

Research Article

A Comparative Study of Love in Emerson's Essays and Attar's The Conference of the Birds

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ABSTRACT

Love has always shone as one of the major themes in literature. A great number of writers and poets have enriched their works with it and created memorable stories. However, not many have delved into the very nature of love itself to see what it really is and where it comes from. Hence, the present essay aims to stay away from the typical analysis of love and will instead focus solely on the nature of this immeasurable force through a comparative view on Emerson and Attar's thoughts on the concept. To gain an understanding of their spiritual thoughts, the research focuses on comparing and contrasting Emerson's essays with Attar's *The Conference of the Birds*. The study is descriptive-analytical in nature and follows the American school of comparative literature. Through the analysis it is revealed that the two literary figures share many similar thoughts. To both of them beauty and love are considered the source of the universe. Furthermore, in their views true love leads to self-knowledge. The difference between the two is shown to be that Emerson has a more humanistic approach towards love, whereas Attar has a more mystically divine one. In the end, Attar's influence on Emerson is identified as well.

Introduction

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) was an American essayist, poet, and philosopher whose thoughts and works have had a lasting influence on American Literature. Emerson was arguably the forerunner and the representative of the 19th century Transcendentalist movement which emphasized the unity of all creation and the power of each individual soul to comprehend reality. In Transcendental thought "The soul of each individual was thought to be identical with the world — a microcosm of the world itself" (VanSpanckeren, 2011, p. 26-27). In his readings of Eastern thoughts, one of the nations Emerson came into contact with was Persia. He soon fell in love with Persian poetry and was influenced and inspired by it (Gougeon, 1989, p. 41). In an essay titled *On Persian Poetry* Emerson (1875) writes of the seven pillars of classical Persian poetry going on to name Attar as one of the poets who would soon rise to be recognized by the world scholars (p. 191).

Emerson (1875) praises the Persian civilization and its love of poetry stating that "Religion and poetry are all their civilization" (p. 192). Although his essay is entitled *On Persian Poetry*, the majority of it is dedicated to Hafiz and his thoughts and style of verse. His love and reverence for Hafiz caused him not only to translate a number of his poems but also to be influenced by him in own his poetry as well. On Hafiz he says, "[He] is the prince of Persian poets, and in his extraordinary gifts adds to some of the attributes of Pindar, Auacreon, Horace" (Emerson, 1875, p.196). Emerson ends the essay by mentioning Attar and his book *The Conference of the birds* "as a proof of the identity of mysticism in all periods" (p. 213). He gives a summary of the birds' goal and then cites the climax of the story (the birds discovering the Simorgh) as the ending section of his essay.

Abu Hamid bin Abu Bakr Ibrahim or better known as Attar of Nishapur (c. 1145- c. 1221) was a Persian poet and Sufi or mystic who had a tremendous influence on Persian poetry. Although there exist various works from Attar, not much is known about his life. In fact, much of his life has been shrouded in mystery and the existing information on the poet is scarce or very vague.

Attar produced a body of undeniably great poetry which influenced many after him. As Rumi (2009), another great Iranian mystic, said of him:

Attar was the spirit,
Sana'i his eyes twain,
And in time thereafter
Came we in their train. (p. 30)

His most famous work, *The Conference of the Birds* tells of the journey of the world's birds who represent human beings to find their king, Simorgh who represents God or the ultimate truth. The hoopoe becomes their guide in their quest helping them go through seven valleys or stages to reach God. Each bird is a symbol of a human being with particular traits. In the book, the seven valleys are introduced in order as "Quest," "Love," "Insight into Mystery," "Detachment," "Unity," "Awe," and "Nothingness." Finally, out of thousands of birds only thirty make it to the throne of Simorgh. To their astonishment, they see themselves in the Simorgh and realize they are one with Him (si morph in Persian means thirty birds). The journey ends with the lovers reunited with the Beloved.

