, the name represents a point of origin, a point that precedes Judeo-Christian denominations. With this perspective, it becomes a site of power that is capable of marginalizing, or even pointing to the senselessness of sectarianism in all its forms. Thus the moral of story invites the reader to fall back in the history of the bible to a point of human inclusiveness. Luedtke, on the other hand is interested in linking the name to its geography. His research leads him to two history books that Hawthorne read around the time of writing the story. From Willem Sewel’s History of the Rise, Increase and Progress, of the Christian People Called Quakers, Luedtke sees a
historical source for Catharine, in Mary Fisher. Sewel’s history narrates “The circumstances of Mary Fisher’s Barbarous handling in Boston in 1656 and her respectful reception by Mahomet IV in 1660” (Luedtke, 97). And Luedtke traces the origin of the character of the little boy from Sir Paul Rycaut’s The History of the Turkish Empire from year 1623 to the Year 1677: Containing the Reigns of the Three Last Emperours, Viz. Sultan Morat or Amurat IV, Sultan Ibrahim, and Sultan Mahomet IV. His Son, the XIII. Emperour now Reigning. He finds that Hawthorne had availed himself of the history of Sultan Ibrahim and his son Sultan Mahomet in order to create his character. Also he points out that Sultan Mahomet IV, who is included in Pycaut’s title, was the same Sultan that received Mary Fisher in Sewel’s history. But Luedtke unsatisfactorily suggests that Hawthorne had dismissed the name “Mahomet” and opted for “Ilbrahim” because of the strong connotation of the first to his zealous readers. Questioning the ground on which Hawthorne chose a name for his character becomes a critical point once we learn that Sultan Ibrahim, as portrayed in Rycaut’s book, was the example of a ruthless ruler, the opposite of his son, Mahomet, whose name does not appear in the narrative but his personality does. His famous religious tolerance had definitely inspired the character of the little boy. If we dismiss the question of Hawthorne’s opting for Ilbrahim rather than Mahomet on the grounds of religious zeal, then what do we do with the many stories in which “Mahomet” was weaved with a thread of sympathy in American fiction? What do we do, for instance, with Mahomet in Peter Markoe’s The Algerine spy in Pennsylvania? a narrative that as the subtitle indicates “Letters written by a native of Algiers on the affairs of the United
States in America, from the close of the year 1783 to the meeting of the convention” comes at a very crucial point in the history of the nation and speaks directly to the morals of sympathy.

I propose that we treat the name “Ilbrahim” as a rhetorical device, a metalepsis. Rhetoricians define it as a linguistic site that “compress[es] numerous revisionary allusions, tropes, and figures” (Wilson, 58). It is the fusing and adding of one trope or figure to another. In compressing many figures of speech in a metalepsis, this rhetorical device becomes highly charged with meaning. The fusion of several figures of speech into one trope can be done diachronically or synchronically (Wilson, 61). With the first, the figure of the metalepsis connects tropes coming from different historical periods into one image; with the second, a part or an aspect of the figure becomes its main representative, like a typical metonymy. In the discussion above, Luedtke explains the diachronic dimension of the trope; the boy’s name invokes historical events and figures from the 17th century: Mary Fisher and her persecution, and the Turkish Sultan and his hospitality. But the name, as Colacurcio argues, invokes also a patriarch who is celebrated in both Judaism and Christianity. And I propose, instead of limiting the history of the name to a Judeo-Christian history, extending it to include also the Islamic version of the same history. The reasons for this extension are, first, the name keeps the Arabic form; second, since we learn from Luedtke that Hawthorne around the time of writing the story had also read Bernard Picart’s *Religious Ceremonies and Customs*, the suggestion does not sound implausible. Picart’s book spoke generously with ecumenical intentions of presenting
all religions, and which included “an appendix of the lives of Mohammed, Omar, and Ali” (Luedtke, 96). By stretching the semantic content of the name so wide that now it includes such multiplicity of significations, the name becomes a hybrid site. Hawthorne preserved, I argue, the Arabic phonetic form of his hero’s name for a purpose, which challenges the explanation that some critics had on grounds of pointless exoticism. By opting for “Ilbrahim” rather than “Abraham,” Hawthorne opens wide its semantic possibilities. The historical figure behind this name is recognized in Judeo-Christian traditions as well as in Islamic traditions. Thus although the genealogy of the name comes down to us from one single historical fact, it branches into several signifiers: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. By allowing the name to contain three different cultures that contend over its significance, the name consequently loses the definitiveness of any of its constituting significations. It is now a hybrid site, capable of invoking all of its historical parts but failing to signify precisely any. The retrospective interest of the narrative in the history of the name and its diverse cultural significations speak of Hawthorne’s moral of the tale; A moral that questions the value of culturalism in human history, wherefrom the author chooses the battle between Quakerism and Puritanism over the human heart as an example of the destructive power that culture has over us. It also works as a perfect example of the author’s poetics: with multiple layers of significations, the name becomes an exciting site for the imagination, allowing a free play among all of its possible meanings. And
with the Arabic phonetics, the name might also represent the author’s interest in shaking the roots of Western theology by allowing Arabia to claim the biblical patriarch as its own.

The Oriental connotation of the boy’s name was born from the heteroglossia of the period. Using the historical character of Abraham as a hybrid site that evokes cultural tolerance had already been established in the American tradition years before Hawthorne’s story. In summer 1755, Benjamin Franklin wrote “A Parable against Persecution.” The story is written in 15 verses, imitating the biblical language. It tells the story of Abraham who one day sees an old-aged traveler and invites him to his tent. When food is brought Abraham notices that the “stranger” does not bless God, so he inquires of him for not doing so. The traveler tells Abraham that he does “not worship the God” he spoke of. Enraged with the man’s explanation, Abraham gets up and starts beating him. At night, God reprimands Abraham for what he did to the “stranger.” Abraham instantly goes to the wilderness seeking the stranger. He now entertains his guest with his famous hospitality (Benjamin Franklin, 122-24). The oriental root of this parable is revealed when in 1781, “H.S.” in the Gentleman’s Magazine pointed to the parallel between Franklin’s parable and a passage in Jeremy Taylor’s Discourse on the Liberty of Prophesying. But the history of the story does not stop at this point; we learn from the Papers of Benjamin Franklin that Taylor’s source was the dedication by Georgius Gentius to Solomon Ibn Verga’s Historia Judaica. “Gentius in turn had taken the story of Abraham and the stranger, he said, from the Bustan of the Persian writer Sa’di, another of whose works Gentius had
already translated” (121). In 1788, Benjamin Vaughan admits that the story was taken from Gentius’s translation but clears Franklin from any intentional plagiarism. A year later, Franklin writes to his friend Vaughan, “it is in itself, on account of the importance of its moral, well worth being made known to all mankind” (122). In Franklin’s parable, although the name of Abraham keeps its English transliteration of the Hebrew form, its oriental significance cannot be overlooked because it came from the lips of the Persian poet. Abraham, therefore, becomes again a hybrid site that invokes both East and West.

If we go back to the “practical allegory,” which the narrator referred to in describing the scene of the two mothers “contending for the empire of a young heart,” we can unravel the synchronic significance of the metalepsis of the name. The boy’s story is an allegory of a fragile heart searching for sympathy to wrap itself around. When we look at the narrative from this allegorical point of view, Ilbrahim is reduced to a heart, an organ of compassion. It is his sole representative. The narrator explains to us the character of Ilbrahim as “wanting in the stamina for self-support; it was a plant that would twine beautifully round something stronger than itself” (125). And when Ilbrahim sees the injured boy, his “heart seized upon, and clung to him, from the moment that he was brought wounded into the cottage” (127). Then at the tragic encounter between Ilbrahim and the boys, he is brutally beaten. His “bodily harm was severe, but long and careful nursing accomplished his recovery; the injury done to his sensitive spirit [his heart] was more serious, though not so visible” and it was never cured (128). In the syntax of the narrative, Ilbrahim, or better now described, his
metonymic representative, his heart, is the object of a destructive act. The culturally corrupted minds of the Puritans are the subject and of the destructive action. The purging effect, at least in the reader’s mind, of Ilbrahim’s death turns him into a sacrifice. Hawthorne sacrifices his hero at the altar of culturalism to remind humanity of its pre-cultural innocence. If we marry the diachronic to the synchronic significations of the metalepsis, Ilbrahim might as well suggest a fantastic conjunction of the story of Abraham and his son, Ishmael. Ilbrahim shares with the patriarch his innocence from culturalism, and shares with the son his sacrificial story, but with Ilbrahim it is fully enacted.

After touching on the metaleptic role of the boy’s name, I can now turn to discuss how the Orient figures in his character and formulates his role in the narrative. The Orient characteristic of this little boy distinguishes him from the people of Boston. We learn from the narrative that Ilbrahim’s “natural character displayed itself with freedom,” allowing his imaginative faculty to blossom into wild fancies captured in stories. When the Pearsons receive the injured boy into their cottage, Ilbrahim takes it upon himself to entertain his guest. He:

amused him by a faculty which he had perhaps breathed in with the air of his barbaric birthplace. It was that or reciting imaginary adventures, on the spur of the moment, and apparently in inexhaustible succession. His tales were of course monstrous, disjointed, and without aim; but they were curious on account of a vein of human tenderness, which ran
through them all, and was like a sweet familiar face, encountered in the
midst of wild and unearthly scenery. (127)

In this passage, Hawthorne acknowledges the Middle Easter origin of Ilbrahim’s talent
of story-telling. To establish the difference between Ilbrahim and his guest, the
narrator soon reports to us the response that Ilbrahim’s tales found in his audience. His
guest “paid much attention to these romances, and sometimes interrupted them by
brief remarks upon the incidents, displaying shrewdness above his years, mingled with
a moral obliquity which grated very harshly against Ilbrahim’s instinctive rectitude”
(127). The contrast between the two boys points to the crux of the narrative: the
anguish of the creative mind in a social context, where every flight of imagination is
checked with twisted sense of moralism. If the boy, however, does not find a
sympathetic heart among the people of Boston, he can find one in his author. This
moment of sympathy between the author and his hero is highly charged with
significance because of the manifold dialectics that control its structure. In addition to
pointing to the tension between the gifted boy and his oblique moralist guest, we sense
a tension between Ilbrahim and Hawthorne, the writer of the story. His narrator
engages at one point in the narrative in an open criticism of the boy’s skills of story-
telling. He describes Ilbrahim’s production as “monstrous, disjointed, and without
aim”; and we are left to conclude Hawthorne excels in his refined knowledge of the art
of story telling. Notwithstanding its biased judgment, this interesting piece of criticism
is not void of high regards lavished on the Oriental art. It insinuates that in the history
of story-telling the East is its point of origin. Hawthorne might be paying homage to
the East, following the step of the first Western narrative, Cervantes’s *Don Quixote of the Mancha*⁵. Finally he finds what he was looking for in an Arabic script written by Cid Hamete Benegeli (58).

In Hawthorne’s fiction, the Middle East shapes the primal thoughts and feelings of his characters. It figures like an archetype in their psyches. In “The Old Manse,” for instance, what fills his narrator’s heart with pleasure and contentment is a sentiment, which we can safely identify as the author’s, molded beautifully after an Eastern cultural character. In the library, books, regardless of their subjects, “[have] a charm in [his] eyes, similar to what scraps of manuscript possess, for the good Mussulman” (1138). And the reverence that he holds for them springs from the possibility that any “may contain the ‘Open Sesame’ –the spell to disclose treasures, hidden in some unsuspected cave of Truth” (1138). This marvelous combination of divinity with earthly sensation speaks of a unique Middle Eastern cultural-print. The entwinement of “the good Mussulman” with a trope from *The Arabian Nights,* or in other words of ‘Truth’ with ‘pleasure’ reflects a specific precept in Sufi poetics: the metaphorical identification of the Divine with lovers and wine.

And when the narrator is in the outdoors, he still does not escape the charm of the Orient. There, while riding the calm waters of the Concord with Ellery Channing once, and gliding through its beautiful sights, the narrator becomes fascinated by the

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⁵ In this book, when the story reaches the fighting scene between Discaine and Don Quixote, the narrator is appalled to find out that the narrative stops at this point. Disturbed to find the “history stopped and remained dismembered,” he starts searching for its completion in the city (56). Finally he finds what he was looking for in an Arabic script written by Cid Hamete Benegeli (58). Cervantes implicitly acknowledges the Middle East as his primary source of inspiration in the art of narration. Without this recognition, his story would remain “dismembered.” Similarly, Hawthorne recognizes, even in his biased piece of criticism, that the root of his art is Oriental.
reflection of the scene on the calm water and ponders the ontology of the reflection and its origin. But soon he is convinced to think that no decision can be made on which “was the most real—the picture, or the original?” He falls back on identifying, as Sufis do, the self with the Self. At that ecstatic moment he makes a spiritual comment turning the scene into a mystical expression of his companion’s inner thoughts. To this effect he says, “had it been a thought more wild, I could have fancied that this river had strayed forth out of the rich scenery of my companion’s inner world; only the vegetation along its banks should then have an Oriental character” (1139). The alteration in the scene that the narrator imagines evokes the Arabesque. But at the same time it speaks of the narrator’s perception of the scene at the moment. This mystical analogy by which the narrator ended his expression creates out of the substance of the river and its Arabesque edges a cycle of continuous metamorphosis. It is the never ending of the numinous experience in which the mystic oscillates between the physics and the metaphysics of the universe. Out of all his creative writings, Hawthorne in this section of “The Old Manse,” comes very closely to Emerson’s mystical discourse. But for my investigation of Hawthorne’s art of story telling I find this mystical Arabesque to translate, as I will show in the following pages, into Hawthorne’s richest narrative technique.

This kind of visual art has been adopted in literature by the romantics since the eighteenth century. “[T]he term indicates works,” G. R. Thompson explains, “characterized by intricate narrative design and self-reflexivity: a frame within a frame within a frame—as in the narratives and narrative perspectives of the Book of the One
"Thousand and One Nights" (113). In defining the Arabesque as a visual art, Ernst Kühnel writes, “The Arabesque was born from the idea of a leafy stem, but just as branches turn into unreal waves and spirals, so do leaves furcated into forms that do not occur in nature” (5). Historians date the introduction of this art into the Islamic culture to the 10th century. The original Hellenistic form of this art included animated figures, such as birds, animals and people; however, when the Muslim artists adopted it as their suitable means for expression, they had to exclude everything animated and leave the entwined curvilinear patterns. This reduction was mandated by their religion. Muslim scholars cite the authority of Mohammad (SAAWA), the prophet of the religion, for their prohibition of any reproduction of figures that live. The following two traditions are most quoted:

1- عن ابن عمر رضي الله عنهما: أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قال: "إن الذين يصنعون هذه الصور يعذبون يوم القيامة، يقال لهم أحيو ما خلقتم.

2- عن ابن مسعود رضي الله قال: سمعت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قال: "إن أشد الناس عداياً يوم القيامة المصورون."

The first of these traditions reads, “narrated by Ibn Omar, God be pleased with both, that the messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said, ‘those who produce these portraits will, in the day of resurrection, be tormented and asked to inspire life in what they created’” (Alnawayi, 496). The second reads, “narrated by ibn Mas’od God be pleased with him that he heard the messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, saying, ‘surely those with the greatest share of agony in the day of resurrection are the portrayers’” (Albogha,662). With these clear admonishments, the artists of Islam
regulated and institutionalized what they inherited from the Hellenistic architecture and designs into an art of their own. Thus, their means of expression became involved with absolute abstraction and was limited exclusively to lines and geometry. But from this apparently little space, the Muslim artisans created enough room to include even infinity. Kühnel recognizes the Arabesque as a system of thought that permeates all forms of Arabic arts. In Arabic music for instance, he finds the Arabesque to be in control, regulating its cadence up and down. Looking at the Arabesque as a deep structure in the grammar of Oriental arts allows us to investigate its presence in all forms of arts. We could find in Goethe, who captured the Middles Eastern poetics, a good example of witnessing the Arabesque transformed into another mode of expression. With this understanding of the Arabesque, as a deep grammatical structure, capable of surfacing in various forms of arts, Kühnel reads the following excerpt from Goethe’s Wester-Eastern Divan:

That thou canst never end, doth make thee great,
And that thou ne’er beginnest, is thy fate.
Thy song is beginning evermore the same;
And what the middle bringeth, but contains
What was at first, and what at last remains.

Kühnel asks, “[d]o not these lines, in which Goethe expresses the deeper sense of Near Eastern poetry with so much empathy, also portray that which in the last resort characterizes the nature of the arabesque?” (10). An answer to this question could be
found in Annemarie Schimmel’s works, who argues that in Sufi poetics there is another manifestation of the Arabesque. She writes:

Indeed, one aspect of mystical language in Sufism that should never be overlooked is the tendency of the Arabs to play with words. The structure of the Arabic language—built upon triliteral roots—lends itself to the developing of innumerable word forms following almost mathematical rules. It might be likened to the structure of an Arabesque that grows out of a simple geometric pattern into complicated multiangled stars, or out of a flower motif into intricate lacework.

Building on Genette’s discussion of repetition in narrative, Sandra Naddaff studies the Arabesque as a narrative technique in the Arabian Nights. She writes

The foundation of the arabesque, then, is the repeat unit, the horizontal and vertical mirroring of the design which ensures its spatial perpetuation. This repetition of design necessarily occurs in a spatially restricted region, which concretely influences its outer limits; but the very rhythm that derives from this spatially determined repeated movement, the visual rhythm that characterizes the arabesque, curiously counters its spatial movement. In much the same way that narrative repetition impedes the temporally determined progress of a tale from beginning to end, the repetition of pattern in arabesque stalls, for all intents and purposes, the spatial movement of its design by
turning it back on itself, by making it repeat its earlier self. What seems
to be the progress of a design in space is, in fact, only the repetition, the
replaying of an initially determined pattern. What seems to be the end
of a design is, in fact, only another manifestation of its beginning, of a
point that, given the movement of repetition, could potentially antecede
its beginning. (112)

From the blurred borderline between beginning and end, the Arabesque
“creates a kind of spatial infinity” (Ibid, 112). Because of its abstractness, the
Arabesque does not derive its meaning from referents that exist outside its
spatial limits. Every instance of repetition is connected in dialectical
relationship to the other instances that appear in the narrative, and their
meaning is ever shifting because they all lack points of reference.

In The Blithedale Romance, we can consider the repetition of the “The Veiled
Lady” trope as an instance of the Arabesque in Hawthorne’s poetics. It appears four
times creating an intricate pattern of self reflexivity, and consequently assuming a
central position in the tale. “[w]hen Blithedale was finished but unnamed he
[Hawthorne] considered ‘The Veiled Lady’ as a possible title for the book but ruled
that” out (Brodhead, 36). The reason for his disregarding this title was, as he wrote in
a letter to E.P. Whipple, because he did not “wish to give prominence to that feature of
the Romance” (536). When we look at his wish and try to understand it from the
Arabesque perspective we can produce a new reading of the book. In a typical
Arabesque design, the dynamic of recurring lines prevent any one of them from
claiming prominence over the others. The trope appears four times in the book; on each occasion, every single instance of its recurrence acquires additional meaning to the extent that its cycle of repetition becomes so illusive.

Miles Coverdale, the narrator in this book, from the very beginning, places the motif of the Veiled Lady in its central position. He opens the narrative with, “The evening before my departure for Blithedale, I was returning to my bachelor-apartments, after attending the wonderful exhibition of the Veiled Lady.” He decides not to let the mention of the Veiled Lady go unnoticed so he presents his readers with an account of its cultural significance. We learn that it is a mesmerism show that features an exhibitor and a female medium, whose role is to communicate with the world beyond. But Coverdale regrets that this show is not as perfect as it used to be, when around fifteen years ago, he explains, “all the arts of mysterious arrangement, of picturesque disposition, and artistically contrasted light and shade, were made available in order to set the apparent miracle in the strongest attitude of opposition to ordinary facts” (7). The contrariety between the world of “ordinary facts” and the world of the “Veiled Lady” establishes this show as a liminal experience. But most importantly it establishes this trope as a controlling liminal motif in the narrative. We learn also from Coverdale that the lady in question is “enshrouded within the misty drapery of the veil. It was white, with somewhat of a subdued silver sheen, like the sunny side of a cloud; and falling over the wearer, from head to foot, was supposed to insulate her from the material world” (7,8). On the shimmering surface of the veil, the exhibitor weaves dreams for his audience, and his medium’s words and acts inspire
their imagination. To this show of hyper-imagination came an audience whose imagination was rife with reformative thoughts. The narrative’s main setting is the Blithedale Farm, which is the site of a social experiment that aims at reforming the conditions of the social order. Metaphorically expressed, Coverdale describes the mission of his fellow reformers as their dream to breathe “Air, that had not been spoken into words of falsehood, formality, and error, like all the air of the dusky city” (13). They had set their feet “for the reformation of the world.” But this is not the only instance of reformation that the story chooses for its historical context. We learn that Zenobia is a very enthusiastic advocate of women’s rights. Also we learn that mesmerism indicated “the birth of a new science,” and that Hollingsworth’s sole goal was to reform the penal system. The book recreates the American scene as sizzling with reformative ideas. And only in this kind of environment can the Veiled Lady have its very eager audience. The historical moment that Hawthorne’s book portrays represents an extremely fertile soil for all dreams. It is a historical moment of metamorphosis, of materializing possibilities. From such historical context the trope of the Veiled Lady gathers its momentum.

But, as I have pointed out earlier, we have to pick the thread of the Veiled Lady’s story in the book from the perspective of the Arabesque design. In the middle of the book, Zenobia weaves the story of the Veiled Lady for her audience of reformers. She turns the story into a tale of thralldom, curiosity, love, and betrayal. But what makes Zenobia’s “The Silver Veil” evocative of the Arabesque, and thus intriguing to the reader, is its allusions to Priscilla’s history. While Zenobia’s
audience is oblivious to the double meaning of her tale, Priscilla along with the readers recognizes its duplicity. Zenobia starts by a flashback technique pointing to the disappearance of the Veiled Lady from stages in the city, but at the same time suggesting the appearance of Priscilla among the reformers. The hero of Zenobia’s story is Theodore, and he had set his intention, after a wage, to solve the mystery of the Veiled Lady. He somehow manages to get into her private room, but she discovers his presence. She learns about his intention and tells him that he has the choice of either kissing her on the veil and becoming hers forever, or lifting the veil and losing her forever. Not heeding her warning, he plays his pragmatic role to the letter and eventually loses the beautiful lady under the veil. “The Veiled Lady,” Zenobia continues, “vanished, a maiden, pale and shadowy, rose up amid a knot of visionary people, who were seeking for the better life” (Hawthorne, 106). The adjectives of this statement throw us back to the moment when Hollingsworth brought Priscilla to Blithedale farm. Priscilla, then, had a pale and shadowy figure, and she came to live among visionary reformers. The fusion between ‘reality’ and fiction in Zenobia’s tale becomes more sensational to us, when Zenobia includes herself in the narrative through the character of “a lady.” Her meeting with Westervelt in the chapter before is replayed to us as “One morning, the lady was wandering in the woods, and there met her a figure in an Oriental robe, with a dark beard, and holding in his hand a silvery veil” (106). The intensity of our interest rises still further when the Magician warns the lady against a maiden who recently came among them. “[T]he fates,” the Magician admonishes, “have ordained it, that, whether by her own will, or no, this stranger is
your deadliest enemy. In love, in worldly fortune, in all your pursuit of happiness, she is doomed to fling a blight over your prospects” (107). To protect her fortunes, the lady conspires with the Magician and brings the maiden back within the bounds of the veil, captive to him. Zenobia finishes her tale by throwing a piece of gauze on Priscilla at the same moment the lady in the story throws the veil on the maiden and conjures the Magician to take her away. The correspondence between the story of the Veiled Lady and the history of Priscilla resembles the entwining lines of the Arabesque. From the spaces created by these interlacing lines of history and story, we get to know more about the past and future of Priscilla. The gaps that are left by the narrative are filled up with suggestions born from the effect of the Arabesque. Towards the end of the book, Priscilla’s past revisits her, and she becomes once again captive to Westervelt’s power.