Emerson, as a Transcendentalist, looked for the deepest truths of human existence and Attar is praised as one of the greatest Persian mystics who sought to reach the ultimate truth and go beyond the intellectualism of his time much like the Transcendentalists. It is then obvious how these two concepts, that is, Transcendentalism and Mysticism are connected and can be comparatively analyzed. In light of this matter, this study aims to achieve the three following objectives in its course through a comparative methodology focusing on the theme of love: One: To achieve a comprehensive view towards Emerson and Attar based on the concept of love, which means to identify the similarities between Emerson and Attar and highlight how two literary figures can share a lot in common in spite of living far apart from each other in time, place, and culture. Two: To analyze Emerson and Attar's differences and highlight their significance in understanding the two. And three: To identify and discuss the influence Attar had on Emerson's thoughts.

Literature Review

As previously mentioned, Emerson and the Transcendentalists were fascinated by Oriental wisdom. As an avid reader of Eastern ideas, Emerson's thoughts demonstrate much similarity to these nations' thoughts.

Kane (2009) has started his paper by highlighting one of Emerson's lectures in which he expressed his reverence for Persian poetry by naming Hafiz alongside Homer, Milton, Herbert, and Wordsworth to bring to attention how important Hafiz was to Emerson. By giving an analysis of Emerson's poetry and those of Hafiz, he arrived at the conclusion that "we learn much more about the poetry and about Emerson generally when we pay attention to the presence of Persian poetry in his writing" (p. 134).

Hatam (2010) in his PhD dissertation has analyzed the influence of Sufi poetry on Emerson and Thoreau believing most of the essays on Emerson and the east revolve around Indian influences on Emerson while he was greatly inspired by Persian poets as well, especially Hafiz and Saadi. Therefore, this influence should be brought back to light. He first analyzes Sufi thoughts and then goes on to examine their traces in the two figures' works.

Rudmajani and Naghandari (2010) have analyzed Emerson's translations of Hafiz and compare the poetry of the two based on their literary figures and themes used and point out the influence of Hafiz on Emerson as they state, "Love in the eyes of Emerson has the same value as Hafiz regards it"¹ (p. 60). In another article (2012) they analyzed Emerson's essay *On Persian Poetry* and discuss how Emerson was familiarized with Persian poetry and his overall views on it, finally focusing on Emerson's thoughts on Hafiz and his intellectual liberty and transcendental love.

Attar and his thoughts have been the topic of many academic efforts. For instance, Yaghoobi (2012) has reflected on Attar's use of love, particularly transgressive love in medieval ages, by applying modern theories and laws regarding the concept. Her analysis helps better understand Attar's choice of social outcasts to highlight the importance of earthly love as the emanation of divine love and a useful means for familiarizing man with the path of the divine (p. 88).

Ahangarkolayi et al. (2017) in their article have compared the spiritual journey of the birds in *The Conference of the Birds* of Attar with Carl Jung's theory of archetypes. They found that Attar's depiction of the journey of the birds in a mandala, from particle to the whole, is similar to Jung's theory of the self's development which highlights the role of archetypes in shaping the self throughout history.

La'albakhsh and Peyman (2017) have also conducted a comparative analysis on the Sun symbols in the myth of Icarus and poetry of Attar according to Jung's theories of collective unconscious. They conclude that Icarus is very similar to lovers in mystical poetry and that in his myth "the Sun is a symbol of the desired and the truth" much like in Persian poetry (p. 181).

As seen in the examples above, although Attar and Emerson have been compared with various figures, the two have not been put together in a comprehensive study and this essay intends to fill that gap.

Methodology

The present research follows the American school of comparative literature and is descriptive-analytical in nature. It is based on thematic analogies and delves into the aesthetic values of each writer's works. Focusing on the ideas of the two literary figures as expressed in their selected works this essay analyzes the concept of love.

The American school of comparative literature is focused on the aesthetic and intrinsic value of literary works instead of focusing on linking the historical influences they have on one another methodically which is the hallmark of the French School. The only thing that matters in this school is literature itself: "The American School of comparative literature does not proclaim a precise doctrine or program, but practices tolerance and eclecticism. It is the school in which, to repeat Welles' phrase, it is best to speak simply of literature" (Jost, 1974, p. 26). To sum it up, The American school is broader, freer and gives the scholar the chance to compare any two works, regardless of whether they were influenced by one another. This essay follows the American school due to the freedom it gives the researcher to explore themes across nations comparatively. For when literatures are set side by side and "as we leave the national sphere and approach a different one, we encounter not only the possibility of differences but also a confirmation of common values and question" (Guillén, 1993, p. 44).