At this point of the narrative, Coverdale is back in the city. He decides to attend the Veiled Lady exhibition before he returns to Blithedale. We surmise that his visit to the show was for a purpose. The few days that he spent in the city led to events that filled his mind with questions and at the same time helped him solve some of their mysteries. In an apartment facing the window of his room at the hotel, he sees Zenobia, Priscilla, and Westervelt. The following incident shows Coverdale that Zenobia is no more the daringly frank character that he met at Blithedale. Zenobia becomes aware of her exposure to Coverdale’s eyes, so she “administered one of those pitiless rebukes which a woman always has at hand, ready for an offence (and which she seldom spares, on due occasion), by letting down a white linen curtain between the
festoon of the damask ones” (147). The change in her manners towards him sets a chain reaction in Coverdale’s imagination. To solve this mystery he pays Zenobia a visit, wherefrom we gather that he suspects that Zenobia was plotting to get rid of Priscilla by letting her back into the hands of Westervelt. The implications of many little acts and words, in the chapters before this scene, create in our mind a sense of competition, at least in Zenobia’s mind, between Priscilla and her over Hollingsworth’s heart. Now, following his visit to Zenobia’s apartments and his getting even more suspicious of Zenobia’s intention regarding Priscilla, his curiosity leads him back to Mr. Moodie in an effort to learn more about the history of Priscilla, since this mysterious character was her guardian. His goal, with the help of a warm bottle of red wine, is accomplished successfully. He learns from his meeting with Mr. Moodie that Zenobia and Priscilla are half sisters, and he anticipates that this knowledge of the history of the family will certainly shake the foundations of Zenobia’s financial/social security. Pondering many questions that this revelation entailed, he ventures to the city hall, where the show of the Veiled Lady is held. There, he notices, seated not far from him, Hollingsworth. The show starts, and Westervelt demonstrates to his audience his magical power over his medium’s spirit. In a testimony to this power, he declares that there does not “exist the moral inducement, apart from [his] own behest, that could persuade her to lift the silvery veil, or arise out of the chair!” (187). But to his “discomposure, just as he spoke these words, the Veiled Lady arose. There was a mysterious tremor that shook the magic veil” (187).
The reason for this unexpected act had nothing to do with the world of spirits; it was simply an answer to Hollingsworth’s summons: “Come!” he commanded her “You are Safe!” (187).

Before I discuss the next instance of the Veiled Lady, I want to comment on Coverdale’s language in the passage just referred to. Before Priscilla walks away from Westervelt on the stage, Hollingsworth has already “mounted the platform, and now stood gazing at the figure [of Priscilla], with intentness that brought the whole power of his great, stern, yet tender soul, into his glance” (187). Under the powerful influence of such a look, Priscilla, to the discomfort of Westervelt, rises from the chair. The language of the text switches the roles of the characters. In this scene, the real mesmerist is Hollingsworth. He seems to possess a hypnotic look from which Priscilla cannot shake herself. Such power is genuine and more effective than the fake white veil of Westervelt. But the history of Hollingsworth’s hypnotic power over Priscilla started a long time before this scene. “Within that encircling veil,” Coverdale notes “though an evil hand had flung it over her, there was as deep a seclusion as if this forsaken girl had, all the while, been sitting under the shadow of Eliot’s pulpit, in the Blithedale woods, at the feet of him who now summoned her to the shelter of his arms” (187-8). Coverdale’s language interweaves the character of Hollingsworth around that of the magician, making an interesting shift in their roles that the one becomes a semantic site for the other. Hawthorne stresses the hypnotic power of Hollingsworth through several scenes in the book. The subdued spirit that Zenobia shows after Hollingsworth’s attack on women’s modern cries for more social
recognition bewilders Coverdale. “Hollingsworth through necromancy of his horrible injustices,” Coverdale fretfully observes “seemed to have brought them both [Zenobia and Priscilla] to his feet!” (115). Later on, when Hollingsworth turns his charm on Coverdale to make of him a proselyte for his cause of criminal reformation, he says “Had I but touched his extended hand, Hollingsworth’s magnetism would perhaps have penetrated me with his own perception of all these matters” (124). Like two lines of Arabesque, the mesmerism of Westervelt and Hollingsworth’s magnetism derive their significance from the spaces created between them. However, whatever meaning is created from the analogy between the two characters, such meaning does not operate by means of definitive signification. In the Arabesque, a line throws a shadow of meaning on the other lines, but does not totally replace them. Similarly, Westervelt’s career and past throw a shadow on Hollingsworth’s practices with Zenobia and Priscilla, but they do not replace them. The narrative does not transform Hollingsworth into Westervelt.

Now if we go back to the beginning of the book, we will find that at that early stage of the narrative another thread of the Veiled Lady motif was developing. This time it spins its thread around Zenobia. When Mr. Moodie asks Coverdale whether he knows Zenobia, the latter answers that he does not know her personally but he expected the pleasure the next day. “Zenobia, by-the-by” he continues in a way of commenting, “as I suppose you know, is merely her public name, a sort of a mask in which she comes before the world, retaining all the privileges of privacy—a contrivance, in short, like the white drapery of the Veiled Lady, only a little more
transparent” (8). The analogy between Zenobia’s veil and that of the Veiled Lady suggests two lines of interpretation. We can read the analogy as insinuating Zenobia’s vulnerability to influences greater than her, and consequently her final destruction. In his personal life, Hawthorne did not favor mesmerism with a positive opinion. In 1841, ten years before the publication of the book, in a letter to his wife, previous to which she indicated her inclination to try this art, he wrote, “my spirit is moved to talk to thee to day about these magnetic miracles, and to beseech thee to take no part in them. I am unwilling that a power should be exercised on thee, of which we know neither the origin nor the consequence, and the phenomena of which seem rather calculated to bewilder us, than to teach us any truths about the present or future state of being” (Letters, 242). Also, we can see the analogy between Zenobia’s name and the veil of the mysterious lady as pointing to the work of the imagination on the surface of the veil. While the audience of the Veiled Lady weave solution for their questions on the surface of their mysterious lady’s veil, the fans of Zenobia, for her enthusiastic advocacy of women’s rights, weave their dreams of improving their cause on the majestic name of their heroine. Or we can further see an analogy between the magical powers of the Veiled Lady with those of Zenobia. In one of his delirious utterances, while he was feverishly sick in bed, Coverdale makes a similar statement. “Zenobia is an enchantress!” whispers he to Hollingsworth. Next, he adds, “She is a sister of the Veiled Lady!”(42).
Another meaning for the Arabesque in literature, Thompson explains, “refers to essays, plays, stories and other narratives characterized by a Middle-Eastern and North African Islamic milieu and ambience” (113). Luedtke describes *The Blithedale Romance* as “The richest [among Hawthorne’s longer works] in Oriental characteristics and themes” (198). The most conspicuous among them is Zenobia. The name comes down from the ancient history of Syria. She was the queen of Palmyra from A.D. 267-272. After the assassination of her husband Odainat, she assumed the throne. In her brief reign, the military power of her city-state thrived so much that she conquered Egypt, Syria, and most of Asia Minor in a short period of time. After her victory in Asia Minor, she declared her independence from the Roman Empire, an act that was promptly interpreted as a direct threat to the Empire. After a series of battles with Aurelian, the Roman Emperor then, she finally fell captive. As for how her life ended, historians disagree, but some say that she committed suicide following the model of her predecessor the queen of Egypt, Cleopatra. In *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne molded his character after the imperial pomp of the Oriental queen, which was essential to him in order to create a tragic effect in his heroine’s final fall. Hawthorne’s character follows the outlines of her namesake’s life. She too was a “queen warrior” fighting, in this case, for women’s rights. She too fought a battle with a dominant power presented in a male figure, and in this case Aurelian is cast as Hollingsworth and his domain as the social system that molds the domesticity of the female subject. With this twist, the battle field is moved to the inner sphere of Zenobia’s heart and mind, and the goals of the battle are recast as woman’s dream of
equality. In the book, Hawthorne shows a thematic interest in calling to our mind the historical Zenobia even before we have the chance to get to know his character. Upon seeing Zenobia for the first time, Coverdale gives voice to the impression that she made on him. He repeats the notice that he made earlier to Mr. Moodie that ‘Zenobia’ was not her name but “her magazine-signature.” Then he adds: “it accorded well with something imperial which her friends attributed to this lady’s figure and deportment” (13). Her friends took the signature and used it jocularly in their social meetings. Zenobia did not disapprove the gesture; on the contrary, she “encouraged its constant use, which in fact, was thus far appropriate, that our Zenobia –however humble looked her philosophy –had as much native pride as any queen would have known what to do with” (13). The comment definitely intimates, through the use of “imperial” and “queen,” our historical figure. Later on in the book, when Coverdale comes back to Blithedale, he finds the residents of the farm entertaining themselves with a masque play. Part of their merriment was a performance in which Zenobia enacted the trial scene of the historical queen before her conqueror, Aurelian. For this show “Zenobia (whose part among the masquers, as may be supposed, was no inferior one) appeared in a costume of fanciful magnificence, with her jeweled flower as the central ornament of what resembled a leafy crown or coronet. She represented the Oriental princess, by whose name we were accustomed to know her” (196). The Oriental queen is conquered in this scene and so is Hawthorne’s heroine. The sight of her devastation after she confronts Hollingsworth invokes in Coverdale’s imagination the sight of the
conquered queen of Palmyra. “[S]he took the jeweled flower out of her hair; and it struck me” Coverdale observes “as the act of a queen, when worsted in a combat, discrowning herself” (208).

But Zenobia’s ties with the Middle East are not limited to her name; her appearance too is shaped after the East. We learn from Coverdale that she has “dark, glossy” hair that charmed him; but what fascinated him most about her hair was a single flower, “an outlandish flower” (41), “of rare beauty,” and “an exotic” origins (15). This flower “was...indicative of the pride and pomp, which had a luxuriant growth in Zenobia’s character” (15). Its oriental origin can be proved by its effect. “[T]he flower in her hair is a talisman”; Coverdale observes “If you were to snatch it away, she would vanish, or be transformed into something else” (42). The flower dislocates Zenobia from her New England environment and turns her momentarily into an Eastern figure. Charming and friendly as she might look to the visionary members of her Utopian society, she still looked alien to everyone else. Coverdale imputes her uninhibited manners

to Zenobia’s noble courage, conscious of no harm, and scorning the petty restraints which take the life and color out of other women’s conversation. There is another peculiarity about her. We seldom meet with women, now-a-days, and in this country, who impress us as being women at all; their sex fades away and goes for nothing, in ordinary intercourse. Not so with Zenobia. (17)
Hawthorne underscores Zenobia’s rhetorical significance to the American reader by alienating her from her environment and tying her with the Middle East through history and looks. Her name has become a metalepsis that uses one episode from the history of the Middle East to insinuate current social concerns in American society. Because of her rhetorical function, it becomes impossible to decide, in a white-and-black simplicity, on her geography. She is a hybrid of Eastern and Western traditions, a mixture that defies analysis. The presence of the Orient in Hawthorne’s heroine is essential for her reformative role. With her outlandish characteristics, she creates a liminal site for the American audience, and promises a new future for woman’s social status.

The last Oriental aspect in the book is the exhibitor of the Veiled Lady. His career and costumes calls to mind the *Arabian Nights*. While the lady in Zenobia’s story was wandering in the woods, “there met her a figure in an Oriental robe, with a dark beard, and holding in his hand a silvery veil” (106). This figure, based on the correspondence between the story of “The Silver Veil” and Priscilla’s history, as I have explained earlier, translates, in the book, into the character of Westervelt. When, in the same tale of Zenobia, the lady called “Arise, Magician!” and stamped the earth with her foot, “uprose the bearded man in the Oriental robes –the beautiful!” (108). The scene undoubtedly emulates what we might find in almost every story of Scheherazade. The ties that connect this character to the *Nights* become more apparent when we read Coverdale’s description of Westervelt’s appearance on stage in the end of the book, “there appeared a bearded personage in Oriental robes, looking like one
of the enchanters of the Arabian Nights” (184). The miracles that his medium does, he proclaims to his spectators, reach far and wide. Were he to will it, he tells his audience, “she could hear the desert-wind sweeping over the sands, as far off as Arabia,” or “the rustle of a leaf in an East Indian forest” (187). During the early years of the first half of the 19th century, the Arabian Nights was a best selling book in America. The book was published repeatedly. Hawthorne read the first volume, Luedtke tells us, as early as 1819 (51-2). However, what critical point that Hawthorne wants to make lies in the intentional twist that he made in his Arabian Nights character. Coverdale notices that “He came upon the platform from a side-door – saluted the spectators, not with a salaam, but a bow” [my emphasis] (184). Hawthorne knows that the greeting the audience expects from an exhibitor dressed in this kind of costume should be an oriental one. But Westervelt does not come with any. Instead he bows silently. Certainly, there is a statement that Hawthorne wants to make by his character’s dysphasic move. His mute greeting brings out his linguistic disability. He is not a story-teller like Zenobia or Hawthorne. He is a humbug scientist. The persona in which he appears on the stage is an amputated one. His missing “salaam,” the pass for his audience to the East, is cut off from his character. Everything else about him, his appearance and his art, is from the Middle East, except that missing “salaam.” By his bow, he has become a disjointed utterance. A phrase, but never a sentence. He does not have a story to tell because he lacks that linguistic ability. He errs unpardonably by delivering the world of the Arabian Nights to his audience in the form of facts and sciences. The Arabian Nights builds its world on fancy. It invites its audience to leave
the world of reality behind and explore possibilities created by the power of imagination. It represents, as the narrator of “The Gentle Boy” insinuates, “a vein of human tenderness” (Hawthorne, Tales and Sketches, 127). Scheherazade uses “there was once” as an introductory phrase that facilitates the transition between the real and fancy, keeping each at bay, whereas Westervelt purposefully imposes the fancy on the real. Westervelt’s creation, when evaluated from the perspective of the romancer, as defined by Hawthorne in the preface, fails to form a middle ground between the fairy-land and reality. Therefore, we cannot consider it as a liminal site for social reform. It is a humbug.

Before I close my comments on the Arabesque in The Blithedale Romance, I want to point to a little thought that crossed Coverdale’s mind. When he lost hope in Blithedale he found himself plunging deep down in some emotional crisis. I “stood on other terms than before,” he tells us “not only with Hollingsworth, but with Zenobia and Priscilla” (128). The state in which he now finds himself bewilders him, and he doesn’t seem to succeed in solving its mystery. In tormenting despair, he shares his crisis with us by saying: “[W]hen you try to analyze it seems to lose its very existence, and resolve itself into a sickly humor of your own” (128). The intensity of this crisis pushes him to look for novelty in his life, so he thinks of traveling, among other places, “up the Nile,” and he considers “offering [him]self a volunteer on the Exploring Expedition –of taking a ramble of years, no matter in what direction, and coming back on the other side of the world” (129). To purge his soul and mind from that “sickly humor” he thinks of visiting the East. The thought, it seems, when we look
at other similar instances in American texts of the period, speaks of an established
tradition in 19th century America. For example, when Lord Warburton gets turned
down by Isabel, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, he leaves with a broken heart; but when he
meets her in Italy afterwards he looks better and tells her that he has “been in Turkey
and Asia Minor” (Henry James, 243). Similarly, when Mr. Sydney’s mind writhes
under the exhausted landscape of his America, in “Desert Sands,” he tells Eos, his
wife, ”I shall go to the East” (Spofford, 201). This medicinal aspect of the East shows
also in the biographies of Herman Melville and Ralph Waldo Emerson. They too
sought the East to revive their burnt out souls and minds. In 1856, Melville set on a
five months journey in which he visited Constantinople, Cairo, Jerusalem (Melville,
513-5). Emerson’s journey to Egypt came late in his life –right after his home was
destroyed by a fire in 1872.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, we have another example of Hawthorne’s longer work
whose structure includes orientalia, but it is less populated with the East and its
symbols than the former works. The story starts when on “one idle and rainy day” the
fortune of the narrator of the introductory sketch leads him to that desolate second
story in the custom house. He finds piles of records of the past that open to him a vista
to the history of Salem. The magic of the past intoxicates his imagination, and with
some efforts he tries to “raise up from these dry bones an image of the old town’s
brighter aspect, when India was a new region, and only Salem knew the way thither”
(106). The narrator rightly measures the glory of his city with its knowledge of the
East. And now for the narrative to accomplish a successful recovery of the past, it will
have to borrow from the East symbols to raise its structure. He accomplishes this by,
first, letting his “steeple-crowned progenitor” know that he is “A writer of
storybooks.” The Middle Eastern significance of this declaration can be explained
further by visiting an earlier work by Hawthorne. As early as 1832, he wrote “The
Seven Vagabonds,” in which the narrator tells his companions, who were heading to
Stamford Camp-meeting, that he will join them as a story teller. He explains to them
that his plan is “to imitate the story tellers of whom Oriental travellers have told us,
and become an itinerant novelist” (152). The persona finds in the heritage of the East
a model for his career. But what raises this aspiration to a more significant point is the
following statement which he makes: “‘Either this’ said I, ‘is my vocation, or I have
been born in vain.’” Behind this life commitment to story telling lies so much of the
author’s life commitment. “As early as 1821” Luedtke points, “in a letter to his mother
concerning his preparation for college, Hawthorne systematically disregarded the
ministry, law, and medicine before he raised the idea of ‘becoming an Author, and
relying for support upon my pen’”(109). The thematic conjunction between traveling
and telling stories appears five years later. In “Fragments from the Journal of a
Solitary Man,” the speaker quotes from the diary of his friend Oberon a statement that
speaks directly of Hawthorne’s fascination with the East and the stories spun around
it. “The time has been,” Oberon regretfully remembers, “when I meant to visit every
region on the earth, except the poles and central Africa. I had a strange longing to see
the Pyramids. To Persia and Arabia, and all the gorgeous East, I owed a pilgrimage for
the sake of their magic tales” (489). Like Oberon, (but unlike his friends: Emerson, Melville, and Curtis) Hawthorne did not visit the East. However, he chose an oriental career and pledged to refine its ‘primitive’ form.

The story of story-telling in the Middle East is always told incomplete. Orientalists make of the Arabian Nights, which dates back to the 10th century, a starting event in the history of this art. But the story goes further back to the 6th century. In Islamic literature, the Koran is considered a founding institution in the art of story telling. The book has a significant portion of its structure built on stories in prose. And what makes it an interesting case for narratology is that many of these stories are told several times, each time in a different way. The book is a showcase for an ancient appreciation to the role that motifs, tones, and themes play in altering the form and meaning of the narrative. The book grants the art of narrative a primary place in its system of education. At the end of chapter 12, entitled Joseph, the last verse reads:

"لقد كان في قصصهم عبرة لأولي الألباب ما كان حديثًا يُفتقر إلى تفصيل الذي بين يديه ويفترين كل شيء وهو ورامة لقوم يؤمنون."

In rough translation, the verse in English reads, “There is, in their6 stories, instruction for men endued with understanding. It is not a tale invented, but a confirmation of what went before it,- a detailed exposition of all things, and a guide and a mercy to any such as believe.” The critical terms around which this text weaves its commandment are ‘stories’ and ‘instruction.’ Although the translation does a good job handing us the gist of the Arabic text, it still fails, like any translation, to reproduce the

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6 This pronoun refers back to the prophets: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Jesus etc.
full effect of the original. In etymology, every term has a history of its own, which makes it impossible for expert translators to produce complete translation in their works. And here we are faced with the same problem. In order to lessen the reductive effect, I will have to elaborate on the etymology of the two terms. The text uses “ﻗﺼﺼﻬﻢ” [qasasihim] which translates as “stories”, and “ﻋﺒﺮة” [‘ibra] which is rendered as “instruction.” If we take out from the first term the possessive pronoun “him’ which stands for the masculine-plural-third person, we are left with “ﻗﺼﺺ” [qasas], the plural of “ﻗﺼﻪ” [qisah] which in our translation means ‘a story’. The lexical root is the verb “ﻗﺼﺺ” [qasa], which means ‘to trace the trail of something,’ and when taken metaphorically it also means ‘to tell a story,’ as if in telling a story the narrator traces the trails of events and characters to a point. The grammatical description of the second term is a noun inflected from the verb “ﻋﺒﺮ” whose lexical root means ‘to cross’, as in crossing a river. From this physical act a metaphoric crossing can be derived such as ‘to die’. Or on an abstract level, the term can metaphorically mean ‘to interpret,’ because in interpretation the interpreter takes us from one side of perception to another. And still on a higher level of abstraction, the word is metonymically linked with the outcome of crossing rather than the crossing itself, thus it signifies ‘to command/commend somebody to something’, where ‘something’ is the resulting lesson of a story. With this etymological explanation, we can now add to the translation cited above that the text also suggests that the story, as a method, facilitates the crossing from one side of understanding to another, and it commends the reader to the findings.
The genre of story in the Islamic heritage preserved its theological place until the 9th century, when Caliph Haroun Al Rashid and after him his son Caliph Al Ma’mun opened the door wide for translation. The outcome was massively thriving activities in secular sciences. In this atmosphere, we witness the birth of prose romance. Al Asma’i, a prominent 9th century scholar and a leading philologist in Al Basra grammar school, wrote *Antara Ibn Shaddad*, a hundred years before the appearance of the *Arabian Nights* in Islamic culture. The book was translated in the first decade of the 19th century, and was available, according to Kesselring’s research, to Hawthorne. The *Arabian Nights* had the lead over *Antara* in getting to European readership when in the first decade of the 18th century it was translated into French by the orientalist, Antoine Galland, inaugurating, as Raymond Shawb phrased it, the Oriental Renaissance in Europe. *The Arabian Nights* was immediately translated into English, making a great chapter in English literature. And this book too is included in Kesselring’s *Hawthorne’s Reading*. Many editions followed the French translation, and the book was transformed into other genres, drama and poetry. “After its publication by H. & P. Rice of Philadelphia in 1794, *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainment* became a best seller in America,” Luedtke comments on the significance of the book in the American literary scene. The book also inspired a troop of romantic writers both in Europe and America, who tried to imitate in their production the oriental tales, such as Byron’s “The Bride of Abydos,” Voltaire’s *Zadig*, Moore’s *Lalla Rookh*, Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan,” Goethe’s *The Easter-Western Divan*, Sir Walter Scott’s *The Talisman*, Whashington Irving’s *Alhambra*,
and *The Conquest of Granada*, Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Thousand and Second Tale of Scheherezade,” Lucretia Maria Davidson’s “Amir Khan”, Robert Southey’s *Thallaba the Destroyer* and *The Curse of Kehama*, Samuel Johnson’s *Rasselas*, and Beckford’s *The History of the Caliph Vathek*, in addition to innumerable “Oriental tales” in the magazines of the day. In such literary environment Hawthorne learned the significance of the East in the art of story telling. And from this understanding the speaker of “The Custom House” delivers to us his sketch. He is a story-teller.