Since the present study is not undertaking a positivistic approach to historically identifying the relationship between Emerson and Attar, it needs a more liberating, broad approach which focuses on the aesthetics of the works; not the external, historical elements of them. The American school of comparative literature allows such an endeavor. It not only paves the way for the study of any literary work, it also uses the influence studies of the French school as well:

In fact, the American school doesn't exclude influence studies completely, arguing that positivistic studies should be combined with the aesthetic studies, rather than only emphasizing the former as the French school, because the two kinds of research at some point are not completely separate. (Cao, 2013, pp. xxiii-xxiv)

This study, likewise, tries to focus on the intrinsic values of Emerson and Attar's works. The influence that Attar had on Emerson was not as significant and direct as the influence other figures such as Hafiz and Saadi had on him. However, since Emerson read Attar and was inspired by him, Attar's influence on him will be brought into light in this study as well. That is why this research follows the American school of comparative literature as it unravels the intrinsic beauties of the chosen literary works as well as identifying any influences, however small, one figure had on the other.

Discussion

The theme of love is one of the most prevalent themes in literature and fine arts. It has been hailed by writers and artists and used in some form or another in their works. However, gaining an understanding of love itself, as an emotion or force, would be a tough task and few have dealt with its nature or where it comes from. Emerson in his essay *Love* has touched upon the matter exclusively and explained the nature, meaning and effects of love. As Emerson was a reader of philosophy and western and eastern thoughts, it would benefit the reader greatly if this section starts by tracing love from early times to Emerson, however very briefly.

In literature, to trace what love is would take one to the ancient realm of mythology and mysticism. For instance, according to the concept of creation in Greek Mythology, in the beginning there was only Chaos and three other primordial beings: Gaia, Tartarus, and Eros (love). It was Eros or love which caused Chaos and Gaia to procreate and bring about the world as we know it. Therefore, in this view, love is the essentially the binding force in creation of everything that exists. Hard (2003) writes on this issue: "EROS is introduced at this early stage because he is the motor that will drive the process of mating and procreation that will bring everything else into being" (p. 23). In Indian mythology, the god of love, or Kendarpa, "is

considered the son of the creator and the sustainer of the universe, and the enemy of the destroyer” (Pattanaik, 2003, p. 21). In Buddhism, according to Mahayana texts, there are pure lands where pure people will be reborn to. Their creation is a karmic act done by the bodhisattvas (Buddha followers) or the people themselves in this world. To create these worlds one must be imbued with love and compassion; therefore, “Because the creation of pure lands is an expression of compassion... there are universes whose fabric, whose very warp and woof, is altruistic love” (Schmidt-Leukel, 2006, p. 39). Hence in Buddhism also, the source of the universe is attributed to love.

Regarding mystical love in literature, the theme has always been the jewel put on top of the works of mystics. They believe that one can achieve unity with the all-encompassing truth or God through love. Not only do they believe in love’s power to guide man to God, they also believe that God Himself equals love. In her book *The Persian Mystics: Attar* Margaret Smith (1932) points to the role of love in man’s quest for truth of existence and the fact that God is eternal love.

There is but one key to unlock the door, but one inspiration and motive-power strong enough to lead the soul through all trials and all sacrifices, until at last it reaches the goal of its Quest, and that power is Love...That passion of Love for God will lead the mystic onward and upward, until, purged as by fire from all the dross of self and self-seeking, the soul can look upon God face to face, and become one with that Supreme Reality, Which is also Everlasting Love. (p. 20)

To gain an understanding of how mystics look at love, it would be appropriate to take a look at the very mystic analyzed in this study, namely Attar. Among Attar’s contributions to mysticism, his emphasis on love is one of the efforts that definitely made him stand out. In *The Conference of the Birds* the annihilation of the self in the face of true love is the prominent thought. According to mystical thoughts, love is the underlying force that binds the universe together and Attar deals with love throughout the story numerous times, especially in the short stories the hoopoe tells the birds to counter their objections. In fact, as Yaghoobi (2012) asserts: “Attar was one of the most significant authors to espouse and articulate the term *‘ishgh* as a representation of both earthly and heavenly love” (p. 89).