After his apology to his readers for letting them into another personal narrative of his, he advocates his narratorial position by noting that he does not and will never expose his ‘naked’ self to his readers. He pledges to “still keep the inmost Me behind its veil” (87). The metaphor certainly borrows its significance from the East. The unveiling of the inmost self is as sacrilegious to his story telling career as the unveiling of the harem in the East. It seems that our narrator shares a destiny with the Veiled Lady; he too has to stand on a public stage hiding behind the drapery of the veil. The veil that he desires to keep hanging over his self is produced by transforming incidents from his life through the umbrageous zone of the romance into a biography of a fictional persona. The produced self is entwined irrevocably with the characters of his fiction like the entwining lines of the Arabesque. The narrator turns instances of analogies and repetitions into his primary means to charade his veiled self without dropping the veil.
In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne spins another Arabesque narrative. The dramatic repetition that links the narrator, Surveyor Jonathon Pue, and Hester Prynne together casts the book into the Arabesque motif. To pick up the thread of this design, we will have to trace instances of analogies among them. The most obvious connection that links the narrator with Mr. Pue is their office. They both worked as surveyors at the custom house of Salem. And if we look closer into their characters we will find that both have a liking for antiquity. We learn that our narrator becomes ecstatic when he finds piles of records on the second story of the Custom House. “It has often been a matter of regret with me,” he writes, “for, going back, perhaps, to the days of the Protectorate, those papers must have contained many references to forgotten or remembered men, and to antique customs, which would have affected me with the same pleasure as when I used to pick up Indian arrow-heads in the field near Old Manse” (106). His love for the past is shared with Mr. Pue who “devoted some of his many hours to researches as a local antiquarian, and other inquisitions of a similar nature” (107). With their archeological pastimes comes their love for writing. Both reverenced the sanctity of solitude and found in it an escape from the pestering public life of the office. I have already pointed to the agonizing inertia through which the narrator went. It tormented him to find the embers of his imagination are put out. About the old surveyor, our narrator says, “being little molested, I suppose, at that early day, with business pertaining to his office –he seems to have devoted some of his leisure hours” to researching and writing about he past (107). They both feared the destructive effect that their public life could have on their talents. And interestingly,
they both found in writing Hester Prynne’s history a means to protect what they had of
talent from disappearing. Both of them communicated their interest in turning, from
“the realm of the quiet,” their writings to the public. “With his own ghostly voice” the
old surveyor committed to the narrator the script and letter of Hester, and exhorted
him “to bring his mould and moth-eaten lucubrations before the public” (109). The
narrator accepted the charge, and he in turn, offers his book to us as “the Posthumous
Papers of a Decapitated Surveyor” (117).

With all these instances of resemblance between the narrator and his
predecessor, the sketch still leaves a space for dialectic tension between them. The
tension is significant because it helps the author build up his critique of the Republic
and expose the destructive effects of its politics on her citizens. When the narrator
conjures the spirit of the “ancient surveyor” we cannot fail to notice the majestic air in
which he does his presentation. “In his port,” the narrator describes his predecessor,
“was the dignity of one who had borne his Majesty’s commission, and who was
therefore illuminated by a ray of the splendor that shone so dazzlingly about the
throne. Who unlike, alas! The hang-dog look of a republican official, who, as a servant
of the people, feels himself less than the least, and below the lowest, of his masters”
(109). We can sense in this dramatic contrast Hawthorne’s bitterness, which rankled in
his mind after his removal from the post. The ironic nostalgia for the tyrant king is
inspired by the senseless beheading of the narrator by the players in the democratic
process of the republic. His removal was not a private event; it stirred a whirl in the
media as is evident in the following word from *The literary Union* published in June 23, 1849:

The removal of this gentleman [Hawthorne] from a small office which he held in his own town, is giving rise to many comments from the Press; – the Democrats, of course, severely censuring the act, and the Whigs apologizing.

The facts are scarcely known. The plea urged by one journal, that Mr. Hawthorne’s *reputation* as a writer, cannot have reached the ears of the government, is surely unsound; no public man *should* be thus ignorant; no intelligent man, *can* be. If the government knew Mr. Hawthorne to be a politician, or incapable, the act is just; if political opinion, alone, is made a cause, it is as plainly wrong; while, if it results from ignorance, we hope amends may be made by the tender of a still better office, to one that ablest, and most amiable and deserving of our literary men; one, too, whose bread is wearily earned with his pen. (185)

We can easily feel the sympathetic rhetoric of this journal with Hawthorne’s crisis, and we can easily notice the agreement between the defense this paper offers for Hawthorne’s removal and the one he included in his sketch. At least there is a shared belief that Hawthorne was looked at primarily as a writer, not a politician, and based on this kind of social persona, his removal was considered by all an unjust act. Hawthorne’s metaphor of the guillotine does not only victimize him, but also points to
the publicity that his removal stirred. “Meanwhile,” the narrator explains, “the press had taken my affairs, and kept me, for a week or two, careering through the public prints, in my decapitated state” (116). He was publicly stigmatized by the Whigs as a removed surveyor, and obviously hated their apathetic attitude. From turning the removal into a public affair, we can pick the first thread that connects Hester to the narrator of “The Custom House.”

Both Hester and the narrator suffer from the apathy of those in power, and consequently both share their antipathy against cold judgments imposed on them by those same representatives of power. The narrator does not hide his resentment of his Puritan ancestors, and the rhetoric of the sketch stretches it to include, or even equate them with the Whigs. Furthermore, there is a resemblance between the metaphorical beheading of the narrator and the metaphorical branding of Hester with the A on the scaffold in front of the townspeople’s eyes. The narrator suffers from a split personality: all the while his public self is “careering through the public prints, in [its] decapitated state,” he is glad to have “[t]he real human being, all this time, with his head safely on his shoulders” (116). Hester too suffers from a similar split, and she too metaphorically loses her head. While she is walking to the scaffold, the narrator takes the chance to say a few words about the significance of this penal machine in the colony. It was deemed “as effectual an agent in the promotion of good citizenship as ever was the guillotine among the terrorists of France” (124-5). This analogy transforms the scene into a beheading event, in which Hester loses her individuality and becomes a decapitated self, a sinner. When the narrator, however, presents us with
“Another View of Hester,” we learn that “[t]he scarlet letter had not done its office” (205). The blade of the guillotine did not reach her private self. In her secret hour, Hester thinks of changing the system, and for a start, “the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew” (205). The final analogy that ties the narrator with Hester is art. I will treat Hester’s art more extensively later on, but for now I can say that they both build from art a bridge that links them with their audiences through a bond of sympathy, and they both include in their arts a subtle criticism of their societies.

Both Hester’s embroidered letter and Hawthorne’s text share the East as their source of origin. As for Hawthorne, I have already discussed the connection between his career as a story teller and the East. As for Hester, the narrator points out to us, in “Hester at Her Needle,” that “[s]he had in her nature a rich, voluptuous, Oriental characteristic—a taste for the gorgeously beautiful, which, save in the exquisite productions of her needle, found nothing else, in all the possibilities of her life, to exercise itself upon” (145). Not only does the Arabesque occupy the two dimensions of the cloth on which the letter resided, it also creates a third dimension to the narrative. It generates, on its own, a chain of analogies, the first of which we see in her littler girl, Pearl. In making her daughter’s dress, Hester “had allowed the gorgeous tendencies of her imagination their full play; arraying her in a crimson velvet tunic, of a peculiar cut, abundantly embroidered with fantasies and flourishes of gold thread” (158). The fantastic play of the Arabesque that we are used to seeing on Hester’s letter we now recognize on her daughter’s dress. “It was the scarlet letter in another form:
the scarlet letter endowed with life” (158). We see it also unfurled in the sky as a symbol of Arthur Dimmesdale’s plagued conscience. It seems that the letter extends its range of significance so wide that it includes every one of the main characters. It also reaches Chillingworth, and brings out the marvels of his Oriental art. The mastery of alchemy which Chillingworth manifests in his treatment of Dimmesdale reminds us of the professor in “Rappaccini’s Daughter.” When Baglioni smells the strange odor coming from his friend Giovanni, he hastens to admonish him to keep away from the professor’s daughter. “[W]ere I to fancy any kind odor” Baglioni warns his friend, “it would be that of some vile apothecary drug, wherewith my fingers are likely enough to be imbued. Our worshipful friend Rappaccini, as I have heard tinctures his medicaments with odors richer than those of Araby” (Hawthorne, Tales and Sketches, 997). The comparison of Araby’s knowledge of alchemy to Rappaccini’s endorses Hawthorne’s connection between the Middle East and alchemy, and endows the latter with oriental mysticism. Like Rappaccini and Aylmer in “The Birth-mark,” Chillingworth belongs to Hawthorne’s host of oriental alchemists. This skilled alchemist becomes haunted by the “A” of Hester’s partner. From the moment he finds Hester on the scaffold without a partner, he tells the townsman, “[I]t irks me, nevertheless, that the partner of her iniquity should not, at least, stand on the scaffold by her side. But he will be known! –he will be known! –he will be known!” (131). Finding the missing letter becomes his quest, and later on, after a lot of concocting and probing, Roger Chillingworth finds what he was looking for. One day, while Dimmesdale is asleep at his desk, he parts his vestment, and we are left to envision
that he saw the “A” branded on his enemy’s chest (185). At the end of story, the same brand is exposed to the eyes of the townspeople. Such frequency of recurrence of the letter and such a wide scope of significance entitle it to become an episteme, shaping the knowledge of its society. No one can escape the power of the “A,” and even governor Bellingham metonymically falls under its spell. At his house, which “glittered and sparkled [with embedded fragments of colored glass] as if diamonds befitted Aladdin’s palace,” (such an ironic comparison exposes the hypocrisy of the head of the “sumptuary laws”) the armor breast piece foretells Hester of the governor’s prejudice. There, on the convex smooth surface of the armor, “the scarlet letter was represented in exaggerated and gigantic proportions, so as to be greatly the most prominent feature of her [Hester] appearance. In truth, she seemed hidden behind it” (161). At the end of the book, the letter recurs for the last time, “ON A FIELD, SABLE, THE LETTER A, GULES,” summing up the aftermath of a battle between the dark moralism of a Puritan culture and the oriental imagination of a cast away woman (272).

*The Scarlet Letter* is a historical novel, for which Hawthorne selects from the days of the early colonies a context for its events. It tells the story of a fallen woman, Hester Prynne, in the city of Boston, in the first half of 17th century, around the time of John Winthrop. The story revolves around the circulation of sympathy, and its structure consists in a tension resulting from the conflict between what is public and what is private in the three main characters. They all go through transformations that affect their share of sympathy. The book opens and ends with Hester being the
cynosure of all eyes; but while in the beginning she is denied the sympathy of her fellow Puritans, at the end she is lavished with it. The transformation in Hester’s part of the tale happens objectively, namely in the way the members of her community perceive her; her fellow Puritans now interprets the “A” to mean “Able” and “Angel.” But with the other main characters, the transformation occurs in the minds of the characters: Dimmesdale stops his hypocrisy and Chillingworth ends his malicious vengeance. If we look, however, at the cultural argument that the book is making, we might read it as Hawthorne’s advocacy of the citizens’ right in the Republic to enjoy a private sphere of their own. In this respect, the book tells the story of a civil rights fight in which Hester struggles to assert her own identity, or as Hawthorne names it “individuality,” in a socio-political organism that denies her this simple right. The letter which Hester carries on her breast obliterates any individualistic value that she might have, and grants her, in term of public sphere, its one single meaning, adulteress, as her only space on the social map of her community. The law of the colony imposed on her one, and only one, form of identification, the letter “A.” Such law does not allow her to claim any social space other than what is designated by the “A.” For the socio-political argument that Hawthorne makes in his narrative, he evidently borrows from the discourse of “The Declaration of Independence” to define Hester’s social crisis. Jefferson, in The Declaration wrote, “[w]e hold these truths to be self evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent and inalienable rights” (The Norton Anthology of American Literature, 728).
Hawthorne’s evocation of what The Declaration called for speaks of a national concern. For more than ten years, prior to the writing of *The Scarlet Letter*, journals and newspapers repeatedly circulated articles warning the citizens against the tyrannical grip that social, religious and political organization have over the will of the individual. Perhaps it is fair to say that parties and politics constituted the most imminent threat to the freedom of the republic. The social scene of the period was forcefully impacted by whatsoever opinion that was produced by the two dominant political parties, the Whigs and the Democrats. The election became a political game attracting powerful men in the nation to lucrative offices. Orville Dewey was among the whistle blowers, who reminded the public with the constitutional protection that the individual enjoys in the republic. In 1838, he wrote “Freedom of Opinion” challenging “the universal despotism of public opinion in this country” with “individual freedom” (381). Hester too fights for her “inalienable rights,” to occupy a social space other than what is given to her, a space pertaining to her as a human being capable of sympathizing and being sympathized with. I share my view on Hester with some reviewers who commented on her character right after its introduction to the public readership. In 1850, *Holden’s Dollar Magazine* wrote, “[t]he outward cannot conquer her [Hester],” then, “[i]n taking her sin, and the odium, and the penalty of it, on her own isolated, absolute individuality, we have an impressive example of mental and moral prowess” (342). Ironically, the narrator relates the “enmity and passion” which Pearl showed towards the Puritan community to what she received “by inalienable right, out of Hester’s heart” of abhorrence (Hawthorne, 152). By the end
of the book, Hester succeeds in creating a public space of her own, a space founded on the imprints of her individuality. Her success represents the only optimistic aspect in the book.

Hester Prynne shares social oppression with Mr. Pue and the narrator of “The Custom House.” Each one of them is inflicted with some sort of societal subjugation imposed by the laws of theology, monarchy, and government, respectively. The imposition of their milieu on their private spheres establishes a structural link among them. Hester, like Mr. Pue and the narrator, falls victim to a forceful intrusion of society into her private life. But what distinguishes Hester from the other two characters is her ethnographical mark. She is Oriental to her core; and if the narrator has a liking for an Eastern tradition, that is story telling; Hester’s passions, mind and soul are molded after the East. The art that she parades in front of the eyes of her society is Oriental. Her badge of shame is clothed with the Arabesque; even her Pearl is an Oriental show. With Hester, it is not a simple disposition of some sort that ties her with the East. With due attention to this character, we will see that history shapes the essence of her identity and links her irrevocably with the East. We will see also that it is through the East she launches her battle to assert her own individuality.

It is noteworthy that before the story begins the narrator describes to us the gate from which Hester is going to be delivered, or borne, into the world of the book. The narrator tells us that a rose bush grew “on one side of the portal” of the prison (119). This setting element holds a valuable significance to the characterization of Hester for two reasons: first because it is “rooted almost at the threshold” between the
darkness of the prison and the light of the market place (119). We can interpret this rose bush as the narrative’s symbolic representation of Hester. The betwixt and between location of the rose bush intimates to us the umbrageous nature of Hester’s character. It establishes liminality as its only theater and promises a story of transformation. Furthermore, it “has…kept alive in history” the reforming predecessors of Hester (119). The secret for its survival in the harsh milieu of Boston could be explained by its mysterious origin. “[T]here is fair authority for believing,” the narrator postulates, “it had sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Ann Hutchinson, as she entered the prison-door” (119-20). Obviously Hawthorne makes the connection between the heroine of his book and the historical Ann Hutchinson. However, when we go back to the author’s sketch, “Mrs. Hutchinson,” which was published in 1830, twenty-one years before the publication of *The Scarlet Letter*, we will notice that the sketch of this historical female was painted on an Arabian background. In this sketch, Hawthorne launches his critique of the changes that were sweeping the publishing business in America. With a skeptical eye, he looks at the intrusion of the “ink-stained Amazons” onto a sphere that he believes to be designated naturally and exclusively for men. He is not pleased with the rise of writers among the female population, and he is worried that with such “false liberty” American women would no longer be “a domestic race” (*Tales and Sketches*, 18). He fears what the press would do to them, and his apocalyptic vision warns us that with “ill-judged incitements” American females “shall have turned their hearts away from the fireside” (18). With these misgivings galling his heart, he questions the morality that could
validate “the display of woman’s naked mind to the gaze of the world” (19). It seems no matter which angle the author takes, the scene of changes in the press keeps plaguing his mind with images of evil outcomes. As a last resort, he admonishes every female who “feels the impulse of genius like a command of Heaven within her” that she “should be aware that she is relinquishing a part of the loveliness of her sex” (19). However if she insists on following the voice of genius in her, then she should “obey the inward voice with sorrowing reluctance, like the Arabian maid who bewailed the gift of Prophecy” (19). The analogy that this simile proposes invokes an image of female martyrdom at the altar of fame and publicity. Hawthorne scholarship does not provide us with a satisfactory answer as to the identity of the “Arabian maiden” which his simile refers to; however, judging from the context of the simile and the words that are used in its structure, we can speculate that Hawthorne might have meant to refer to Rabi’a Aladaway. She is a late 8th century sufi poetess. What furthers this speculation is the publication of “The Sayings of Rabia” in The Child’s Friend and Family Magazine in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1847. The author of this short article, R M Milnes, introduces her as:

a holy woman, who lived in the second century of the Hegira [8th c. AD]. Her sayings and thoughts are collected by many devotional Arabic writers; they are a remarkable development of a purely Christian mystical spirit so early in the history of Islam; the pantheistic mysticism of Sufism soon followed, and obtained a signal victory over
the bare positive theism of the Prophet, clothing the heartless doctrine
with a radiant vesture of imagination.”

The amount of information that we get from this little introduction is definitely not insignificant. From it, we learn that Rabia was a gifted “holy woman,” and that her inspiration changed the face of the prophetic heritage in Islam, an impact that lifts her up to the state of a prophetess. And finally, we lean that she had a devoted audience. But we learn more from her biographers who tells us that after the death of her parents, she was sold, at the age of 11, as a slave in Basra. Her devotional life to Islamic spirituality in later years made her notorious in Iraq. Many marriage offers were made to her but she turned them all down preferring to live her life in celibacy. Although she became a social icon during her life – doubtless her spiritual poetry played a momentous role in her rise – she still limited her public life to few disciples. She is known to us now for a precept of mystic love that she always harped upon in her poetry. Contrary to orthodox Islamic teachings of reward and punishment as grounds for motivation, she sings love as the only ground for her duty-bound prayers and rites.

The Arabian maiden’s disregard, or “reluctance,” as Hawthorne called it, for publicity and fame after she proved to her contemporaries her mastery of spiritual poetry points directly to his admonishment to American female writers. The way this Eastern poetess handled her public life becomes a trope in Hawthorne’s literature. Through her rise from slavery to sainthood, Hester Prynne’s public persona is figured out in The Scarlet Letter. In the story, Hester too rises up from social contempt to “a
species of general regard” (201). With the selfless services she offered to the members of her community, “the world’s heavy hand had so ordained her [a Sister of Mercy], when neither the world nor she looked forward to this result” (202). She refused to get lured by the opening arms of the public because she knew that in their embrace she would meet her destruction. She never left the sphere of her privacy even when she was surrounded by the people, and “if they were resolute to accost her, she laid her finger on the scarlet letter, and passed on” (202). The reward for her refusal to break free from her private sphere was another, but, pleasant refusal on the part of her community: “many people refused to interpret the scarlet letter A by its original signification. They said that it meant Able” (202). Similar to rise in the life of the Arabian maiden, the “general regard” that Hester’s community favored her with raised her to the highest social esteem, sainthood. This explains to us why when she comes back from the Old Continent, she “resume[s], – of her own free will. For not the sternest magistrate of that iron period would have imposed it, – resume[s] the symbol of which we have related so dark a tale” (271). And she never lets the letter leave her breast again. Furthermore, we learn from the life of the Arabian maiden that her master was the first to recognize her sainthood, likewise with Hester, the people “who spoke thus [the black scandal of bygone years], the scarlet letter had the effect of the cross on a nun’s bosom. It imparted to the wearer a kind of sacredness” (203). The ultimate point which Hester Prynne reaches in her seclusion is mythology. People in Boston started weaving Legends around the mystery of the wearer of the scarlet letter that stories of miracles decked the sacred sphere of her private world.
The Eastern character of Hester Prynne is not founded solely on the simile that Hawthorne created in his sketch of Ann Hutchinson. There is another thread in the fabric of Hester’s character that ties her with the East even more intimately than her historical model. To grasp the full significance of the Oriental vein in Hester’s character, we need to investigate in our analysis her career as a seamstress, and find the complete meaning of “who” and “what” her needle work involved. When Hester Prynne gets reintroduced into her Puritan community in Boston, after she pays her dues to society for her sin of adultery, she chooses embroidery for a career to earn her living. She proves to be a successful seamstress, and soon the products of her needle become rife among her community. Ironically the art of this fallen woman is seen on all forms of power, political and religious. It was “seen on the ruff of the Governor; military men wore on their scarfs, and the minister on his band” (145). The irony lies not in the circulation of her art among the highest in rank in her society, but in the effect that it made on the semiotics of Puritanism, shaking it to its very foundations. The “ruff,” “scarfs,” and “band” are literally emblems of the Puritan community. They stand for the theology on which Puritanism is established. Hawthorne in his narrative captures the arid spirit of Puritan theology by paying attention to its fundamental principle of exclusivity. The rhetoric of Governor Bellingham and Reverend John Wilson, in the book, reminds us of “Simile simili gaudet or like will to like,” John Winthrop’s philosophical description of the ligament of love to his follow Puritans on board the Arabella (Myra Jehlen, 155). In explaining his maxim, Winthrop adds:
For it is things which are carved with disafecction to each other, the ground of it is from dissimilitude or [blank] arising from the contrary of different nature of the things themselves. Soe the ground of love is an apprehension of some resemblance in the things loved to that which affects it. This is the cause why the Lord loves the Creature, soe farre as it hath any of his Image in it. 

(Ibid, 155-56)

Based on this policy of distribution of sympathy among the first settlers of Massachusetts, any deviation from the theological mainstream, in thoughts or actions, was met with exclusion, which more often than not was practiced in the form of execution. The Scarlet Letter provides us with enough information to conclude that Hester lived before the half-way covenant controversy started in the colonies. First, we learn from the narrator that the events of the book take place “some fifteen or twenty years after the settlement of the town” (Hawthorne, 119). Second, we learn from the conversation between the townsman and Chillingworth, that prior to her move to the New Continent Hester “was the wife of a certain learned man, English by birth, but who had long dwelt in Amsterdam, whence, some good time agone, he was minded to cross over and cast in his lot with us of the Massachusetts. To this purpose, he sent his wife before him” (Hawthorne, 130). This description matches the two removals, to Amsterdam and then to the New Continent, of which William Bradford talked in his Of Plymouth Plantation (Myra Jehlen, 178-81). At this early period in the history of the colonies, Hester lived in Boston, and under
such an exclusive theology she was cast away for her sin. But as I have pointed above, she became a successful seamstress leaving her artistic imprints on the symbols of her communities. The irony of the display of her art on Puritan sites of social power undermines the exclusivity on which these emblems are founded. What we have here is a beautifully worked out example of a divorce between the signified and the signifier. With Hester’s thread the “ruff,” “scarfs,” and “band” become hybrid sites of signification, and consequently their premise of ‘pure’ Puritanism is subtly destroyed.