Attar saw love in both the creator and the created. “Attār believed that love was not limited to humans. He saw love in all creatures as emanations of divine love... For him, God’s motivation for creating the world and the people in it had been love” (Yaghoobi, 2013, p. 40). Therefore, when Attar writes on love, he truly goes deep into its nature. The result of such craftsmanship is that Attar’s stories throughout the book greatly touch the reader.

The sole goal of Sufis and mystics such as Attar was union with God. To attain such a goal, they searched for internal ways to understand the universe and their being, for they disdained the mundane physical world and its reasoning system. The power of love, they believed, overshadowed that of reason as Attar (1984) declares, “Give up the intellect for love and see / In one brief moment all eternity” (637-652)². The goal of the Sufis required them to rely on inner instincts rather than external methods. Hence, in their quest to discover God, they believed that love (which came from the depth of the soul) was the key to helping the traveler awaken his soul’s vision, overcome the difficulties and gain the knowledge he seeks. Smith (1932) highlights the power of love by asserting that “all the difficulties may be overcome by Love, for Love is the solution of the insoluble; where reason fails, Love will triumph, and where earthly knowledge is powerless to help, Love will prove all-availing” (p. 25).

Finally, in the realm of ancient philosophy, Plotinus’s (2018) words on the cause of earthly love are of great interest to this study:

If one were to posit as its [love’s] origin the desire for beauty itself which is already present in human souls, their recognition of it, kinship with it, and non-rational grasp of their affinity for it, one would, I think, hit on the truth about its cause. (p 293).

It should be noted that Plotinus is one of the figures who had a pronounced influence upon Emerson as his readings on Plotinus have helped him shape his view on various subjects including love. In the foreword to *The Heart of Plotinus: The Essential Enneads*, Bregman (2009) refers to Emerson’s high regard for Plotinus by declaring that “The American Transcendentalist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, included Plotinus (204-270 C.E.) and Porphyry (235-305 C.E.) in “the high priesthood of pure reason”” (p. 97).

According to Plotinus (who was inspired by Plato regarding the concept of “forms”), this world of ours is but a shadow of the one true reality. Therefore, we all originally come from a world where we had once witnessed the true beauty. Having descended to earthly life, the Diety has placed clues for us to remember the true and perfect life we once had. The beauty of

a human being is a thus a reminder. Many get lost in it, but some, while enjoying it, contemplate upon it discovering that it is only a shadow of the real beauty of the One.

Fast-forward to the nineteenth century, there is an Emerson who has been deeply acquainted with the spiritual philosophies of the old east and west. His turn having arrived, in his essay *Love*, Emerson (2004) presents a profound study of love itself, beginning by highlighting the effects of love on man, nature and society:

[love] is the enchantment of human life; which, like a certain divine rage and enthusiasm, seizes on man at one period and works a revolution in his mind and body; unites him to his race, pledges him to the domestic and civic relations, carries him with new sympathy into nature, enhances the power of the senses, opens the imagination, adds to his character heroic and sacred attributes, establishes marriage, and gives permanence to human society. (pp. 131-132)

Reading the above lines, which actually start Emerson's essay on love, the reader is immediately presented with Emerson's delicacy towards the nature of love as he heaps praise on this "enchantment".

But where does love come from? The first inquiry this study makes is to identify the source of love based on Emerson and Attar's beliefs chronologically. The first figure to be studied in each section is therefore Attar as he predated Emerson.