The second point that needs to be investigated is ‘what’ Hester Prynne produced with her needle. In chapter “Hester at Her Needle,” the narrator comments on her art, telling us that “she had in her nature a rich, voluptuous, Oriental characteristic – a taste for the gorgeously beautiful, which, save in the exquisite productions of her needle, found nothing else, in all the possibilities of her life, to exercise itself upon” (Ibid, 145). Critics recognize this aspect of Hester’s Oriental character, and Luedtke even goes a step further to point to “the cultural and archetypal dialect of Puritan pastor and his ‘Oriental’ Other” (183). Luedtke correctly reads the book as a drama of dialectics between Puritanism and Hester Prynne, emphasizing the fact that her difference is established on Eastern grounds. He recognizes, from the moment she walks from the prison gate, the East as her archetype of origin.

The young woman was tall, with a figure of perfect elegance, on a large scale. She had dark and abundant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam, and a face which, besides being beautiful from
regularity of feature and *richness of complexion*, had the impressiveness belonging to a marked brow of *deep black eyes*. [my italics] (Hawthorne, 123)

The racial profile of Hester Prynne, as we can see from this description, points directly to her difference from the domestic race of Boston. And Luedtke rightly identifies this racial otherness with the East, referring to the narrator’s formerly cited comment. But we cannot restrict the dialectics of the book to some physical characteristics in this female protagonist. Her Orientalism is not a personal affair, and its final analysis is not just the “outlandishness” of the character. But if we look at the discourse of Hawthorne’s novel as a heteroglossia of several layers of social dialects, of which Orientalism constitutes one, we can open the text to its fullest scope of signification. The outlandish element in her embroidery does not stand merely for meaningless mimicry of Eastern artistic forms, it was, as our narrator defines it, “a mode of expressing, and therefore soothing, the passion of her life” (Ibid, 145). Hester uses the Arabesque in her needle works as a language to express her individual crisis of isolation in a Puritan community. Thus the Arabesque expression has become to Hester her only platform from which she can fight back the hegemony of her imposing culture, and only through the Arabesque does she now carve her new identity of difference. Her methodology for campaigning against the exclusive policy of her community is purely linguistic. Hester understands the function of the letter as a sign, and she knows that the letter “A,” as handed to her from the magistrates of Boston, stands for one meaning, ‘adultery’. But she also knows, like her author, that by
transforming the letter into a liminal zone it becomes pregnant with multiple meanings. With the help of the Arabesque, she turns her letter into a threshold, continually changing its meaning. On the face of the Puritan law, which forced her to give “up her individuality,” her needle and her Arabesque products reinstated her individuality anew. If the law branded her with a symbol for adultery, her art adulterated that law, blurring out its defining lines. Such a significant transformation in the significance of a judiciary act is certainly indebted to the power of the Arabesque. From the moment she walked from prison, the effect of what her fancy worked on the law did not escape the crowd. She had made a special dress for this occasion, “[b]ut the point which drew all the eyes,” our narrator observes, “and, as it were, *transfigured* the wearer, –so that both men and women, who had been familiarly acquainted with Hester Prynne, were now impressed as if they beheld for the first time, –was that Scarlet Letter, *so fantastically* embroidered and illuminated upon her bosom” [my emphasis] (Ibid, 123). The sentence breaks up repeatedly with dashes and commas, communicating to us the effect that the transforming letter had on its audience. The predicate “was that Scarlet Letter” does not come, as is expected, immediately after its subject “the point” but it is extensively delayed. The subject is separated from its predicate with a subjunctive clause, a sentence whose deleted subject refers forwards to the “Scarlet Letter”, and a complex sentence. The syntax of this lengthy sentence figuratively represents a space of transformation bounded by the subject and the predicate, “the point was the Scarlet Letter.” The first element of these interrupting clauses, the verb ‘to be” in the subjunctive mode, provides the means for
the magical “transfiguration” of Hester, whom “men and women” already knew. The letter has become a borderline for a state of metamorphosis, and we have to credit Hester for her knowledge of the power of her Arabian design. She knew that her fantastic imprints on the law would result with such transfiguration. The transformed/transforming letter, the narrator explains, “had the effect of a spell” (Ibid, 123).

Such was the power of the Arabesque, but this power was not borne out of vacuum. The Oriental discourse in the book borrows from the knowledge that was rife in Hawthorne’s time of the Middle East. As I have pointed earlier, an Oriental Renaissance, to use Raymond Shwab’s designation, was in full force in Europe. The culture of this intellectual movement was founded on myriad of publications, of which we can point to Antoine Galland’s massive translation of The Arabian Nights and the popularity that this book gained in Europe and America, the reports coming from missions and expeditions to the Middle East, the deciphering of the Hieroglyphic by Jean-Francois Champollion, the translations of Persian and Arabic texts by William Jones and Abraham Hyancinthe Anquetil-Duperron, the production of Oriental texts by the men of letters of the 18th-19th centuries such as Byron, Moore, Scott, Goethe, and last but not least the founding of dozens of Oriental Societies – the American Oriental Society was established ten years before the publication of The Scarlet Letter – and their overwhelming interest in the translation and circulation of Oriental texts.
The fact that such an interest in the Middle East did not exist in the time period of Hester’s life makes Hester’s Oriental art an interesting instance of anachronism in Hawthorne’s historical novel.
From the earliest days of his career as a storyteller, Poe showed continual interest in the culture of the Middle East. From “Metzengerstein,” his first published short story of a rivalry between “the Saracen Berlifitzing” and his opponent Metzengerstein, or from the Oriental title of his first collection, we witness the earliest indications that the culture of this specific geography would play a significant role in shaping his fiction (Poe, Selected Writings, 85). On the 4th of May of 1833, he sent a letter to Joseph T. and his son Edwin Buckingham, the owners of the newly founded New-England Magazine, requesting them to consider a collection of his short stories for publication (Letters I, 53). The title that he chose for this collection was Eleven Tales of the Arabesque. The modifying genitive case that connects his proposed “Eleven Tales” with “the Arabesque” points to the generative nature that Middle Eastern culture assumes in his art. The Arabesque is the engendering force that gave birth to his fiction. It, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, figures in Poe’s fiction as both a narrative technique and as a site of Otherness; but this Otherness, at the same time, reflects so much of American domesticity: It allows the author to express his

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1 Arab, or the nomadic people who lived in the Levant, between Syria and Arabia. Poe sometimes uses this term as synonymous with arabesque. In “Ligeia,” the narrator describes the “huge censer” as “Saracenic in pattern.”
views on the state of national literature as it fell increasingly under the influence of forms of regional rhetoric. In the first part of this chapter, I will discuss the role of the Arabesque in Poe’s fiction: I will start by pointing to the author’s persistent interest in including the Arabesque in his first three proposed collections. Then, from his contemporary criticism, I will refer to German romanticism and use Schlegel’s discussion of the Arabesque as a reference to explain its works in Poe’s fiction. In the second part, I will discuss the author’s uses of the Arabesque as a means to express his views on national questions.

The stories of *Eleven Tales of the Arabesque*, Poe explains to his prospective publishers, “are supposed to be read at table by eleven members of a literary club, and are *followed* by the remarks of the company upon each. These remarks are intended as *burlesque upon criticism*” (Ibid). Poe’s short description of his proposed work is very important because it contains all the clues that will help explain the relationship between his art of storytelling and the Arabesque. Poe’s explanation points to two elements that mark his work: alternation and irony. But these two elements take part in the formation of the Oriental design. In the Arabesque, there is alternation in the continuous curving of its stem or line, and there is irony in the aspiration of its lines to express the infinite by means of their finitude. In narrative as well, the Arabesque operates under the concepts of alternation and irony; in fact it will help us to think of the Arabesque in linguistic terms, as a narrative structure that informs the syntax and semantics of Poe’s fiction. Syntactically, the Arabesque can be seen in the alternating
order of narration, whether in the collection’s formation as Poe explains in his letter, or in one single work, as we will see in “Ligeia,” while semantically it can be seen in the irony.

Still, Poe’s “burlesque” has another aspect than its relation with the Arabesque. It provides us a brief idea of the office that he envisioned for art and artists. It implies that subversion and challenging rules reside at the heart of his art. With his “burlesque” he intends to undermine the authority of “criticism.” Even his caricature of Pierre Bon Bon\(^1\) stands for a poet/philosopher whose goal is to “upset a theory” (*Poetry and Tales*, 166). This anarchistic vision speaks of the Romantic spirit that always inspired the Poe’s fiction. By romantic I mean the tendency to revolt against the angular reality of the Enlightenment. Instead of the Newtonian understanding of a mechanical world, the cosmos is now described as a growing organism that thrives in multiplicities. In this world of diversity, Poe’s primary interest is to spin a narrative from its dialectics. I borrow this concept of romanticism from Morse Peckham’s “Toward a Theory of Romanticism,” in which he defines romanticism by three basic concepts: organicism, dynamism and diversitarianism. Of the last he says, “Perfection ceases to be a positive value. Imperfection becomes a positive value. Since the world is changing and growing, there is consequently a positive and radical intrusion of novelty, the fundamental character of the universe itself changes. We have a universe of emergents”(11). Poe’s “burlesque” is his novel “intrusion” onto “criticism.” In the frame of his proposed collection, its significance can be seen in the two-fold dialogical relationship that it has with every tale antecedent to it: in alternation and irony. This

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\(^1\) The hero in Poe’s “Bon-Bon.”
dialectic nature of Poe’s work reflects another concept of romanticism which is expressed in the following aphorism by Peckham: “Relations, not entities, are the object of contemplation and study” (10) in the romantic text. Likewise, in Poe’s Arabesque we do not look for entities but for relationships: symmetry, parallelism, contrast, etc. Therefore we can argue that the arabesque and romanticism in Poe’s fiction are interrelated.

Poe might have borrowed the idea of framing his collection in the format of a comic literary club from Washington Irving’s *Salmagundi*, which was published in 1807-8. Irving spins the satires of his book around the American social and political scene. Through the letters² of his Middle Eastern character Mustapha, he expresses his misgivings about “logocracy” and its ability to produce practical solutions at moments of national emergencies. While Poe’s work might resemble Irving’s in the fact that both use the Middle East to spin their satires of the American scene, it still distinguishes itself by the fact that it is not an epistolary narrative; second, it grants the Arabesque a central role in its construction.

For a specimen from this collection, Poe sends his prospective publishers “Epimanes,” which later was renamed “Four Beasts in One –The Homo Cameleopard.” This tale is a faithful representation of the ambitious title of his collection. It is an Oriental tale set in Antioch, an ancient city located to the north of

² There is a great possibility that Irving fashioned the Oriental segment of his *Salmagundi* after Montesquieu’s *Lettres Persanes*, which was published in 1721. Like the French author before him, Irving uses epistles as a form for his narrative; and like his predecessor, he makes the local scene the subject of the Oriental character’s criticism. Irving wrote Salmagundi during Jefferson’s presidency, when the Republic was still debating the best avenue to take in solving its crisis with the regencies of North Africa. From this text, it seems that Irving wanted to see the Republic invested with more central power.
modern Latakia on the Syrian coast. Poe’s narrator tells us that it was “the residence of
the Syrian monarchy” (Poetry and Tales, 181). The tale is an imaginative journey in
time to the pre-Christian days of this city. “Let us suppose, gentle reader,” the narrator
starts, “that it is now the year of the world three thousand eight hundred and thirty”
(Ibid). After describing the setting of the ancient city, the narrator then describes a
parade that was then taking place to celebrate the king’s victory. The show runs amuck
when the domesticated beasts turn after their king to devour him, but with the good
use of his legs he marvelously escapes. But the tale is not about the East and its
ancient history; it is about Poe’s America. He had opted for this tale because he
believed that its political satire on the national scene would sound palatable to his
prospective publishers. From the dialogues between past and present, here (United
States) and there (Syria), and “Other” and “self” Poe casts his criticism of American
domestic politics. The tale should be read as Poe’s satirical recreation of President
Andrew Jackson’s campaign and inauguration for the second term of his presidency.
In the tale the narrator talks about the “tumultuous mob of idiots and madmen”
celebrating the triumph of “Antiochus the Illustrious, King of Syria” (Ibid, 186).
Jackson was satirically called by his opponents ‘King Jackson I.’ In the parade, or
what now should be termed the presidential campaign, the narrator sees “Some few
are mountebanks, Others more particularly belong to the race of philosophers. The
greatest portion, however –those especially who belabor the populace with clubs –are
the principal courtiers of the palace, executing, as in duty bound, some laudable
comicality of the king’s” (Ibid, 183). Right below these different classes of the
political order, “the town is swarming with wild beasts,” or the ‘mob’ (Ibid). Some of these beasts are leashed, but to the narrator’s astonishment the “lion, the tiger and leopard are entirely without restraint. They have been trained without difficulty to their present profession, and attend upon their respective owners in the capacity of *valets-de-chambre*” (Ibid, 184). At this point, Poe seems to direct his satire on the populace; however, he soon predicts that when hoopla becomes the parade, “the general voice of the four-footed patriots [the same beasts] seems to be for eating up cameleopard [the king]” (Ibid, 187). A radical reading should be entertained for this prediction, and I don’t think it will be completely wrong if we interpret it as Poe’s hope for another revolution but this time against the ‘monarchy’ of Jackson.

Prior to his short stories project, Poe had previously submitted this tale, along with four others for a prize competition announced in the Baltimore *Saturday Visitor*. He won the prize for “Ms. Found in a Bottle” and an honorary second prize for his poem “Coliseum,” but his proposed collection did not win the interests of the Buckinghams. The *Visitor* in October of that year published his prize-winning tale and an advertisement for Poe, soliciting publishers for his second collection of short stories. This time, he named it *Tales of the Folio Club*. The preface which he wrote for this project shows that his new collection is in fact no more than a revised and expanded edition of his earlier *Eleven Tales of the Arabesque*: it uses the same framing technique, and it promises to make its aesthetic investment in satire. The serious undertone of his satire is expressed in the first sentence of the preface: “The

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3 This tale is also one of Poe’s Oriental ones. Its narrator seems to be an Orientalist who “imbibed the shadows of fallen columns at Balbec [Lebanon], and Tadmor [Syria], and Persepolis [Persia]” (114).
Folio Club is, as I am sorry to say, a mere Junto of Dunderheadism,” whose intention is “to abolish Literature, subvert the Press, and overturn the Government of Nouns and Pronouns” (Ibid, 131). But sadly, the lofty aspiration of The Folio did not win the favor of any publisher either, and the work as a whole book was consequently lost. Critics regret this loss because it would have helped Poe scholarship to develop a better understanding of the implication of The Folio. The connection between these literati and the tales would have helped us shed light on the author’s critical intentions toward his contemporary scene. Notwithstanding the loss, what survives of The Folio continues to attest to the central role that Poe conceived for the Orient in his career.

Its fragmentary manuscript now survives in just its conclusion, “Siope –A Fable,” which later Poe renamed “Silence –A Fable,” and the aforementioned preface. “Silence” not surprisingly is an Oriental tale. The events of the tale are set “in Libya, by the borders of the river Zaire” (Selected Writings, 137). In addition to the Oriental location, the tale also invokes the Orient culture. When the Demon finishes his tale, our narrator swears “as Allah liveth, that fable which the demon told” is better than what he could find “in the volumes of the Magi –in the ironbound, melancholy volumes of the Magi. Therein, I say, are glorious histories, of the Heavens, and of the Earth, and of the mighty sea –and of the Genii that over-ruled the sea, and the earth, and the lofty heaven” (Ibid, 140). At one level, the tale is a parody of Oriental stories. Its setting is rife with fantastic elements, such as a river of “saffron and sickly hue,” and which does not flow but “palpitate[s] forever and forever beneath the red eye the sun with a tumultuous and convulsive motion” (Ibid, 137). The syntax of the tale is
linear, insinuating the rhythm of the Arabic language with its overuse the conjunctions ‘and’ and ‘but.’ At another level, the tale critiques the Orientalist discourse. The “Demon,” or the spirit of the ancestors of the main narrator, who is Oriental, tells the story. This Demon seems to be watching over the land of Zaire. One day, he discovers a man “in the toga of old Rome” standing on a rock by the river Zaire. It is clear that this man in the toga is an alien element in this Oriental land; but he still seems to be enjoying a moment of “solitude.” The Demon becomes interested in the “actions” of this man, so he “curse[s]” him first with “tumult” but the man stays where he is. Then the Demon curses him with “silence” and every thing become “still.” After this change, the man’s “countenance was wan with terror” and soon “fled afar off, in haste.” One of the very obvious things that Poe intends to do in this tale, is to mock the Orientalist discourse. The man in the toga represents the Orientalist discoverer, who wants to fathom the Oriental “desolation.” Poe seems to satirize the misconception of such Orientalist, who seeks “solitude” in a world antagonistic to him. Poe mocks the Orientalist’s oblivion to the presence of the Demon, or his powers of the Oriental elements. Still at another level, the tale invokes racism. The man in the toga is obviously a white man, and the Demon and the main narrator, as we learn from the narrative, are African from Zaire. In this racialized narrative, the African agent is empowered by the control that its representatives hold over the white man. It is further empowered also by its connection with the Middle East through Islam. The continuity
that this tale suggests between the African race and the Arabian race operates as a
ground to undermine the myth of whiteness. I will explain this more fully when I
discuss “Ligeia.”

After two rejections, finally –this was towards the end of 1839 – the Lea and
Blanchard publishing house of Philadelphia agreed to publish Poe’s third collection.
For a title, Poe seems to have decided to go back to the title of his first collection and
reword it. He named this new collection the Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque. In
his preface to this collection, Poe seems to be interested in doing two things:
marketing his book and explaining the meaning of the “Arabesque.” He provokes our
curiosity by making us witness a scene of critical warfare that involves him and “one
or two critics” who “tax” him with “Germanism” in his fiction. The preface leads us to
heated “grounds of accusation” and a chagrining “charge”, and made to hear the clang
and clatter of his pen ravaging his enemy in this artistic battlefield. But we know that
all the alleged aggravation is a show, a typical exercise of Poe’s marketing theatrics. If
he were genuinely ‘insulted’ by the “charge”, why would he repeat Germany, or any
of its inflected forms, six times in this one-page introduction? It seems that he
deliberately wanted to leave us, after we finish reading the preface, with some ringing
of this word in our ears. Contrary to his theatrical provocation, he wanted the reader to
know that his stories were modeled after German romanticism, at least for the delicate
taste that his reader has for this tradition. But we need to remember that what made
him talk about German romanticism, in the first place, was the “Arabesque,” another
appealing motif for the public.
The preface starts with what looks like the author’s genuine interest to provide us with a definition of his thematic term, but surprisingly he does not, and we are left to wonder why. He opens his preface stating that “The Epithets ‘Grotesque’ and ‘Arabesque’ will be found to indicate with sufficient precision the prevalent tenor of the tales here published” (260). But what we have here is a circular logic, or a self-reflexive statement: the Arabesque is defined by the “tenor” whose character is supposed to reflect the Arabesque. The second sentence does not supply us with any further explanation either; instead it leads us into denser haziness. We can summarize what the author wanted to say about the Arabesque in two points: there is “prevalence of the ‘Arabesque’ in [his] serious tales” and that the Arabesque is connected with German Romanticism. From our brief review of Poe’s publishing history, up to 1840, and especially after his two earlier rejections, we have to dismiss carelessness as a valid explanation for his omission to supply us, as he promised, with a definition of what “Arabesque” meant to him. Committing unwarranted mistakes, at this critical moment in his career, would be nothing less than a meaningless literary suicide. Furthermore, mistakes have to be ruled out from our explanation because of what he says at the end of this preface: “I think it best becomes me to say, therefore, that if I have sinned, I have deliberately sinned. These brief compositions are, in chief part, the results of matured purpose and very careful elaboration” (621). Since his sinning was deliberate, we have grounds to include his intentional omission of a definition of the “Arabesque” as part of his ‘sinning’ scheme. After all, he warned, here and in several other places4, against fragmenting his work for he “desired to preserve, as far as a

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4 In his letter to Philip P. Cooke of August 9, 1846, Poe writes: “Should you undertake the work for me,
certain point, a certain unity of design,” including this preface, and he repeatedly emphasized that his work should be approached as “one book” (261,262). With these premises in mind, the “Arabesque” can be defined as a structural concept that informs Poe’s narrative technique. It is, as I will show in the following pages, intended to be reconstructed from the intrinsic system of relationships that controls the tales and binds them into one whole. In pursuing this theory I will start first by pointing out that Poe in this preface does not abandon us completely in our quest. He leaves us with clues enough to solve the riddle; he leaves us with the ironic “tenor” of his preface, the tradition of the German romantics, and the unity of his collection.

But before I advance any further in this discussion, I have to emphasize that any critical sense that has developed about the Arabesque stems originally from its lexical meaning. The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides us with three definitions for “arabesque” as an adjective, and five as a noun. The prominent two are: “Arabian, Arabic” for an adjective, and for a noun “A species of mural or surface decoration in colour or low relief, composed in flowing lines of branches, leaves, and scroll-work fancifully intertwined.” The prosperity of the textile, pottery and porcelain industries in Alhambra and Cordova might have played an essential role in popularizing this visual art in medieval Europe. Then at the turn of the 19th century, the early romantics, or, as they were called by Poe’s contemporaries, the German romantics, reintroduced
this word into critical theory discourse. From its basic geometrical system, they
developed a theory of textual analysis. Friedrich Schlegel employed it and allotted to it
a special place in his discussion of “romantic irony.” Thus it will be fruitful to start
with a brief description of what romantic irony means.

Schlegel extended the scope of irony beyond the way it was understood and
practiced by the rhetorical tradition. If according to the conventional sense of this
trope the apparent meaning of the text or utterance is reversed and turned upside
down, Schlegel’s concept of irony argues for the inclusion of both the apparent and
implied meanings. Instead of inverting the polarity of meaning, he wanted to preserve,
if not increase it in multiplicity. “Antithesis” Raymond Immerwahr explains “lies at
the very core of Friedrich Schlegel’s view of human existence, of communication, and
of artistic creation….Schlegel’s view of the process of artistic creation involves a
conjunction of opposites” (665-6). With this synthetic view of the literary text,
Schlegel challenges and changes the dynamics of rhetorical irony. By widening its
range to encompass a host of conflicting meanings, it becomes “a progressive
movement of thinking” (Behler, 79). In Fragments 108, Schlegel writes:

In this sort of irony, everything should be playful and serious,
guilelessly open and deeply hidden. It originates in the union of savoir
vivre and scientific spirit, in the conjunction of a perfectly instinctive
and perfectly conscious philosophy. It contains and arouses a feeling of
indissoluble antagonism between the absolute and the relative, between
the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication. It is the
freest of all licenses, for by its means one transcends oneself; and yet it
is also the most lawful, for it is absolutely necessary. (156)

Schlegel highly values this philosophical form of irony because of its middling
position. It offers the imagination the “the freest” zone of “all licenses.” His artist does
not aspire to idealism, whether subjective in the Kantian sense, or objective in the
platonic sense. The idealism of his artist is mediatory. It springs from the poet’s ability
to transcend the multitude of reality. And the self, whether of the text or the author of
the text, is dialogically constructed, and therefore “is a kind of library books, an
‘encyclopedia’ of voices” (Thompson, 218). Schlegel also values irony for its
inclusiveness. Gary Richard Thompson finds resemblance between Schlegel’s
explanation of the ironic text and Bakhtin’s analysis of the novelistic discourse. In
Schlegel’s “Dialogue of Poesy,” Thompson argues, the author “grapples with a
redefinition of dialectic; even though it does not duplicate the twentieth-century
conception of the dialogue of fiction as articulated by Mikhail Bakhtin, it struggles
toward (and comes very close) to that conception. Indeed, the modern character of
Schlegel’s theories of arabesque romance can be illustrated by a brief description of
Bakhtin’s theory of the ‘dialogical principle,’ which is itself indebted to Schlegel’s
writings” (213). The crisis, in such inclusive nature of utterance, is a crisis of
meaning. According to both Schlegel’s irony and Bakhtin’s dialogical principle, the
text does not hold one single finite meaning. Instead, multiple readings contend in the
text without any final resolution.
Poe subscribed to this concept of multiplicity; he even used it as a dramatic element in his “Shadow –A Fable,” written 1832 and included in *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*. Poe opens this sketch anticipating his readers’ reaction to his volatile text: “some to disbelieve, and some to doubt, and yet a few who will find much to ponder upon” (*Selected Writings*, 134). Such indecisiveness is steeped further into the indeterminacy of the text. When the shadow appears to our narrator, the latter becomes confused as what to make of it because “the shadow was vague, and formless, and indefinite, and was the shadow neither of man nor of God –neither God of Greece, nor God of Chaldea, nor any Egyptian God” (Ibid, 136), but was all. The tale reaches its climax when the shadow makes its utterance. Every word it spoke echoed the voices of the “many thousand departed friends.” In such horrific moment, our narrator and his companions started from their seats “trembling, and shuddering, and aghast: for the tones of the voice of the shadow were not the tones of any one being, but of a multitude of beings, and varying in their cadences from syllable to syllable, fell duskily upon” them(Ibid, 136). The sublime terror that the ending scene captures rests on the bewildering effect of the multitudinous voices that every word of the shadow evoked. The indecisiveness of the word creates the scene’s atmosphere of fear, the absence of a definite meaning. Although in this case Poe makes a theatrical exploitation of Schlegel’s theory, it nonetheless stands as a proof of his appreciation of its aesthetic value in his stories.
My earlier quotation from Fragment 108 is significant to Poe scholarship because it provides us with a philosophical explanation of the form and function in Poe’s fiction. In the chaotic sphere of conflicting thoughts, in this liminal zone, “one transcends oneself,” including all the socio-political factors that participate in one’s formation. Schlegel’s appreciation of the ability of modern art to portray this sphere of “antagonism” is expressed in a similar way in one of Poe’s reviews. In his review of Elizabeth Barret Browning’s *The Drama of Exile, and Other Poems*, Poe names the poetic traditions that Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Tennyson established as Mrs. Browning’s poetic milieu. But he concludes that to these antagonistic traditions, Miss Barret was “seduced” “into the sin of imitation” (Essays and Reviews, 141). In evaluating the contemporary history of poetry, he prophesizes:

> chiefly on account of mere fortuitousness of that mental and moral combination which shall unite in one person (if ever it shall) the Shelleyan abandon, the Tennysonian poetic sense, the most profound instinct of Art, and the sternest Will properly to blend and vigorously to control all; –chiefly, we say, because such combination of antagonisms must be purely fortuitous, has the world never seen the noblest of the poems of which it is possible that it may be put in possession.

(Ibid, 140-1)

Poe sees that the perfection of poetry is achievable only when the diverse voices in the poetic tradition find their way in the poet’s execution, but he emphasizes that this should be done with originality without falling in the trap of “imitation.” The poet
imbibes these voices, and allow them to become part and parcel of his constitution, and had he to affect them, he would unpardonably fall. Poe’s fiction thrives on this doctrine of indeterminacy. The multifarious nature of the utterance in his text challenges us to pinpoint it to one single, final meaning. It is “the spirit of the age,” Poe explains, “which proceeds by the rule of contraries altogether, and is now usually admitted as the solution of everything in the way of paradox and impossibility” (*Selected Writings*, 388). In its simplest form –again I am referring to its theatrical application –this doctrine of diversity helps Poe set the interior stage for his “The Man of the Crowd.” The perspective of this tale shifts from the unitary general, to the detailed specific, and finally to the horrifying private, creating for us a persona of conflicting orientations. At the beginning, the narrator’s “observations took an abstract and generalizing turn. [He] looked at the passengers in masses, and thought of them in their aggregated relations. Soon, however, [he] descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance” (233). Poe makes us feel a genuine pulse of life by sketching for us the effect of its detailed heterogeneity on the mind. The constitution of his persona rises from its ability to encompass all of the above named philosophical perspectives. Even when Poe turns his eyes to the interior of his character, he still projects this variegation. The narrator of his “Berenice” starts his tale with “Misery is manifold” (140). And like the rainbow, “its hues are various as the hues of the arch, – as distinct too, yet as intimately blended” (140-1). Out of the motley colors of miseries, the consciousness/lunacy of his character is created.
In his philosophical description of irony, Schlegel further recognizes one specific form, the Arabesque, or what he called “poetische Arabesken.” This form of irony concerns itself with the dialogue that mediates between the form and content of the work. Raymond Immerwahr finds Schlegel’s poetic arabesque to be “centered in the generally playful treatment of artistic form,” which involves “the unusually close association or transposition of form and content, the discussion within the work of the form or medium along with the actual object of portrayal, or the portraying of this form or medium instead of the object” (673). Schlegel’s Arabesque entangles the work, form and content, in the net of its open-ended irony. To support his claim, G.R. Thompson refers to Mikhail Bakhtin’s argument. “Schlegel was aware,” Thompson argues, “as perhaps no one else in his time, of the dialogical voices of the ‘selves’ constituting the ‘self’ of the text –and thereby aware of the frequently naïve concept of determinate ‘unity’ and ‘truth’ in a text” (“Romantic Arabesque,” 212). Then later he says “The arabesque according to Schlegel (and this is how Schlegel is quintessential romantic) [sic] ‘reconciles’ or somehow otherwise elevates contradictions and oppositions into a higher unity of consciousness for the artist, in a text that explores and embodies the continuity of various intentionalities” (213). This dialogical analysis of the arabesque can provide us with a better understanding of the character of Poe’s art. In this dialogical system, there is no finite meaning for the text. Multiple meanings, and sometimes contradictory, are formed from the interrelationships that permeate its system. And if we decide on a certain reading, it is because we emphasize one certain order of the text’s dialogue over another.
The ultimate objective of this economy is a democratic inclusiveness, a desire to encompass all the unsettling forces of society, economy, politics etc, in the text. Poe acknowledges that “the horrid laws of political economy cannot be evaded even by the inspired, and that a perfect versification, a vigorous style, and a never-tiring fancy, may, like the water we drink and die without, yet despise, be so plentifully set forth as to be absolutely of no value at all” (Essays and Reviews, 221). Thus, the products of the “fancy,” according to Poe, are unavoidably colored by the shades of political reality. If the Arabesque is Poe’s means to reproduce this reality, not leaving out one of its contending elements, then it speaks of his championing of republicanism, in the generic sense of the term, in a nation riven by political dissentions. Regionalism, in all its ramifications: racial, political, economical, philosophical and artistic, is therefore intrinsic to his Arabesque. In this wide scope of inclusiveness, his fiction has room for every factor that played a role in the construct of antebellum America. His Arabesque becomes politically provocative for the mere reason of its inclusive nature. It is an expression of his skepticism of a national monologue that was born in New England, and continually claimed to represent the national identity. In the economy of national representation, therefore, the Arabesque is Poe’s revolution in the face of cultural hegemony, and validates his strife for a national platform and audience. But before I turn to my discussion of the Arabesque in “Ligeia”, I will end my discussion of the Schlegel’s Arabesque with this quote from Thompson’s comment on the Fragment 108:
The recognition of an “insoluble conflict” between determinateness and indeterminateness is embodied in the romantic artist on a “higher” aesthetic plane, though never ultimately reconciled as logical oppositions outside that artist. So also the “impossibility and necessity” of any “total communication” is accommodated by incorporation of this contradiction into the mind of the artist. The romantic artist intuitively and also consciously makes the effort to incorporate antagonisms and contradictions into himself and his works. In the texts produced by such a mind, we find embodied a certain continuing reversibility, so that those whom Schlegel contemns as self satisfied bourgeois readers – addicted to conventional notions of transparent language and linear narrative and familiar plots, of verisimilitude based on a naïve notion of mimesis –do not (since they are limited and read only partially) know how to read the romantic text. (219)

Schlegel’s choice to dub this specific form of romantic irony the “Arabesque” attests to his interest in preserving the original meaning of the Oriental ornament. Irony, too, is fundamental to the arabesque décor, since as an art it mediates between the limited space of its form and the infinitude that it aspires to capture in its repetitive design. Its economy of signification is controlled and regulated by its self-reflexivity. The entwining lines of the arabesque are dialogically interconnected, not only by their mirroring of each other, but also by filling a space in the work as a whole. The curving line might annihilate itself at every turn of its repetition, but it recreates itself again
and again as it takes part in the arabesque holistically. The arabesque’s most fundamental irony, when we think of its dialogical system, is that its curving line can be dead and alive at the same time.

Poe, in the *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, included twenty-five stories; “only five do not have references to the Near East” (Schueller, 110). From this collection, I select “Ligeia” to be the subject of my study of Poe’s Arabesque in the following pages. Poe originally wrote this tale in 1838, and then two years later he included it in his collection. I am prompted, in this selection, by the wide scope of the tale’s suggestiveness, and by the author’s recognition, as he stated in his letter to Philip P. Cooke, that “‘Ligeia’ may be called my *best* tale” (Letters II, 329). Following Schlegel’s description of the Arabesque, I intend to discuss the ironies in “Ligeia” as an Arabesque system. I will investigate two lines of irony in its structure: on the one hand, the author’s intended irony on New England’s cultural hegemony, and the racism of the South; and on the other hand, the role of the Oriental other in the tale. But in developing my discussion of each meandering line I will visit other texts by the author. Thus, the format of my presentation will, to a certain extent, mimic the Arabesque by shooting off sub-discussions from its main argument.

“Ligeia,” in its simplest form, is a melancholic tale of love and death. After losing his Ligeia, the narrator seems to be unable to unfetter himself from the memories of his beloved. He falls prey to unremitting fits of her remembrance, tirelessly roving over her hair, eyes, and mind. The story opens with, “I cannot, for my soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where, I first became acquainted with
lady Ligeia” (Poe, Selected Writings, 159). The statement unveils to us the confusion of its speaker. The thematic negation of two constituting elements of reality, time and space, in the first sentence of the story is significant because it portends the psychological nature of the narrator’s crisis. By taking out time and space, Poe sets the mind of his narrator as the stage of his drama. From the moaning tone of his discourse, we can sense the prescient lunacy of his end. He incessantly fails to recollect; and from this constant failure, his memory has now become after the lapse of many years “feeble through much suffering” (Ibid). The gaps in the narrator’s language, his omission of time and space, disclose his desire to possess what he does not have. If time and space do not allow him a union with Ligeia, then outside them, in the realm of imagination, in his tale, he might. As this tale of remembrance unfolds, waves of anguish rise up in our narrator’s mind to their climactic point of inundation. Prior to that moment, we constantly find him unsatisfied with his recollection. First, he tries to call to mind all the details that surrounded her earthly existence, but all to no avail; then he tries to produce her in his decorative art, but again fails, and then at the end, he sees her standing before him a ghost that defies his understanding.

If we want to pursue a psychological reading of the tale we can say that when, at the end of the narrative, the apparition of Ligeia confronts the narrator with “huge masses of long and dishevelled hair” [Poe’s italic], he gets to the point where his mind collapses under the burden of his melancholy and completely loses touch with reality (Ibid, 173). The frantic image of “dishevelled hair” can be thus interpreted as a hallucinogenic projection of the frenzy that now grips his mind. The scene, we can say
at this point, is therefore internal; and if we borrow from the period’s discourse on the science of the mind, we can confidently put down a working analysis of this tale and describe it as a well concocted case of hypochondria. “It [hypochondria] is, in fact,” Thomas C. Upham writes in *Outlines of Imperfection and Disordered Mental Action*, “nothing more or less than a state of deep depression, gloom, or melancholy.” It plagues the mind of its sufferer by turning it into a hyperactive zone for his chaotic imagination. Upham’s discussion of hypochondria can provide us with a very good illustration of our narrator’s problem.

The mind of the sufferer is fixed upon some unpromising and gloomy subject; probably one which has particular relation either to his present or future prospects. He gives it an undue place in his thoughts, dwelling upon it continually. His imagination hovers over it, throwing a deeper shade on what is already dark. Thus the mind becomes disordered; it is broken off from its ordinary and rightful mode of action, and is no longer what it was, nor what nature designed it should be.

(347)

We can also further this psychological reading of “Ligeia” by pointing to Poe’s personal interest in the philosophy of the mind in “The Poetic Principle” (and elsewhere). In this essay, he explains how faculty psychology is essential to the analysis of any text. But Poe did not favor linguistic monogenesis. If the Arabesque, as I pointed out earlier, challenges us to make any conclusion about the tale’s psychological genesis, then the text should include other genes that suggest other
interpretations. In the internal landscape of confusion, Ligeia stands out as an ethnographically marked woman. Her “black” and “irregular” eyes compel the narrator to describe her as a person different from “our own race” (161). Her “knowledge” fascinates the narrator and becomes his life’s quest. The presence of this outlandish character in a narrative predating the Civil War allows us to stretch its significance beyond the internal landscape of its narrator. In the following pages I will show that the tale encompasses through its system of irony the nation in its totality, touching on fundamental concepts of nationhood in antebellum America. I will argue that “Ligeia” is a national tale, notwithstanding the European settings that Poe chose for it: the Rhine and London. The author’s selection of foreign settings in “Ligeia” is his personal reaction to what he deemed deterioration in national literature. Poe resented the absurd and very often senseless, superficial evocation of nationalism in literature. He hated to see the press lauding national authors for their mere reference to domestic themes and events. He writes in the “Exordium to Critical Notices,”

A foreign subject, at this epoch, was a weight more than enough to drag down into the very depths of critical damnation the finest writer owning nativity in the States; while, on the reverse, we found ourselves daily in the paradoxical dilemma of liking, or pretending to like, a stupid book the better because its stupidity was of our own growth. (Selected Writings, 632)

I don’t think that we should take his protestation literally. He only wanted to criticize seeing a superficial evocation of nationalism as the only merit that an American writer
should display in his work. To counter this “absurdity,” in many of his tales that engage national themes⁵, Poe either blurred out their geographic location or established their setting away from United States. “Ligeia” is one of these tales.

If we go back to my description of the narrative, as a reflection of the narrator’s internal landscape, such reading can further help us underline the vagueness that permeates its world. Its narrator seems to be ever so helplessly groping into the elusive history of his beloved Ligeia. It seems, as I have pointed out earlier, that time and space can hardly pinpoint her to any earthly fact. We get this impression from the language of our narrator who in the first sentence of his tale states that he cannot for his soul, “remember how, when, or even precisely where” her first met her. In the midst of these murky images from the past, however, the narrator surprisingly still finds himself capable of recollecting vividly one single fact: that he has “never known the paternal name” (Poe’s italics) of his beloved (159). Poe’s emphasis on his narrator’s quirky remembrance of this negation points directly to the crisis that informs the content of his tale. It is a crisis of knowledge, of a specific form of knowledge that revolves around Ligeia and what she stands for. The narrator, as I pointed out earlier, presents Ligeia as an ethnographically marked woman, an Oriental woman. His quest, as evident in his language, revolves around this Oriental figure: to discover, and ultimately to possess. But ‘never knowing’ was and is the tragic premise and conclusion of this quest. Like a mirage he pants after his dream of knowledge only to find at the end of his quest the nothingness of illusion. Between the beginning and

⁵ Such as “Some Words with a Mummy” or “The Thousand-And-Second Tale of Scheherazade”, or “Four Beasts in One –The Homo-Cameleopard.”
end, between his compulsive recollection of her history (or failure to recollect it) and later his fixation on her return, the narrator is locked into a vicious circle of story telling. This dramatic situation of incessant return is analogous with the main stem of the curving line of the Arabesque. Like the Arabesque, the beginning and ending of the tale are lost in the progressive entwining of its narration. Narration has become our narrator’s sole goal, to tell and retell the story. And frantically does it come out from him, not knowing that his quest for knowledge has become a tale of failure, not knowing that his dream of possessing Ligeia has become a story of his madness. This ironic situation, this shift from “never known” to ever telling, points to the narrator’s epistemological crisis. We pity him for his misperception of his art for a form of knowledge, a misconception that makes him doomed never to find a closure for his tale. But the irony in this tale is not only an irony of misconception. When we turn our critical interest from the narrator who is so blind to the nature of his crisis to the author who is perceptive of his narrator’s shortcomings, we will see the tale in a different light. Beyond the bounds of the chaotic world of the narrator, beyond the irony of his misconception, there lies a finer irony that speaks of the finely formulated critical stance of the author.

Poe’s irony is best understood by studying the rhetoric that informs the relationship between him and his narrator. The fact that Poe does not paint a glorifying image of his narrator speaks of his desire to disassociate from him. To fully understand this relationship, whose meaning is essential to our exploration of the tale, and consequently to national elements that play part constitution, we will have to go
back to the history of the period and see how we might reconnect our author and his narrator to the map of the nation. With the historical context of the text, we can safely navigate among the tale’s conflicting national voices. This wider perspective will help us explore in depths the meaning of Ligeia’s outlandish origin and her racial difference. It will help us also find a meaning for the “expression” of her eyes and explain why her apparition possesses Rowena’s body at the end. With the historical context, we can better understand the heteroglossia of the text, and we can also develop a better analysis of the narrator’s ironic shift from a love for the exotic to a disturbing gothic taste. The text is so rich with ironies, that every strand of its Arabesque design continuously splits making room for another one to grow. We may venture to say that “Ligeia” is Poe’s best ironic tale. After all, Poe named it “my best tale.”

When Poe, in 1820, came back with the Allans to America, after a five-year stay in England, he got to know an America that was internally insecure. The state of the Union was challenged to its core by two major events: the panic of 1819⁶ and the entrance of Missouri in 1820⁷ as a slave state in the Union. Both events forced the

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⁶ In that year the cotton market was crushed after England decided to get its supplies of this commodity from East India. The prices of cotton went from 32.5 to 14.3 cents per pound, and it proved to be disastrous to the Southern states. A chain reaction subsequently swept all the monetary institutions of the nation, toppling down banks, including the Second Bank of the United States. The destructive effect of this inflation on the national economy was huge, especially on the Southern states, the producers of this staple.

⁷ Before its proposal was submitted to the House, there was a balance in the nation between the slave and free states. Its entrance would tip the balance in the Senate in favor of the slave states. With this event, the conflict of interests between South and North would from now on crystallize into two political blocs. Northern politicians did not want the system of slavery to extend beyond the Mississippi river, and for this reason Congressman James Tallmadge Jr. (R) of New York introduced a bill preventing any further introduction of slave states into the Union. The House voted for the bill, but the Senate voted against it. The rising political tension threatened the state of the Union. But a compromise was finally reached by letting Maine enter the Union as a free state.
South increasingly to express itself as a separate entity in the nation. In this polarized political environment, Poe found himself back in America. The conflict between the Southern states and the Northern states over the tariffs in 1819 would revisit the nation later in the sequel of heated debates in 1824 and 1828, and would reach a boiling point in 1832 and 1833. These debates were a manifestation of the widening rift between two economies: industrial in the North, and agrarian in the South. The balance of the nation’s economic powers was progressively being tipped in favor of the North. Because at the time the North was more populated than the South, the House was controlled by the economy of the North, and consequently the South had to fight for a balance in the Senate by maintaining at least its equilibrium. But the outcome was an increasing Northern political hegemony, whose ramification would affect every aspect of American life, including religion and literature. After President James Monroe, the last of the Virginian dynasty, the White House came increasingly under the influence of the amalgamating economical power of the North. Even when John Tyler, a Southern Whig politician, became the tenth President, he had in 1842 to compromise his stance and sign a tariff bill protecting the Northern manufacturers. One of the significant effects of the tariffs crisis was its revivification of an old national discussion over two political principles: federacy and confederacy. During the crisis of 1832-33, the intense confrontation between President Andrew Jackson and Senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina verged on a civil war. And again a compromise from both sides was reached, but a wedge between the North and the South was irrevocably driven in the body of the nation. Then after Jackson finishes his second
term, another depression hung over the nation. Poe was personally affected by this panic; he had just married his cousin Virginia Clemm, and had to support his mother-in-law Mrs. Clemm. In his pursuit of a writing career to support his family, Poe moved at this time from the South to the North, and later he would repeat his crossing of the Mason and Dixon’s line, a biographical fact that some critics would use to argue for Poe’s disinterest in regional conflicts.

From this highly charged national environment, diversified discourses on every aspect of the American life were borne. The industrial economy of the North, which was founded on factories, came under attack by Southern writers. They used moral and religious arguments to show that “the large factories which have gown in the North, within the last seventeen years, are of a very demoralizing tendency: that so many persons –such persons too– cannot be housed together, and allowed the free intercourse unavoidable where the restraint is not for crime, without a large result of licentiousness and vice” (“Letters from New England, No. 4”, P 273). The agrarian economy of the South, which depended on free labor, slavery, was also attacked by the Northern writers using moral, religious, and legal arguments. This rift in the nation’s politics helped form alliances among men of letters. And like the monopoly of the

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8 In 1836 President Jackson vetoed the re-charter of the Bank of the United States, plunging the nation into another economical crisis, whose biting hardships would not appear until after his successor, President Martin Van Buren, assumed the White House office. The “precarious economy was tipped over into crisis by depression in England, which resulted in a drop in the price of American cotton, and caused English banks and investors to cut back their commitments in the New World and to refuse extensions of loans” (Tindall, 436). On top of this there was a massive failure in wheat crops. In the panic, creditors moved quickly with foreclosures, and consequently “a good many of the wildcat banks succumbed, and the federal government itself lost some $ 9 million it had deposited in pet banks” (Ibid, 437). The repercussions of the plummeting nation economy left almost one-third of the working class without jobs, while wages for those who kept their jobs went down by 30 to 50 percent. The effect was devastating on all, especially the South.
nation’s politics and economy which were gradually falling in the hands of the
Northern states, so was their monopoly of the nation’s representation in letters. From
New England we find Channing, Emerson, Parker, Hawthorne, Fuller, Thoreau, and
Pickering, forming an intellectual platform for the North. To this host of writers, the
South did not find a match. In general, reading was a privilege enjoyed mostly by the
class of planters; it was a socio-political exercise that created and re-enforced their
rights of aristocracy. It also practiced a form of political control over the slaves. In
August of 1834, in the first issue of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, James Ewell
Heath voiced the South’s anxiety about the North’s monopoly of national letters. From
the title that he chose for his article, “Southern Literature” we sense that his rhetoric
springs from his aversion to the hegemony of the North’s representation of national
literature. He, like every other southerner, feared the total blotting out of the South
from such representation. From aversion and fear, Heath draws his vision of an
autonomous Southern nation. He believes that its survival and continuity depends on
its self representation, so he alarmingly asks: “Are we to be doomed forever to a kind
of vassalage to our northern neighbors—a dependence for our literary food upon our
brethren, whose superiority in all the great points of character,—in valor,—eloquence
and patriotism, we are no wise disposed to admit?” (1). He pricks his audience’s
conscience by connecting “the honor and dignity of the state” to self representation,
and warns them that every one should participate “in building a character of our own”
(1, 2). “We are not willing,” he provocatively declares, “to borrow our political,—
religious, or even agricultural notions from the other side of Mason and Dixon’s line”
(1). Heath wanted to erect “geographical boundaries” in front of this “empire of literature” which was flooding from the North. He tells his readers that even the writers of the North will “rejoice in the emancipation of the south” from this “kind of vassalage” to the North.