The Source of love

Attar believed that earthly love comes from a deep inclination towards beauty that is innate in every human being. Therefore, love is powered by the beautiful scene, sound, or smell "for the perception of Beauty contains the essence of delight, and the delight is loved for its own sake, not for anything apart from it" (Smith, 1995, p. 205). Attar's descriptions of beautiful human beings are so strikingly detailed that they naturally spark up the reader's imagination. In a story about a dervish who falls in love with a princess, Attar (1984) describes the beauty of the girl in this way:

There was a king whose comely daughter's grace
Was such that any man who glimpsed her face
Declared himself in love. Like starless dusk
Her dark hair hung, soft-scented like fine musk;
The charm of her slow, humid eyes awoke
The depths of sleeping love, and when she spoke,
No sugar was as sweet as her lips' sweet;
No rubies with their colour could compete. (776-797)

Similarly, according to Emerson (2014), a man falling in love with a woman's beauty is much more meaningful than just earthly love. It is a recollection of the main source of beauty. Emerson refers to this ancient wisdom in this way:

... they said that the soul of man, embodied here on earth, went roaming up and down in quest of that other world of its own out of which it came into this, but was soon stupefied by the light of the natural sun, and unable to see any other objects than those of this world, which are but shadows of real things. Therefore the Deity sends the glory of youth before the soul, that it may avail itself of beautiful bodies as aids to its recollection of the celestial good and fair; and the man beholding such a person in the female sex runs to her and finds the highest joy in contemplating the form, movement, and intelligence of this person, because it suggests to him the presence of that which indeed is within the beauty, and the cause of the beauty. (pp. 141-142)

The conclusion regarding the source of love is thus that both Emerson and Attar consider beauty as the source. To them both beauty is more than just a trait, but a pathway to connect oneself to the origin of love which is the supreme beauty of the One. According to them both, we are shadows of the One and when we fall in love with other human beings, we are in fact trying to reconnect with the Supreme source of beauty or God. What needs to be remembered is that all these shadows have a source and the source is the True Beauty. Therefore, love or beauty is the source of the universe.

Union in Love

According to both Emerson and Attar the path to find God passes through the private heart. They believed the union between man and God could be achieved through pure love and would ultimately result in the soul becoming one with God. Attar (1984) believed that to reach God, one must look deep into the mysterious fathoms of his heart: "Whoever lives, the

wicked and the blessed / Contains a hidden sun within his breast” (3708-3728). His book ended with the birds, who sought the Simorgh (God), becoming one with Him. Speaking to the thirty love-imbued birds at the end, the Simorgh reveals this truth: “The journey was in Me, the deeds were Mine / You slept secure in Being’s inmost shrine” (4255-4271).

Emerson (2004) hails the same truth as he says in *The over-soul*: “Ineffable is the union of man and God in every act of the soul. The simplest person who in his integrity worships God, becomes God” (p. 227) and therefore it can be inferred that “... the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one” (p. 209). He, too, believed that the lover and the beloved are actually one when united.

Love and Self-Knowledge

A very significant similarity between Emerson and Attar which creates much deep thought is that both of them believed that when one is struck by the bow of love, his soul will step on the path of self-knowledge and knowledge of the divine as well. At the end of the story in *The Conference of the Birds*, when the thirty birds arrive at the throne of Simorgh, their beloved, they realize they are one with him and see themselves in the legendary bird. The Beloved (Simorgh) says to his lovers that “You find in Me the selves you were before” (Attar, 1984, 4255-4271), meaning the birds reached self-knowledge in the union with their Beloved. Therefore, the message Attar wished to convey is that the lover gets to know himself or herself when in true love. Union with the beloved means the ultimate self-knowledge as the lover and beloved become one. Emerson (2004), likewise, in “Love,” writes of a man in love that “In giving him to another it still more gives him to himself. He is a new man, with new perceptions” (p. 139). Moreover, he reminds the reader that true love “knows not sex, nor person, nor partiality, but which seeks virtue and wisdom everywhere, to the end of increasing virtue and wisdom.” Therefore, love can lead to knowledge, as humans “are by nature observers, and thereby learners. That is our permanent state” (p. 147). This message is beautifully put in another essay of his *History*, in which Emerson believes that it is when one is in love that he will gain the utmost knowledge about himself or herself: “A mind might ponder its thought for ages and not gain so much self-knowledge as the passion of love shall teach it in a day” (p. 29) emphasizing that love is the path to reach the beloved *and* one’s self.