In “Ligeia,” Poe echoes this anxiety about the North’s “empire of literature”. But he does not advocate a separate ‘Southern literature.’ He aspires to create literature that transcends the Mason-Dixon Line. Critics, like Terence Whalen, might argue that his motives to invoke such literature were fundamentally commercial, but at least such argument lays the ground for a national Poe. Poe’s irony in “Ligeia” reflects this national sentiment, and through it, he raises a host of the hardest questions that raged in the nation in the first half of the 19th century. But his irony, as I said earlier, is also founded on the Arabesque, thus allowing elements of conflicting nature to be part of its system. So while I will show that on the hand the tale questions New England’s autonomy as a claimed home for national literature, I will also demonstrate that, on the other hand, the tale disrupts the institution of slavery in the South. The Arabesque allows Poe to recast his national questions in a structure of irony that reflect his biographical crossing and re-crossing of the Mason-Dixon Line in real life. He, thus, allows us to construe the microcosmic chaos and destruction that we see in the narrator’s mind into a national crisis, a macrocosmic disorder. When, however, I invoke these unbending terms of national concern I don’t mean to look at them in isolation. The Arabesque binds them together into one structure. It unveils to us a very significant aspect of Poe’s writing career, his heterogeneous vision of national
consciousness. His ambition to create an authorial voice that rises above every form of American locality. This kind of reading poses Poe for us as a national biographer, interested in documenting the nation’s most unsettling questions, and who was interested in purposefully disrupting its very constituting concepts.

For an author who wanted to materialize in his writing the crossing of national barriers, Poe aptly selects the Orient to be his platform. Schueller, in her discussion of the subversive nature of the Oriental romance in the first half of the 19th century writes:

It was particularly fortuitous for writers that in this highly charged political climate [first half of the 19th C.], the Orient that became most familiar to the public at large was the Near East, which, with its mixture of cultures and races, questioned the idea of racial and cultural purity. In the literary imagination, the border became a central trope in Near Eastern Orientalist writing. Racial-cultural hybridity questioned the phallocentric ideology of empire embodied in the figure of venturing archeologist/ savior abroad. (76)

Schueller recognizes in the hybrid nature of the Middle Eastern culture a suitable platform for national criticism. We see instances of such use of the Middle East in the history of American letters as early as the first decade of the Republic. In his narrative, which was published six years after the end of the Revolutionary War, Olaudah Equiano invokes the Middle East to question slavery and its economy of skin color in America. People in Turkey, he inveighs against his American reader, “are fond of
black people,” and “the Greeks are, in some measure, kept under by the Turks, as the negroes are in the West-Indies by the white people” (167-8). The critical significance of the Middle East lies in its disruptiveness of the racial discourse. Skin color is its immediate application, but beyond that I think the Orient has been utilized so that it speaks against any kind of monologue. From the hybridity of their blood, skin color, market, philosophy, religion, language, and culture in general, the Arabian “race” operates as a site of subversive diversity. “I had been twice amongst the Turks,” Equiano argues for his right of freedom, “yet had never seen any such usage with them, and much less could I have expected anything of this kind among the Christians” (211). The hybrid nature of the Oriental culture allows it to function as a liminal zone in which writers, like Poe, found the means to challenge orchestrated national representation, whether it originated from the North or the South. In the Oriental drama of his tale, Poe finds the means to articulate his national concerns, and through the performance of his characters he initiates them into the national consciousness. In “Some Words with a Mummy,” for instance, Poe lets his Oriental character, Count Allamistakeo, express his criticism of President Jackson’s administration. In response to his audience’s enthusiasm about “the great beauty and importance of Democracy,” the Count tells them a story from the ‘ancient history’ of Egypt (396). He says:

Thirteen Egyptian provinces determined all at once to be free, and so set a magnificent example to the rest of mankind. They assembled their wise men, and concocted the most ingenious constitution it is possible
to conceive. For a while they managed remarkably well; only their habit of bragging was prodigious. The thing ended, however, in the consolidation of the thirteen states, with some fifteen or twenty others, into the most odious and insupportable despotism that ever was heard of upon the face of the earth.

Poe humorously creates a hybrid narrative spun from the modern history of America and the ancient history of Egypt to mock the belief, which some of his contemporary held, in human progressivism. The thirteen states that signed the Declaration of Independence need not brag about their accomplishment or their “ingenious constitution” because what awaits them down the road is “insupportable despotism.” It is a sarcastic portrayal of the state of Union during Jackson’s presidency, an acerbic critic of his liberal use of veto and his acclaimed right to resolve the cabinet. When the narrator asks “what was the name of the usurping tyrant,” and the Count says “it was Mob” (Poe, Selected Writings, 397). The appearance of the word “Mob” italicized calls to mind also the epithets that they dubbed him with: “King Mob” and “King Andrew I.” To explain the meaning of the word “politics” to the mummy, Mr. Gliddon, one of the doctors operating on the mummy, sketches on the wall “a little carbuncle-nosed gentleman, out at elbows, standing upon a stump, with his left leg drawn up toward Heaven, and the mouth open at an angle of ninety degrees” (Ibid, 389). And Mr. Buckingham, the other doctor, takes off his “‘wig,’” in his effort to explain the meaning of ‘Whigs.’ What interests us in this political parody is Poe’s selection of an Egyptian character. He reverses the stereotypes of West and East: his
mummy preserves a high sense of urbanity while his viewers are thrown into a state of confusion. Doctor Buckingham, their leader, who puts his thumb into his mouth, a sign of his childish confusion, is now corrected by the mummy and advised to take it out. The subversive presentation of the mummy stretches beyond politics to include Poe’s criticism of his age’s assumptions about history. Is the history of humanity teleological or repetitive? Poe humorously argues in his tale for the latter. Through this Oriental character, Poe shows his readers that what they dream of achieving in the future is an event from the past, and that their dream of improvement is thus a mere illusion, thus undermining an essential doctrine in the period’s political ideology, progressivism.

“Ligeia,” too, is a subversive tale. Its events revolve around its Oriental heroine. Poe constructs her Orientalism from her distinct physiognomy and from a set of tropes that tie her with the Middle East. Critics, like John C. Gruesser and Malini Johar Schueller, as they argue in their “‘Ligeia’ and Orientalism” and “Harems, Orientalist Subversions, and the Crisis of Nationalism: The Case of Edgar Allan Poe and ‘Ligeia’” respectively, agree that Poe was interested in highlighting her Oriental characteristics and in emphasizing her racial difference in a context of comparison and contrast. Her character, as an Oriental figure, is dialogically structured through two systems of relationship: intellectually with the narrator, and sexually with Rowena. Beyond this dialectics, there is also Poe’s irony of the genre that represents Ligeia in an Oriental tale. Let me start first with the following observation: the general encounter between West and East in “Ligeia” calls to mind a very popular antebellum
tradition in the romance genre, the Oriental romance. The events of this kind of
romance take place in a simple world drawn in black and white colors. In this
Manichean drama, West is good and East is evil. Between these two dichotomies, the
events of the Oriental tale unfold moving always in one direction: saving the East by
the Western Orientalist. In this sub-genre of the romance, the protagonist—usually a
missionary, a traveler or an archeologist— is set for an adventure in the Middle East.
The outcome of this adventure is a glorious victory or accomplishment for the
Orientalist. The Orient too is portrayed to be blessed to have the Western adventurer
visit its land and save it. Looking at it from the Orientalist’s point of view, we can see
that it is an ‘optimistic’ drama of conversion or discovery. In our cinematic age, this
tradition survives in adventure movies like *Stargate*\(^9\). The knowledge that Daniel
Jackson brings with him to the East frees it from the grip of the tyrant Ra, while the
discipline of Colonel Jonathon O’Neil converts the Orientals into soldiers. A typical
eexample from the period’s literature would be Susanna Haswell Rowson’s play, *Slaves
in Algiers: or, A Struggle for Freedom*, which was published in 1794. Rebecca is an
American captive in Algiers. She learned from the Republic the meaning of liberty,
and now armed with this knowledge along with Christianity she, the captive, launches
her war against the manipulative Ben Hassan and the tyrant Dey, Muley Moloc. In the

\(^9\) Similar to Poe’s “Some Words with a Mummy,” this movie rewrites the history of Egypt. Contrary to
what history books say, it tells a story of an Egypt that was far more technologically advanced than our
modern age. But tyranny still plagues this ancient/modern world of the East, and the Egyptologist
Daniel Jackson (James Spader) saves the Egyptians from their bondage. It is interesting to see how the
imperial imagination of modern America insists on including the East in the panorama of its
interplanetary frontiers.
end she triumphs in her battle, gaining her freedom, but more importantly she succeeds in saving Fetnah, the Arabian girl, from becoming one of the Dey’s harem.

“Ligeia” deviates from the formulaic Oriental tale. It turns its fundamental emblems upside down. The conventionally ignorant, lustful, chaotic, and tyrannical East is here presented as wise, composed and enlightened, whereas the Orientalist is portrayed as confused, disoriented, and eventually mad. In this tale the Oriental does not need to be rescued, and consequently the Orientalist does not win his supposed victory. Ligeia stands in front of our narrator a beacon of light. “Her knowledge” Poe’s narrator acknowledges “was such as I have never known in woman – but where breathes the man who has traversed, and successfully, all the wide areas of moral, physical, and mathematical science?” (163). In Ligeia’s presence, the narrator cannot help feeling overwhelmed. In front of her “supremacy” he prefers to “resign [him]self, with a child-like confidence” to “her guidance” (163). In this scenario, Poe does not grant his narrator moral or scholastic authority. In addition to his alarming obsession with Ligeia, we learn that his union with Rowena was the result of “a moment of mental alienation” (166). This mental alienation was induced by another moral flaw in his character, his addiction to opium. He tells us that he has “become a bounden slave in the trammels of opium” (166). Furthermore, he turns, as Schueller argues, the bridal-chamber of the abbey into a harem, living, at least mentally, with two women at the same time. Throughout the narrative, his acts are constantly puerile; we see this before and after Ligeia’s death. When she is around, he succumbs like a “child” to her guidance; and after she dies his “child-like perversity” takes hold of him. After her
death, he indulges in an ‘aristocratic’ spree of expenditure. He buys an ancient abbey, and lavishly decorates its bedchamber with expensive orientalia, many items of which are made of gold. He includes a gold censer, “Saracenic in pattern,” several “ottomans and golden candelabra, of Eastern figure,” and five sarcophagi. All the furniture “was spotted all over, at irregular intervals, with arabesque figure,” and again in gold (168).

Poe at this point seems to play his irony on the narrator’s consumption by the East. The outcome of his dilettantish décor is ironically chaotic and insane. “I feel,” he sorrowfully laments his mental degeneration, “how much even of an incipient madness might have been discovered in the gorgeous and fantastic draperies, in the solemn carvings of Egypt, in the wild cornices and furniture, in the Bedlam patterns of the carpets of tufted gold” (166). Poe leaves us wondering whether this décor is a sign of his madness or its original cause. Poe’s twist of irony is not completely void from regional criticism, which can be further explained by his “Philosophy of Furniture.” In this article, he critiques the deteriorated taste for décor among Americans, among whom he finds “the Yankees alone are preposterous” (Collected Works, 496). “It is an evil growing” he says “out of our republican institutions, that here a man of large purse has usually a very little soul which he keeps in it. The corruption of taste is a portion or a pendant of the dollar-manufacture” (Ibid, 500). For this Yankee, who is very much like our narrator, the cost of an article of furniture has become “nearly the sole test of its merit in a decorative point of view” (Ibid, 496-7). Poe ridicules his
narrator for indecorously lavishing the bedchamber with expensive orientalia, and
beyond that his derision might reach the thriving industrial class of “dollar
manufacture” of the North.

In addition to this mockery of tasteless dissipation, Poe also satirizes his
narrator’s intellectualism. We get to know him narrator dialogically as a comic
reflection of Ligeia. From the shadow of her linguistic and philosophical pursuits, Poe
constructs his narrator’s scholastic character; but unlike hers, his pursuits are a series
of continuous failures branded with misconception. In the traditional Oriental tale, the
economy of knowledge controls and regulates the roles of the Orientalist and the
Oriental. But in “Ligeia,” these roles are reversed; here, Ligeia assumes the educator’s
role; she bestows her knowledge on her pupil, the narrator. In the presence of his
mistress, the narrator becomes fixated on one thing: the “expression” of Ligeia’s eyes.
But ironically, this narrator, who is an expert in language and meaning, continually
fails to ‘discover’ the meaning of the “expression.” She stands in front of him an
enigmatic Oriental text that defies his Western methods of research and analysis.

If we look at the characters as metonymies of their geographies, we can
interpret the narrator’s quest of discovery in Oriental ‘territories’ as a colonial
campaign. He marches with his desire to “discover”, “analyze”, “define” and finally to
claim as his the outlandish landscape. In the text, we have seen how the imperial
power of his affluence allows him to transfer the East into his bridal chamber. Not
just his economical power, but his language too discloses his imperialism. He is a
caricatural representation, as Malini Johar Schueller argues in *U.S. Orientalisms:*
Race, Nation, and Gender Literature, 1790-1890, of the nation’s imperial imagination. His quest in possessing Ligeia is mostly discursive. Using a stock of Oriental metaphors, he reduces her to a fragmented entity of “eyes”, “hair” and “expression.” The tale was written at a time when the imperial powers, England and France, competed over the Middle East. Their rivalry was extended beyond the battlegrounds to include various fields of knowledge about the Middle East. Writers in the United States were aware of the link between imperialism and the production of some knowledge about the Orient, and used their discourses about the East to invent the imperial America. But in his tale, Poe seems to be skeptical about this imperial dream. At the performative level of the tale, he mocks his narrator’s confusion in front of his Oriental text, Ligeia. The whole narrative becomes a parody of the imperial imagination. In his analysis of Orientalism, Said finds Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, as a cultural force, very useful to understand the dynamics of forces in cultural transactions (7). He argues that in every instance of representation, in every unbalanced cultural encounter between East and West, the idea of the East is filtered through the supremacy of the West. The outcome of this one-sided representation was and is Orientalism, an “Orientalized” Orient. In “Ligeia,” Poe reverses the role of hegemony. His narrator is awe-stricken by Ligeia’s knowledge. The narrator’s bewilderment before her lore is expressed right from the beginning. When he introduces her character to us, the first thing that he decides to speak about is “her rare learning” (159). In a context of Western culture, Ligeia’s knowledge is rare, synonymous of strange, and her studies are “of a nature more than all else adapted to
deaden impressions of the outward world” (159). If what we have here is Poe’s satire on the Orientalist tradition, according to which Ligeia is a representation of the Oriental legacy and history, our narrator’s emphasis on the fact that he has “never known the paternal name of” Ligeia would reflect what Orientalists of the period found missing in the East. They too were prepossessed with ‘discovering’ the genealogy of the Eastern tradition. Thus we can say that the narrator’s sentiment resonates with William Jones’ and Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron’s enthusiasm, fifty years before the publication of the tale, to find a father for the Oriental letter. Their philological studies were primarily interested in writing a history of Eastern languages, and ‘discovering’ the meaning of their Letters. Our narrator is too a discoverer. The expression of Ligeia’s eyes intrigues him, and he does not hide the fact that he “was possessed with a passion to discover” it (162). The open ended expectations of what the Orientalist anticipates of ‘discovering’, Said explains, turns Orientalism into “the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient –dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for domination, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3). Our narrator, from what he aspires to discover, embodies this wide range of the Orientalist discourse. Beyond discovering the “expression” of Ligeia’s eyes, he also wants to “define that sentiment, or analyze, or even steadily view it” (162). At another occasion, his language betrays him still further when he tells us that in his quest to discover these eyes many a time he became momentarily so ecstatic and “felt approaching the full knowledge of their
expression –felt it approaching –yet not quite be mine – and so at length entirely depart” (162). Evidently, possession is what he ultimately wants, and possession is what he won’t get. Therefore we have reasons to conclude that Poe in this tale intends to satirize the Orientalist project. His narrator does not succeed in his quest; instead he stumbles from one failure into another. And his heroine resists all his narrator’s attempts to ‘penetrate’ her Oriental sphere.

Ligeia’s Oriental facet is constructed by borrowing from the Arabic stock of tropes an analogy that likens her eyes to the full eyes of the gazelle. His narrator flaunting his Orientalism says in praising her eyes that they are “even fuller than the fullest of the gazelle eyes of the tribe of Nourjahad” (Norton, 161). Poe might, as Thomas Ollive Mabbott suggests, have borrowed the Arabic term, “Nourjahad,” from Frances Sheridan’s The History of Nourjahad or Illusion, or the Trance of Nourjahad, a melodrama that was performed in 1813 (332). But a comparative study of this metaphor can be more fruitful to Poe scholarship than tracing the source of its Arabic term back to Poe’s contemporaries. When we turn our attention to its structure and expose its Oriental quality, we can better understand the character of its user. Furthermore, it is important to study it because it is by this distinct Arabic analogy that we discover the ties that connect our heroine irrevocably with the Middle East. Second it is from this Arabic figure of speech that we get to know our narrator’s Orientalism. To illustrate what I mean by Orientalism I refer to Edward Said’s definition of the term. He uses it to mean “the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice” (73). Poe’s narrator is
evidently exposed to this discipline. His language attests to his desire to “discover”, “define” and “analyze” the Orient, but at the same time it is evident also that Poe undermines his narrator’s desire by showing us that it is founded on metaphors and similes; second, by showing his impotency to come any closer to understanding Ligeia.

The analogy of the above example comes down form the classical traditions of Arabic poetry. Pre-Islamic poets repeatedly used this trope in their endearment of the beloved. It exalts her beauty by paying homage to one specific aspect, with which our narrator is familiar, the largeness of the beloved’s eyes. The metaphor comes directly from the simple environment of the ancient Arab. The endless extension of a flat yellow desert was sometimes altered by the sight of a herd of gazelles. The scene mesmerized the desert dweller, and became the subject of his meditating hour and a source for a host of metaphors and similes. Body parts of this beautiful animal provided the Arab poet with his simple means of adoring the beloved. In his discussion of the semantics of the pre-Islamic poetry, Professor Shawqi Dhayf points out in Al-’aser Al-Jahili (the pre-Islamic era) that this analogy was a stock-trope that classical poets in Arabia continuously used in their poems. He says:

وهذه النزعة في الشاعر الجاهلي جعلته لا يحلل خواطره وعواطفه إزاء ما يتحدث فيه من حب أو غير حب ، فهو لا يعرف التغلغل في خفافيس النفس الإنسانية ولا في أعماق الأشياء الحسية . وتتضح هذه النزعة في نفس خياله وتشبيهاته فهو ينترعها من عالمه المادي ، ولترجع مثلًا إلى تشبيهاته للمرأة فهو يشبهها بالشمس والبدر ... وعيونها بعيون البقر والغزال . (220)
This propensity (for the plain and simple) of the pre-Islamic poet does not allow him to analyze his thoughts and feelings of what he has to say about love or anything else. He is not an expert in probing the secrets of the human mind or the depths (metaphysics) of the corporeal. This propensity manifests itself in his imagination and analogies, for he extrapolates it directly from his real world. Let us go back, for instance, to his analogies of woman. He likens her to the sun, the full-moon…and her eyes to the eyes of cows and gazelles. (my translation)

This stock figure of speech persists throughout the history of Arabic literature making its appearance in every era. And if we consult Professor Dhayf’s Al-‘aser Al-‘Abbasi Al-thani (the second Abbasid era), we will find that this trope appears in his discussion of the Abbasid poet, Ali bin Al-jouhm. He quotes:

"عيون المها بين الرصافة والجرة/عيناً بين الدهر والدهر/عيناً بين الدهر والدهر

"أعدني لي الشوق القديم ولم أكن/سولت ولكن زدن جمر

The eyes of the gazelles between Alrasafah and Aljeser have brought love whence I know and know not They brought back to me old love that I have not forgotten, and added ambers to amber.

Then he paraphrases:

وهو تصوير بديع لما ترسل العيون من سهام الحب التي تدف من كل مكان مكشوف وخبئ من حيث يدري ابن الجهم و من حيث ولا يدري، وقد أعدني له جذوة الحب القديم التي لا سبيل إلى أطفالها وأوقد بجانبها جذوات. (267)
This is a beautiful metonymy for what the eyes send of love-arrows from everywhere concealed or otherwise, from where Ibin Al-jouhm knows and knows not. They brought back to him the old flame of love, inextinguishable, and set out others (my translation).

Ligeia’s large eyes have a different effect on our narrator from her sisters on Ibin Al-Jouhm. The reason for this difference is because our narrator views these large eyes as an Orientalist, unlike the Arab poet. To him, they are the eyes of the ‘other’; therefore a gap of separation will always exist between him and her. Part of Poe’s beautiful irony in this tale is this inversion of the symbolism of the eyes. Ironically, in this tale the ‘windows of the soul’ have become an endless tunnel of many twists and turns, like the Arabesque stem. The narrator’s quest to conquer, at the very elusive end of this incessantly running stem, one single meaning is never accomplished. He is repeatedly faced with his failure.

The narrative does not provide us with even one single instance of communication resulting from his looking at her eye, and he repeatedly admits his failure. Only after “Length of years, and subsequent reflection” does he understand the presence of “gigantic volition” behind “the miraculous expansion of those eyes which at once so delighted and appalled” him (163). He has never “known, she, the outwardly calm, the ever-placid Ligeia, was the most violently a prey to the tumultuous vultures of passion” (163). And now when she is wrestling with the shadow, we still doubt if he has ever understood her because of his “astonishment” to find that her struggle is “even more gigantic than” his (164). But the most striking
evidence of his misperception appears at her deathbed scene. Regretfully he acknowledges that he “should not have doubted” her love and that “in death only” is he “fully impressed with the strength of her affection” (164).

But in spite of his failure to see what Ibn Al-Jouhm might see in Ligeia’s eyes, we have to accredit his knowledge of Arabic metaphors and similes. He is impelled, perhaps, by the burden of his fragmented knowledge, to use another Oriental trope to describe the expression of Ligeia’s eyes. This time he compares Ligeia’s beauty to “the beauty of the fabulous Houri of the Turk” (Poe, 161). The term “Houri” comes from Islamic traditions. In “Al-waqi’a” (The Inevitable), chapter 56, verse 22, in the Quran, the speaker describes the beauty of one kind of women in paradise as “Houroun” (women of white skin with black irises surrounded with intense and lustrous whiteness). Unfortunately, none of the contemporary translations pay attention to the details of the Arabic term. Unsatisfied with what I find in the most cited translations, I turned to Al-Rafi’i, a 14th century lexicographer, who explains the term:

Horoun: Houroun حوراً من باب تعب اشتت بصاحبها وسواه ويدل حوراً ويقال الحور
асводاد المشقة كلها كعيون الطلاء قالوا وليس في الإنسان حور وإنما قال ذلك في النساء على التشبه وفي مختصر العين، ولا يقال للمرأة حوراء إلا للبيضاء مع حورها وحورته الثواب
تحويرة بيضتها وقيل لأصحاب عيسى عليه السلام حواريون لأنهم كانوا يحورون الكباب آي
بيضونها. (88)

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10 The three main circulating translations of the Koran are Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall’s, Abdullah Yusuf Ali’s, and M.H. Shakir’s, and they respectively render the verse “And (there are) fair ones with wide, lovely eyes”, “And (there will be) Companions with beautiful, big, and lustrous eyes”, and “And pure, beautiful ones,” George Sale’s, the 18th century translator of the Koran, however, touches on part of the Arabic meaning rendering the verse “damsels having large black eyes.”
Hawara (the root verb of the word): … the eye hawarat (infinitive
‘hawaran’, and rhyming with ‘ta’iba’) means its whiteness is intensified
and its blackness as well. Hawar, it is said, means the blackening of the
whole iris like the eyes of the gazelles. They (lexicographers) said
mankind cannot have hawar, but that was said of women figuratively,
as a metonymy of the eye. A woman, also, cannot be said to be hawraa’
unless she has white skin and black eyes. She hawarat the clothes
tahwiran means she whitened them (to whiteness). It is said of the
disciples of Jesus, peace be upon, him that they were called hawariyin
because they yuhawwiruna their clothes, means they used to whiten
them (my translation).

My purpose of this extensive reference to Arabic language and poetics is to underline
Poe’s irony. Through it, I can point to Poe’s intention to satirize his narrator’s
‘expertise’ in the Orientalist discourse. In spite of all what he learned about the East of
similes and metaphors, he still fails to know Ligeia. It is not my intention with this
considerable reference to Arabic culture to insinuate that Poe was familiar with
classical Arabic poetry or Al-Rafi’i’s dictionary –although he might be familiar with
George Sale’s translation of the Koran. But for the specialist in comparative studies,
there is an unmistakable resemblance noticeable between what we find in these
sources and the narrator’s use of these Arabic metaphors and similes. We cannot miss
the agreement between Poe’s description of Ligeia and Alrafi’i’s emphasis on the
combination of the whiteness of the skin and blackness of the irises. More instances of
what the narrator knows about the Orient are flaunted in other places in the text. One example can be found in the language that he used to describe his ill-omened union with his Ligeia. Borrowing from Oriental mythology, he laments that “the misty-winged Astophet of idolatrous Egypt, presided” over it (Poe, 160). Another instance is his calling the angel of death “Azrael”.11

Our narrator selects the “Arabesque” to be the decorative theme of his bridal chamber. We see it in on the censers, the draperies, the carpets, the covering of the bed and the on the ottomans. It plays symbolic roles in the story by invoking three different meanings: it means the continuity of Ligeia, the death of Rowena, and the madness of the narrator. It symbolizes the continuity of Ligeia because both the design and she are Oriental. The tale can be divided into two halves, before and after Ligeia. In the first half, the narrator internalizes Ligeia as “her beauty passed into his soul”, while in the second half he externalizes her by decorating the bridal chamber with the Arabesque. Ligeia and the Oriental design derive their meanings from each other. But the Arabesque is also a symbol of Rowena’s death because the story of her death starts from underneath the “Saracenic” censer. And before and after her initial recovery, she spoke “of the sounds –of the slight sounds –and the unusual motions among the tapestries,” of the Arabesque (169). The presence of this Oriental spirit whether in the

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11 Arabic for the angel of death. The fact that Poe did not footnote any these Arabic expressions is indicative of the wide spread interest among his readers in the Middle Eastern culture. It seems that Poe’s readership shared more understanding of the East than the readership of today. This might be explained by the fact that a tremendous amount of this understanding was disseminated among the American public by various sources: the popularity of the Arabian Nights, the political tensions with the regencies of North Africa, and the continuous flooding of recent translations of Oriental texts. In such wide spread interest in the Orient, the narrator’s borrowing from Arabic figures of speech accomplishes two things: it, as I said earlier, connects Ligeia with a specific geography; second, it helps Poe portrays his narrator as a versed Orientalist.
“tapestries” or the “censer” will eventually consume her life. Finally the Arabesque is a symbol of the narrator’s madness as can be established from his own confession, quoted above, i.e. “an incipient madness might have been discovered in the gorgeous and fantastic draperies.” He, the Orientalist, has misconstrued the delicate lines of the Arabesque. His hideous representation reflects the maddening effect that Ligeia has on his mind. It divulges his horrific secret thoughts.

In “The Fall of the House of Usher” Poe uses the Arabesque as a motif too. He spins his narrative around the face of Roderick Usher, making it a point of reference for the Arabesque of the tale. We can start with the narrator’s observation, when he meets Usher: “The silken hair” he notes, “too, had been suffered to grow unheeded, and as, in its wild gossamer texture, it floated rather than fell about the [face], I could not, even with effort, connect its Arabesque expression with any idea of simple humanity”[may italics](Poe, *Selected Writings*, 203). The “face” is the tale’s central theme, and it develops on two interrelated levels. Semantically, the face stands for the mind, the family, and maybe the nation; and syntactically, its theme appears in a system of repetition in the tale. For instance, “The Haunted Palace,” a poem which Usher improvises in one of his melancholic moment, describes a castle that looks like a face. Its role is to affect dialectically the meaning of “expression” on Roderick’s face. The poem tells a story of dreary change, from sanity to insanity. Right after the recitation of the poem, the narrator and Usher fall into an interesting discussion of sensation of consciousness of inanimate objects. “The conditions of the sentience [of the house] had been here,” Usher imagined, “fulfilled in the method of collocation of
these stones—in the order of their arrangement, as well as in that fungi which 
overspread them, and of the decayed trees which stood around—above all, in the long 
undisturbed endurance of this arrangement, and in its duplication in the still water of 
the tarn” (209). The objects that drew Usher’s attention as “evidence” of the house 
“sentience” resonate with the aspects of his face, which formerly invoked the 
“Arabesque expression” in the narrator’s mind. And in his survey of what breathes life 
in the house, Usher emphasizes that “duplication” lies at heart of his feeling. But 
before we get to this poem, we see another analogy between house and face. When the 
narrator arrives at the house of Usher, he is struck with horror at the effect of “vacant 
eye-like windows.” Then on the surface of the tarn, he is again but doubly terrified to 
see “the vacant and eye-like windows” (200). The face of Usher’s house has a 
“fissure” that runs from its roof to its foundation. At the end of the story, an explosion 
causes this fissure to widen so vast that the narrator sees the red moon in between. But 
the scene of the house/face destruction appears earlier in the narrative when Usher 
paints a picture of a vault that is completely sealed off from the world with “no torch, 
or other artificial source of light…, yet a flood of intense rays rolled throughout, and 
bathed the whole in a ghastly and inappropriate splendor” (206). Finally, the 
“Arabesque expression” which the narrator sees in Usher’s face, and which initiates 
the syntactical structure of the tale, i.e. its system of “duplication,” is further mirrored 
in Lady Madeline’s, whom the narrator finds to have a “striking similitude” to her 
brother. This mirroring complicates further the “expression” on Roderick’s face; it 
adds the gender element to dialogue of the Arabesque. In “Ligeia” the Arabesque has
structural significance too. The tale’s theme, as indicated in the epigram of the tale, revolves around the unleashing of the power of the will. But Joseph Glanvill’s alleged quotation appears four times in the tale, creating by its recurrence an Arabesque motif. In the middle, between these four occurrences, the narrator reads Ligeia’s poem in which she protests man’s weak will for life. And then in the end when her apparition stands before him, Ligeia makes true her mystical belief in the power of the will; she comes back from the dead a haunting thought of his obsession.

The Arabesque in “Ligeia” has still another significance that is derived from its fundamental meaning, ‘Arabian,’ or ‘Arabic.’ With this sense, it allows Poe to invoke otherness in the tale, hence opening its dialogue to assumptions that lie outside the tale’s structure: East versus West. The tale “begins with an entry into a dreamlike state, which for Near East Orientalist writers would increasingly signify the East” (Schueller, 608). The haziness of the narrator’s account of Ligeia’s history, Schueller explains, springs from the lethargic consumption of opium which Orientalists, from the period, usually associated with the East. Schueller draws her conclusion from several contemporary novels, such as Murray’s The Turkish Slave and Cummins’ El Fureidis, in which the fume of the drug is used to create the exotic oriental sphere. But the consumer of the opium in this tale is not the Oriental, but the Orientalist. In Poe’s writing, the opium has a transcendental agency. But instead of taking its consumer to a blissful world of fancy, it ironically transforms him to a dark world of pain and suffering. This comic inversion of Transcendentalism can be explained as part of Poe’s literary warfare with the North, in which Transcendentalism figures as one of its
literary registers. Poe finds in this Oriental medium the means to counter the “empire of literature” of the North. In “Loss of Breath”, which also appears in *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, we have another example of Poe’s parody of Transcendentalism. When Mr. Lacko’breath is sent down dangling from the gallows, he felt that he was “eating opium, or feasting upon the Hashish of the old assassins” (98). In the ecstasy of this prophetic moment, “A storm –a tempest of ideas, vast, novel, and soul-stirring, bore my spirit like a feather afar off. Confusion crowded upon confusion like a wave upon a wave. In a very short time Schelling himself would have been satisfied with my entire loss of self-identity. The crowd became a mass of mere abstraction” (98-9). The loss of “self-identity,” which the narrator experiences on the gallows, is a mock representation of the transcendentalist notion of self-negation. It sarcastically reminds us of Emerson’s eyeball metaphor. Another example of Poe’s satire on transcendentalism appears in “How to Write a Backwood Article,” another Oriental tale of the same collection. In a comic conversation, Mr. Blackwood instructs Zenobia, the heroine, about the merits and demerits of writing a good article. He recommends for her “the tone transcendental and the tone heterogeneous. In the former the merit consists in seeing into the nature of affairs a very great deal farther than any body else. This second sight is very efficient when properly managed. A little reading of the Dial will carry you a great way…Put in something about the Supernal Oneness. Don’t say a syllable about the Infernal Twoness” (Poe, *Selected Writings*, 178-9). Poe’s transcendentalism is of a dark nature. If man were to see “into the

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12 In *Nature*, published 1836, Emerson describes this moment of self-nothingness in these words: “all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God”
nature of affairs” the “sight” wouldn’t be a pleasant one. His narrator in “The Fall of the House of Usher” reflects on the mystical effect of the sight of the house of Usher on his mind as he approaches it. It engulfs him with “utter depression of soul,” which he compares “to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveler upon opium –the bitter lapse into everyday life –the hideous dropping off the veil” (Ibid, 199). Similarly, in “Ligeia,” the opium is an emblem of dark transcendence. It allows its reveler to experience “the hideous dropping of the veil” which in “Ligeia” translates into the fantastic apparition of the heroine at the end. It is a sight of horror because it reflects the void in the narrator’s mind.

John C. Gruesser too notices the dreamlike world of “Ligeia,” but instead of attributing it solely to the effects of opium, he argues that its haziness is discursively produced. Its effect is created by the narrator’s method of describing Ligeia. Her person is a “shadow,” her face is a “dream,” her voice is a “melody,” and her eyes are metaphors. This indeterminate description allows Ligeia to transcend the finitude of her body to become an infinite concept. The haziness created by the text, in a spatial sense, parallels the effect of the Arabesque: the entwining lines transcend their material nature and become an abstract theme floating within the bounds of the design. Poe recognizes the analogy between spatial art and words. In “The Colloquy of Monos and Una” the narrator’s senses are merged into one consciousness. Seeing inspires his mind with sound imagery, and hearing with optical ones. He tells Una that he appreciates what he sees “only as sound –sound sweet or discordant as the matters presenting themselves at my side were light and dark in shade –curved and angular in
outline” (Poe, Selected Writings, 283). In this fluid experience of a commingled consciousness, “Words are vague things” (Ibid). In “Ligeia” too, the narrator’s description of Ligeia transforms her from substance to concept. We see this inclination further realized in the narrator’s desire to turn Ligeia into a linguistic entity. “Ligeia! Ligeia!” he calls out, in one of his emotional outbursts, as if he were conjuring a spirit. His calls dissolve Ligeia’s body in the body of the text. She is a vocative linguistic case. She is the semantics that regulates the meaning of a paragraph in Joseph Glanvill’s mystical book; she is also an “expression” more “profound than the well of Democritus” (Ibid, 162). She is the letter incarnated, and its mystic meaning shines out from her eyes. The narrator wrestles with this oneness between his beloved and language. When she becomes ill, he mourns the dreadful effect of her subdued eyes on language. He mourns: “Wanting the radiant luster of her eyes, letters, lambent and golden, grew duller than Saturnian lead” (Ibid, 163). The juxtaposition of “eyes” and “letters” allows for liberal traffic of signification between the two terms. Each of them dialogically borrows its meaning from the other, thus blurring out the pause suggested by the comma between them. Furthermore, since the modifiers of the letters, “lambent and golden,” refers back to the “luster of her eyes”, the separating comma dwindles still further almost to nonexistence. Her eyes become synonymous with the letters, and thus she is the letter. When Ligeia is not a letter or a text, she is vast knowledge. Her “readings alone, rendered vividly luminous the many mysteries of the transcendentalism” (163). Her immense knowledge of the mysteries of the transcendental bewilders and confuses him. “Indeed upon any theme of the most
admired, because simply the most abstruse of the boasted erudition of the academy, have I ever found Ligeia at fault?” (163). But Ligeia, above everything else, is an Oriental other, a fact that will render her knowledge Oriental too. She is metonymically related to the knowledge of her original geography. In the presence of this Oriental Letter (and here Poe’s irony is very strong) the narrator feels that he has to bow and admit that he “was sufficiently aware of her infinite supremacy to resign [him]self, with a child-like confidence, to her guidance through the chaotic world of metaphysical investigation” (163). In reverse to a long established tradition of the Oriental representation, Poe makes his narrator acknowledge two essential points: first that her Oriental knowledge stretches far beyond the scope of his understanding; second that such knowledge is capable of restoring order “to the chaotic world of metaphysical investigation.” It has become obvious to us that a significant part of the critical investment that Poe makes in this tale resides in the narrator. So, how does this narrator figure in the nation?

I have referred earlier to the narrator’s linguistic frustration in describing the effect of Ligeia’s eyes on him. To remedy the inadequacy of his language he uses the word “expression,” only to confess thereafter of its impotence to provide him with a satisfactory description: “Ah, word [expression] of no meaning! Behind whose vast latitude of mere sound we trench our ignorance of so much of the spiritual” (162). It is very important that we explore what Poe means by “our.” It connects our narrator with a certain cultural entity, and also unveils to us what the author wants to say about such entity. I have pointed earlier that with Ligeia’s guidance, the narrator was able to find
order in the “chaotic world of metaphysical investigation,” and that “[h]er presence, her readings alone, rendered luminous many mysteries of the transcendentalism in which [they] were immersed” (163). From these statements, we may entertain the notion that Poe wants us to see his narrator as a transcendentalist. And we can pursue this notion further on the grounds that he, as a transcendentalist, shows obsessive interest in the East. What interests him in the East (and this is another indication that furthers our assumption of his transcendentalist background) is its mystical spirituality. In an acerbic review of Theodore Parker’s *A Discourse of Matter Pertaining to Religion*, which was published in 1842, the editor of the *New Englander* accuses Parker of possibly borrowing the principles of his argument from the spirituality of the Middle East. He says “to a common man, even if intelligent or learned, they seem more like the dogmas of a French or Hindoo deist, or mayhap the more refined religionism of a *Persian Soofee*” [my italics] (371-2). Parker re-presents Christianity to the American reader from a transcendentalist point of view. The central concept of his discussion describes man as a religious being by nature, and finds him to be always subject to divine “inspiration.” New England was the home of this philosophy, and was identified with it. But New England, as I have pointed earlier, also dominated the literary stage of the nation, to an extent that it became a threat to the South’s cultural existence in the Republic. Inspired by the South’s national anxiety, Poe creates his narrator, a transcendentalist, and of course a miserable one. His parody of the Northern philosophers and their school appears frequently in his works. Several of his short stories include a sarcastic reference to their national
platform, the *Dial*. In “Never Bet the Devil Your Head” the *Dial* figures as a site of chaos in the world of criticism, where “all that he [the writer] did not intend, will be brought to light” (287). Mr. Blackwood, in “How to Write a Blackwood Article” recommends it to Zenobia, while the narrator and his friends in “Some Words with a Mummy,” after being defeated several times by the mummy, suggest as a last resort to read from the it “a chapter or two about something which is not very clear, but which the Bostonians call the Great Movement of Progress” (178-396).

In “Ligeia,” Poe’s satire on Transcendentalism is more complex than these examples. His narrator attempts in every comment and description of Ligeia to deify Ligeia, but only to bring him destruction at the end. We can notice in his expressions, when he wrestles with the meaning of Ligeia’s eyes, a mystical meaning saturated with the transcendentalist discourse. He invokes the circle as a motif in his quest, and as a transcendentalist he blurs out ‘angular outlines’ of matter so that the law, or the expression of Ligeia’s eyes, becomes ‘transparent’ to his mind’s eyes. But in his case, that law is only void and emptiness. He tells us “I found, in the commonest objects of the universe, a circle of analogies to that expression” (162). This statement calls to mind Emerson’s observation of “the unity in variety” in nature: “All the endless variety of things make [sic] an identical impression” (30). Similar to Emerson’s assertion that “[n]ot only resemblances exist in things whose analogy is obvious…but also in objects wherein there is great superficial unlikeness,” our narrator’s description of the impression revolves around analogies of dissimilarities (30). He too observes its oneness “in the survey of a rapidly-growing vine –in the contemplation of a moth, a
butterfly, a chrysalis, a stream of running water...in the ocean; in the falling of a meteor...in the glances of unusually aged people” in stars, in music, and finally in reading from a passage from in Joseph Glanvill’s volume (162). Ligeia floats through these circles as an elusive concept. Her transcendental state can be best described by the following fluid imagery of the cosmos taken from Emerson’s “Circles”: “The universe is fluid and volatile. Permanence is but a word of degrees. Our globe seen by God is a transparent law, not a mass of facts. The law dissolves the fact and holds it fluid” (Emerson, 229). My evocation of Emerson can be further supported by Ligeia’s question to God: “Are we not part and parcel in Thee?” (166). It too reminds us of Emerson’s “I am part and parcel of God” in Nature. With this transcendentalist language, Ligeia ascends to a state of divinity. The narrator tells us that after her beauty “passed into his soul” it became his “shrine” (162). But more important is what the epigram of the tale suggests. It appears four times in the story, two times of which were uttered from Ligeia’s lips. It emphasizes the divinity of man by making him, as Emerson said, “part and parcel of god.” To this effect the epigram reads, “For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will” (159). Ligeia shares with the divine “An intensity” which is “a result, or at least an index, of that gigantic volition” in her soul (163). In person she is ethereal or transcendent, walking in and out of the narrator’s study like a “shadow” and the beauty of her face is “the radiance of an opium dream—an airy spirit-lifting vision more wildly divine than the phantasies which hovered about the slumbering souls of
the daughters of Delos [Greek mythology: island of Apollo and Artemis]” (160). But ironically Poe does not allow Ligeia’s divinity to thrive. At the end, she brings not harmony, not oneness, but destruction and chaos to the narrator. She becomes a symbol of his madness.

In addition to the tale’s satire on transcendentalism, it seems that Poe wants to make a statement to the transcendentalists who vowed their dedication to study and fathom the East. In its short lived publishing life, the *Dial* published several translations of Oriental texts. Poe, in his tale, seems to say that if the East holds a spiritual truth, it is better to be left alone. The reason that he provides for this argument is convincing. He protests the possibility of Western tradition to “discover”, “analyze” and “define” the Oriental tradition. Poe does recognize the East as a powerful site of knowledge, history, and language; but one that is completely alien, by the difference of its unique nature, to the West. Thus while he admires the East he does not encourage any union with it. The outcome would be inevitable chaos and madness. He prefers to erect, instead, a wall that prevents the West from entangling itself with it. It defies logic to subject an Oriental text to the analysis of Western traditions. This might look an avant-garde to the modern reader, but the fact is that such understanding of the separation between the East and West traditions was discussed in the period. In an article written anonymously, entitled “On Persian Poetry and Hafiz” in 1805, the author makes a significant note of the futility of using Western methodology to construct some form of hermeneutics for the Eastern text. He acknowledges that Hafiz’s poetics are not “subject to the same system of laws, and

234
consequently we have no right to condemn him for deviations from a code to which he will not submit” (420). But even if we agree that Poe recognized this critical stance, the regional anxiety of the South still played the central role in creating his interest in the Orientalist’s tragedy.

The Arabesque, as I have explained at the beginning of my discussion, is a narrative technique that allows different and sometimes contradictory elements to coexist in a text. Based on this simple premise, it would be contradictory to argue that the Arabesque in “Ligeia” operates as a platform for one single notion: the author’s critique of Northern domination in national literature. In the following pages, I will show that there is another strain of meaning in this tale. Such strain helps formulate the author’s critique of racism and slavery. Poe scholars are in radical disagreement among themselves over Poe’s position on slavery. Most of this disagreement is generated by a long documentary debate over the authorship of a review titled “Slavery” that was anonymously published in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, in April 1836, during Poe’s editorship. The article is a review of two books that supported slavery: *Slavery in the United State* by J.K. Paulding, and *The South Vindicated from Treason and Fanaticism of the Northern Abolitionists* by H. Manly. The author of the review uses these two works to make his case about the validity of slavery. Some critics, like John Carlos Rowe and Joan Dayan, argue that Poe was the author of the review, whereas others, like G. R. Thompson, argue that Judge Nathaniel
Beverley Tucker was its author. To support his argument, Thompson refers to a letter from Poe to Tucker dated May 1836, in which Poe tells him that he made “immaterial alterations in [his] article on Slavery” (*Selected Writings*, 779).

I don’t think that Poe can be completely identified with either position. He, as Terence Whalen argues in “Average Racism,” was economically interested in constructing a murky position that could appeal to both segments of audience in the nation. He proposes a commercial argument to explain Poe ambiguous position. “Poe’s political agenda,” He argues, “was conspicuously confined to problems of production, ranging from the poverty of the authors to the corruption of publishers to the emergence of a vaguely ominous mass audience” (2-4). The rhetoric of Poe’s prefatory writings and reviews, such as his preface to the “Raven” or his “Exordium,” attests to this “agenda.” In this commercial argument, Whalen further notes, “publishers and commercial writers were seeking a form of racism acceptable to white readers who were otherwise divided over the more precise issue of slavery” (Ibid, 4).

Whalen is right in describing Poe’s position as ‘middling,’ and I agree that he looked at partisanship as an entrapment that could lead to nothing but the destruction of business. But I don’t see Poe’s middling position as formulated merely by his commercial interests. I find it to spring right from the heart of his creative principle, from his “contraries together,” which he identifies as “the spirit of the age.” It is born from his Arabesque. In “Ligeia,” Poe, along with his criticism of the North, includes another strain of criticism directed against the South. In the following pages, I will
show that his heroine, who carries with her a shade of darkness, invokes the nation’s debate over racism; furthermore, I will argue that the love triangle that links her with Rowena invokes slavery as well.

In appearance, Ligeia is portrayed as an Oriental woman. The color of her hair and eyes places her in this ethnography. The narrator cannot help but be charmed by “the raven-black, the glossy, the luxuriant and naturally-curling tresses, setting forth the full force of the Homeric epithet, ‘hyacinthine’” (161). To him, the whiteness of her skin coupled with the blackness of her hair and eyes makes her eligible to fit an ancient Western tradition of ethnography, a tradition that goes back to Homer. Edward Said speaks of the ancientness of this tradition is in his narration of the history of Orientalism. He writes:

Almost from earliest times in Europe the Orient was something more than what was empirically known about it. At least until the early eighteenth century, as R.W. Southern has so elegantly shown, European understanding of one kind of Oriental culture, the Islamic, was ignorant but complex. For certain associations with the East – not quite ignorant, not quite informed – always seem to have gathered around the notion of an Orient. Consider first the demarcation between Orient and West. It already seems old by the time of the Iliad. (55-6)

13 The *Oxford English Dictionary* supplies us with an explanation for the link between this term and the Middle East. The word is “the English name of the genus *Hyacinthu* (family Liliaceae), consisting of bulbous plants with bell-shaped six-parted flowers, of various colours, usually drooping, arranged in a loose upright spike; esp. *H. orientalis*, a native of the Levant, of which numerous varieties are cultivated for beauty and fragrance of their flowers.”
We might smile at the coincidental agreement between Said and Poe’s choice of the author of the *Iliad* as a historical point of reference for the emergence of the Oriental Otherness. This agreement becomes of more interest to us because of Poe’s full comprehension of the politics of presentation. In “Ligeia,” Poe demonstrates his full understanding of the link between knowledge and power. The crisis of the narrator, as I pointed earlier, is a crisis of knowledge. Its lack unveils the reality of his weakness and threatens his existence, a condition which eventually leads to his final destruction.

In this drama of desire and knowledge, Poe intentionally preserves the dividing line between the Orient and the Occident to make a statement about their racial economy. His interest in the separation between East and West, between white and black becomes very clear in the *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. When Pym describes the rookery, Thompson finds the description to fit that of the Arabesque (“Romantic Arabesque,”203). Its distribution of spaces between the white albatrosses and the black penguins has a role to play in the whole structure of the tale. Their geometrical separation is essential for the existence of any “privileges of citizenship” (Pym, 141). Without this dividing line, chaos would reign in the rookery. In “Ligeia,” Poe likewise does underscore racial separation between his drastically opposite female characters.

After linking Ligeia to an ancient Western tradition of ethnography, our narrator adds in his comments on her eyes that they are “far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race [my emphasis]” (Poe, 161). They are far larger than those of Rowena, the typical Anglo-Saxon female. With this statement, the text provides us
with a strong piece of evidence of Poe’s intention in invoking the racial discourse in his tale. Ligeia’s eyes, the narrator tells us, are marked with “irregularity” (160). The negating prefix works as a separating technique by which the narrator forces Ligeia into a world different from his own. Notwithstanding his expressed desire, which abounds in the text, for a union with her, this prefix discloses his racial ideology of disassociation with her. He is the ‘regular’ and she is the ‘ir-.’ But since this reference to racial differences is still clothed with the vagueness of generality, and since the narrator is seemingly interested in clarifying to us the exact ethnicity of his beloved, he adds that they are “fuller than the fullest of the gazelle eyes of the tribe of the valley of Nourjahad” (Norton, 161). This description recognizes the fullness of the eyes as a racial marker that distinguishes Middle Eastern women. It, as I have pointed earlier, helps us locate Ligeia on the map of the world and connect her with the Middle East.

Poe’s selection of Arabic ethnicity for his heroine in this tale is significant. It invokes questions about the theory of racial ideology of the period, which was founded on the assumption of the supremacy of the white blood. The whole economy of the South depended on such theory. According to it, a man with black blood is naturally constituted to serve a white master. The basic categories of this theory are white and non-white. It suggests a gradational system of blood ratio that ensures the continuity of blackness in any individual of mixed blood. But this theory always found a challenge in describing the Arab race. On the one hand, Arabs belong to a mixed-blood race; therefore their mind and personality hide behind a shade of blackness.
They are intimately related to their brothers of Africa. On the other hand, many pages of the history of humanity speak of their rise in power, sciences, arts, and philosophy. Antislavery writers used the Arab race to challenge the racial ideology of the South on two points: the continuity of blackness, and dependence. In 1840, Eli Smith, a missionary to the Middle East, delivers a lengthy discourse on the Arab race to the American Board of Missions. Smith’s intention in this discussion is to break the continuity between blackness and whiteness in the Arab race by showing a set of characteristics that prove their whiteness.

Again, as to the vindictiveness of the Bedaween [the Arab wanderer], he is not natively blood-thirsty. But he is jealous of his rights, and it has been considered, from time immemorial, a sacred duty to avenge the blood of a relative. It is this feeling which gives them a decided character of independence—a trait possessed even by menial servants, who stand up and raise their voice in the presence of their masters, like the sons of republicans.

Smith’s vindication of the Arab vengeful nature is founded on “rights”, “sacred duty” and “independence.” With these terms, the author establishes the moral ground on which Arabs stand, and makes them brothers to the “sons of republicans.” But what Smith’s discussion implies is to raise a question about the black blood in the Arab race. He implicitly challenges racial ideology in his account of the Arabs’ republicanism. In “Ligeia,” Poe does something similar; he carefully brings up the blackness and whiteness of his heroine. With her “naturally-curling tresses” [my
emphasis] of “raven-black” hair and the “voluptuous slumber of the under” lip, she can be categorized as an octoroon or some other category of a lesser ratio of the Negro blood. But in our tale, Poe challenges the notion of black dependency. He turns this racial formula upside down. His narrator, obviously a white male by reason of racial dissociation with Ligeia, is totally dependent on her. And Poe carefully points out to us that he depended on her for intellectual guidance. In slavery literature, the master’s relationship with his slaves is traditionally described in terms of parental love, in which the master stands for the father figure while the slaves for children. In “Slavery,” the controversial review which I referred to earlier, the author in describing the bond between master and slave writes that the master comes with a “feeling of parental attachment to his humble dependent” slave. But we don’t see this kind of affection on the master’s side nor this kind of dependency on the slave’s side in “The Man That Was Used up.” In this tale, Poe quizzically refers to the black power behind the perfection of the Southern slave master. “The manipulation of Pompey had made” the narrator observes, “a very striking difference in the appearance of” his master, Captain Smith (195) [my italics]. It seems that Poe sarcastically wants to show us that slavery is not just responsible for the economy of production but also the economy of perfection in the South. The master’s fragmented self is brought into a perfect image by the “manipulation” of the slave.

In “Ligeia”, the heroine’s manipulation is not constructive but destructive. She destroys the narrator’s mind and home. By invoking home and domesticity, Poe wants to implicate in his text another line of argument against slavery. His tale warns against
the consequences of miscegenation. After the introduction of Lady Rowena, the tale becomes a love triangle, in which the narrator while married still keeps his secret relationship with Ligeia. When we look at this tale from this perspective, it becomes a warning against the dangers of slavery for the amorous complication that very often entangles the master with his slaves. Thus, the story can be read also as a story of sexual usurpation, where the slave girl replaces her mistress in the bedroom. It starts with the heathen union that brought our narrator and his Ligeia together. Unlike Lady Rowena Trevanion of Tremaine, whose father’s name the narrator obviously knows her father’s name and whom he “led from the altar as” his bride, Ligeia lacks a father’s name and is united with the narrator under the “misty-winged Ashtophet of idolatrous Egypt” (166, 160). The unconsecrated union between Ligeia and the narrator does not receive the blessing of the church, thus does not count as a marriage in the first place. It is an amorous affair that starts before the narrator gets married. Before this happens, Ligeia leaves the scene, but not completely. We sense her presence after throughout the tale, first through her person, second through her spirit. When the narrator gets married to the “fair-haired and blue-eyed” Rowena, he still invites Ligeia into the bridal chamber, and the Arabesque bears witness for her presence. The narrator acknowledges that “the phantasmagoric influences of the chamber itself” made Rowena ill. And Rowena senses that there is some evil force in the “motions among the tapestries,” but she does not know that they are caused by the power of Ligeia. Then in the revivification scene, we witness repetitive visitation from Ligeia to the bed of Rowena’s boudoir. These intimate visitations lead to Rowena’s
destruction, and when she dies, Ligeia stands up in a scene of madness with her “long
and dishevelled hair” streaming “into the rushing atmosphere of the chamber” (173).

In “A Predicament” we have another example among Poe’s texts that invoke
slavery and sexuality. In this comic sketch, Zenobia is on a mission to write an article
after she got her instruction from Mr. Blackwood. She goes accompanied with her
“negro” Pompey. Her slave, Zenobia tells us, was dressed only in a “drab overcoat”
and a “stock,” and nothing else. The overcoat is huge on Pompey’s body so he has to
hold it with his hand in order to be able to walk. When Zenobia reaches the belfry, a
climactic moment in her career, she takes a moment to think. “I thought of myself,”
she tells us “then of Pompey, and then of the mysterious and inexplicable destiny
which surrounded us. I thought of Pompey! —alas, I thought of love” (185). The sexual
innuendoes become more explicit, when Zenobia reaches out with her hand for
Pompey to help him climb the stairs and join her in the Belfry room. Pompey lets go
of his coat which causes him to step on it. What happens next transpires into the most
obscene scene that Poe ever penned, and one wonders how it escaped the eyes of the
censorship. Zenobia tells us that Pompey “fell forward, and with his accursed head,
striking me full in the_____in the breast, precipitated me headlong, together with
himself, upon the hard, filthy detestable floor of the belfry” [my emphasis](185). The
humor in this scene is created by drawing a lewd image of an intimate contact of a
black man dressed with only a coat lying on top of a white woman with his head on
her breasts. Notwithstanding its humor, when this scene is read in its context of a national heated controversy over slavery, we cannot eliminate its political connotations.

If “Ligeia” is a work that voices its author’s criticism of the two political poles of the nation, North and South, where do we then find his political affiliation? The answer to this question is the Arabesque; in its ability to allow antitheses to coexist. And I want, in my conclusion, to stress that the significance of the Arabesque as a narrative technique that informs the form and content of Poe’s fiction is not yet exhausted. Feminism and mental philosophy are other possible strands that participate in the formation of Poe’s Arabesque. Poe saw in the Oriental design a fit mechanism for his vision of art, which he described as “contraries together.” “The arabesque, according to Schlegel” Thompson explains, “not so much ‘reconciles’ as ‘elevates’ contradictions and oppositions into a higher unity of consciousness of the artist – in a text that explores and embodies the continuity of various intentionalities” (“The Arabesque Design of *Pym,*” 193). I find this “unity,” in the authorial voice, to be the most political concept in Poe’s writing career. It stands as a genuine expression of his republicanism. Throughout his life, he relentlessly fought the dividing line. He wanted to draw a picture of the nation in its totality, not leaving one region out. The ability of the Arabesque to include “antagonisms” faithfully reflects the nature of the art that Poe wanted to create. Its multiple layers of ironies correctly reflect the romantic spirit from which he received his inspiration. Based on this premise, the Arabesque should not be read as an absolute other, but a skewed representation of the self.
In August of 1842 in Boston, “an informal meeting of a few gentlemen, interested in Oriental Literature, was held” to discuss “the practicability and expediency of forming an American Oriental Society” (*Journal of the American Oriental Society*, ii). In October of the same year, the proposed Society completed its charter, naming its president, three vice presidents, a corresponding secretary, a recording secretary, a treasurer, a librarian, and five directors. Among its objectives, as we read in Article II of its charter, the Society expresses its interest in “1. The cultivation of learning of the Asiatic, African, and Polynesian Languages. 2. The publication of Memoirs, Translations, Vocabularies, and other works relating to the Asiatic, African, and Polynesian languages. 3. The collection of a Library” (Ibid, vi). And in its By-Laws, it mandates that “IV. The librarian shall keep a catalogue of all the books belonging to the Society, and shall be governed in the discharge of his duties by such rules as the Directors shall prescribe. V. All Manuscripts deposited by the authors for publications, or for other purposes, shall be at the disposal of the Board of Directors” (Ibid, vii-viii). Soon the Society so flourished and bloomed that
its members saw the necessity of sharing their works with the public. In the following year, the American Oriental Society went from its initial private circle to the American public at large, and in a few months it started publishing its own journal in whose first issue we are told in the prefatory material that the content\(^1\) of the journal was originally intended for the members of the Society only; but afterwards a different arrangement was deemed expedient, and a wish was expressed that it should be delivered in some place open to the public. In consequence of this, a departure from the original plan of the Address, in some respects, became necessary; and some parts of the subject are treated in more popular form, than would otherwise have been the case. This, it is hoped, may be a sufficient apology for any portions of it, which may not have been expected in an address intended for an association of scholars. \(\text{\textsuperscript{Ibid}, i}\)

With this event, the Oriental discourse in America had risen to the state of a discipline, circulating translations, thoughts, facts, and interpretations of Oriental texts. Prior to the establishment of this Society and its journal, the Orient figured on the margins of the American media. Its body of letters was scattered through the sporadic articles published by the nation’s most popular journals, such as the Knickerbocker Magazine, the Democratic Review, the American Review, and the North American Review. But with the advent of the American Oriental Society, the East became a body of knowledge founded on the collaboration between “scholars” who specialized in the

\[^1\] Issue one of The Journal of the American Oriental Society contains the charter of the Society, the address of its elected president Professor John Pickering of Boston, Massachusetts, and an appendix.
study of the Orient and the American public. The event is of a singular significance; it came after the Orient had fermented for years in American thought. Emerson, Hawthorne and Poe are only examples of such fermentation.

The discussion that I present in these pages begs several fundamental questions, one of which is about the Romance as a genre. It points at the generic connection between the philosophy of the Romance and that of the Arabesque design. In “The Philosophy of Composition,” Poe finds the poetics of the romantic text to reside in the infinite “suggestiveness” of the “under currents” as they run their ironies beneath the finite “upper currents” (*Selected Writings*, 683). In a similar system of contrariety between upper and under, Ernst Kühnel points out that “The Arabesque was born from the idea of a leafy stem, but just as the branches turn into unreal waves and spirals, so do leaves bifurcate into forms that do not occur in nature” (5). The illusive nature of the signification that arises from the Arabesque, as Annemarie Schimmel explains, would attract the Sufi poets. She indicates that “one aspect of mystical language in Sufism that should not be overlooked is the tendency of the Arabs to play with words”; such style, she then adds, “might be likened to the structure of the an Arabesque that grows out of a simple geometric pattern into complicated multiangled stars, or out of a flower motif into intricate lacework” (13). The poetics of my three American authors springs from this Oriental model.

I choose to end my work with a word about *The Journal of the American Oriental Society*, not as a conclusion but as an introduction. A final statement about the role of the East in the American thought must not yet be produced when there is
still a considerable amount of facts, authors, and texts waiting to unlock their Oriental thought. A full history of Oriental thought in America has not yet been written. I choose to end with the American Oriental Society because it is a great example from the mass media of the blossoming Oriental thought. It speaks unequivocally about the formative role of the East in the construction of the American ‘self’. On the one hand, the self-assurance of the rising nation drew its saps form the East. “And here,” says John Pickering in his first speech to the American Oriental Society, “as Americans, deeply interested in the reputation of our country, we cannot but take pride in the reflection, that,....we have reason to believe there is a greater number of individuals, who are masters of the languages and literature” than “any one nation in Europe” (2). The East became America’s literary frontier.

On the other hand, the East became part and parcel of the American self. In an age when philology ruled in linguistic research, languages are considered to be essentially connected. Identification became the new sentiment of the scholarly research. In his speech, President Pickering gives us several examples; he points to the relationship between Irish and the language of the Berbers, Maltese and Phoenician, the Indian languages of America and the language of the Georgians to the south of Mount Caucasus, the Teutonic and Persian languages, just to name few. In this interconnected world, the self does not live in isolation. “I may here remark, in passing,” says Pickering, “that the various sources of information, which modern perseverance and zeal have opened to us, have materially extended the boundaries of the liberal education; and it has become indispensable to unite with our Greek and
Roman, a portion of Oriental learning” (41). Four years later, the Society would still maintain its principle of identification when it quoted from the charter of a German Oriental magazine:

(2.) the publishing, translating and digesting of oriental literary productions. It may regard this as its most important work, inasmuch as it will, without doubt, direct its attention chiefly to the editing of sources of history hitherto unused, to works which are of value with reference to historical geography, natural science, and the history of religion and civilization in the East; –in a word, maters of fact; though certainly it will also take up, from time to time, some one of the larger native philosophical works, since these afford the means of constant progress in the understanding of literature, and give the necessary correctness to study. (318)

The Germans, and the Americans in their footsteps, recognized in the philosophy and literature of the East the means “of constant progress in the understanding of literature” at large. The works of the American Orientalist, as Pickering saw it, “extended our acquaintance with the languages and literature of the Oriental nations, and have furnished the most valuable additional materials toward the history of the human race” (2). “The writings deciphered by the orientalists made the world, for the first time in human history, ”as Schwab phrases it, “whole” (4). Suddenly it became a challenging fact to scholars that the story of humanity was half told. There lay for
centuries another half waiting to be told. In America, the premise of the Oriental movement did not vary. It too sought in the Oriental text a completion for its theory of arts and philosophy.

In a very short period of time, the library of the American Oriental Society grew so rapidly that it would in a few years exceed what the library of Harvard prided itself of owning of Oriental literature for the last forty years. The Oriental project in America held overreaching ambitions. It promised to study the East from North Africa to China. This massive expanse of geography held as massive a scope of diverse thoughts, colors and ancient histories. In the first meeting of the Society, Pickering highlights the major points or questions that involve every segment of his massive East. From Egypt, he refers to the revolution that Champollion made in his decipherment of hieroglyphic. Behind what had for centuries been viewed as talismans and magical signs there lay the history of Egypt. At the heart of the African Sahara, he turns to the Berbers, telling the story of their migration from Phoenicia, their rise as a dominant empire and their conquests in Europe. Here Pickering stops to compliment the works of the American philologist, Mr. Du Ponceau, who initiated the research on the language of the Berbers. The next oriental site is Malta, about which Pickering refers to its connection with the language of the Middle East, Arabic and Phoenician. From Syria, he selects the ruins of Balbec and Tadmor (or Palmyera) to be his main points, and tells the tragic end of the queen of the latter, Zenobia. Next he comes to Turkey, which he divides into three main region nations: the Circassians (the descendents of the Amazons), the Georgians, and the Armenians. To the South of
Turkey, there is Kurdistan where the Nestorian Christians live. Their language is of a singular value because they spoke a vernacular version of the Syriac, the common language in Palestine around the time of Jesus. Moving west, Pickering now talks about Mesopotamia, Assyria and Babylonia. At this point he compares Hieroglyphic to Cuneiform, naming a couple of linguists of fame in this field. Then he moves southwest to cover Arabia and Yemen, where Queen Sheba established her kingdom. When Pickering next comes to discuss Persia he acknowledges that the “Persian language and literature were among the first to engage the attention of Oriental scholars in Europe; for which we are more indebted to that accomplished English scholar, Sir William Jones, than any other individual” (35). Pickering points out that many of the translations were now done by American scholars, when before they had to rely on European Orientalists. As an example, he points to a recent English translation of *Hayt-ul-Kuloob* done by Rev. J.L. Merrick, an American missionary in Persia. John Brown Porter, whose name in the Index of the first issue of The Journal, would years later write *Dervishes; or, Oriental Spiritualism*, the first American studies on Sufism. From Persia, Pickering then moves to the plains of central Asia to talk about the Tartars and Mongolians. To the South, he then leads us to India, pointing to the affiliation between Sanskrit and Greek. Beyond the Eastern coast of Asia, Pickering makes his final stop at the Polynesian Islands.

After his lengthy survey of the vast expanse of the Orient, Pickering ends his speech with a statement that emphasizes the significance of philology to Orientalism. He also quotes extensively to prove to his readers that German scholars had excelled
in this field over their counterparts in England. In his reference to another “able
English writer” who spoke about “the low state of philological studies in England,”
Pickering quotes: “‘The philological researches of the last and present age, more
especially those of the Germans, have already so entirely revolutionized what before
constituted this department of scholarship’” (55). In the Appendix of the first issue of
the Journal, the editor, to further the final point that Pickering brought out in this
speech, includes lengthy quotations from the transactions of the Paris Asiatic Society.
He too acknowledges the authority of the Germans when he quotes: “‘it is only
Germany at the present day, that the learned public are sufficiently numerous to
warrant the publication of a certain numbers of Oriental works’” (69). This is followed
with notes about recent publications in Cairo, Constantinople, Persia, India and
Canton, such as the *Thousand and One Nights*² (the Boulak edition), *Commentary on
Alfia*³, *Tarifat, History of Kudjars, Kamous, Kitab al-Aghani*⁴. In the following the
issues, the Journal would start including in its Appendices its own Oriental
manuscripts and books. In its third issue of volume one, the Journal would include
fourteen pages of entries of translations and books written by American scholars. Such

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² The following is quoted from what the editor said about the Nights: “The Thousand and One Nights
find editors and translators in all parts of the world, and in all languages. While M. Habicht was printing
his edition at Berslau, they were producing, lithographically, the incomplete texts of the old Calcutta
edition; and the Sheikh Abdourrahman al-Safti al-Scherkawi was printing (in 1835) his excellent edition
at Boulaq, a translation in Hindostanee; and in 1839, there appeared at Calcutta the first volume of the
Arabic edition of M. Macnaghtan, after a manuscript which had belonged to the late M. Macan. This
edition was the basis of the English translation of Mr. Torrens, which comes out at Calcutta also, at the
same time that Mr. Weil is printing a new translation in Germany, and Mr. Lane is publishing, in
London, his fine English translation, on which he follows, principally, the Boulak text.
³ Alfia by the linguist Ibn Malek, is a long poem of one thousand verses. Its subject is Arabic grammar.
⁴ By Abu al-Faraj al-Asfahani, is a history
vast circulation of Oriental literature was assimilated in the fabric of American thought, and from its rich history and culture the American author wrote the story of his nation.
ABC, ABCD. “Letters Relation to Mr. Champollion’s Discoveries in Egyptian Literature.” The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art. 2.10 (April, 1823):376-82.


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“On the Mystical Poetry of the Persians and Hindus” by the president of *Asiatick Researches or, Transactions of the Society Instituted in Bengal: for Inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences, and Literature of Asia*. Volume III. (1801):165-83.


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260