Qualities of a True Lover

Emerson and Attar both stress a number of similar qualities for a lover. By love, Attar meant true, pure love, which was much more than the everyday, superficial interpretation of the word. To this love, one must give body and soul. Love is worth everything as Attar prefers a life of love and blame to a life of joy and shame: “Should we not risk this quest? To suffer blame / For love is better than a life of shame” (1748-1769). To Attar, true love means to give up everything for the beloved, and the beloved alone. There must not be another goal besides the beloved. There cannot be thoughts of achieving other rewards. The beloved *is* the reward, nothing else. “The only love which is worthy of God is “pure love,” which is free from any interested motive, and depends on nothing in the way of reward or object” (Smith, 1995, pp. 204-205). The hoopoe warns one of the birds that “... if mere pride of place prompts your desire / Your love prepares you for eternal fire” (2829-2850) which means you cannot seek God if you desire to have his powers: Your only goal must be Him.

Similarly, Emerson (2004) describes true lovers as the ones who “try and weigh their affection, and adding up costly advantages, friends, opportunities, properties, exult in discovering that willingly, joyfully, they would give all as a ransom for the beautiful, the beloved head, not one hair of which shall be harmed” (p. 145).

Attar (1984) believed the true beauty is the one which makes the beholder feel hopeless and undeserving as he advises his readers about how to expect to reach God:

Until our king excludes you from His grace,
You cannot hope to see Him face to face;
You cannot hope for Life till you progress
Through some small shadow of this Nothingness.
First He will humble you in dust and mire,
And then bestow the glory you desire.
Be nothing first! and then you will exist (4272-4290)

In the above lines the reader observes Attar reminding humanity that they have to be humbled and turned to “nothing” in front of the glory of the One if their love is real. It is only when one accepts this nothingness in comparison to the origin of all things that he or she can expect to attain union with Him. Emerson (2004) likewise had the same idea as Attar as he knew

how humbled the lover must become in the face of true love if the lover seeks to proclaim his love. He asserts it is true beauty:

when it becomes a story without an end; when it suggests gleams and visions and not earthly satisfactions; when it makes the beholder feel his unworthiness; when he cannot feel his right to it, though he were Caesar; he cannot feel more right to it than to the firmament and the splendors of a sunset (p. 141).

The Uniqueness of Love

Another important characteristic of love is that it is unique. It does not matter who the beloved is, how his or her social status compares to yours, and if the love is reciprocated or not. Love is love and it knows no one and nothing else. Attar's book is full of stories about kings and princes and princesses falling in love with slaves or commoners and vice versa. What Attar meant to say was that in the realm of true love, earthly or heavenly, what matters is only the beloved.

Similarly, one of the important features of love discussed by Emerson (2004) is that love brings with it a sense of exceptionality, i.e. it is unique for the person who is experiencing it. It means, if other people behold the lover's beloved, they could "find in her a likeness to her mother, or her sisters, or to persons not of her blood" (p. 139); or they might not understand why the lover loves that particular person, as to them she does not look "pretty enough". The lover, however, is the only person who can observe the uniqueness in the beloved: "the lover never sees personal resemblances in his mistress to her kindred or to others" (p. 139). This sense of uniqueness is what makes every relationship essentially different than others and is something to be contemplated upon.

Love Versus Reason

To achieve a more comprehensive view towards the two literary figures their differences ought to be analyzed as well. The first point to be touched upon is that in contrast to Emerson, Attar puts great emphasis on the clash between love and reason. For example, in the story where a princess falls in love with a slave, her condition is described by Attar in this way: "And as she glimpsed his face she felt her heart / Her intellect, her self-control depart / Now reason fled and love usurped its reign" (3830-3849). Although Emerson (2004) believed in the concept as well, as he wrote of heroism, a noble trait, that it always "feels and never reasons, and therefore is always right" (p. 194) meaning that what comes from feelings is superior to reason; he does not focus on the issue very much. For Attar (1984), on the other hand, this is a crucial matter. In almost all the stories about love that he brings in his book, love and reason are put together to show that the loser is always the reasoning system and it will kneel before love. A very good instance is in the fate of the princess who loved a slave but tried to reason with herself:

For days she meditated, struggled, strove,
But bowed at last before the force of love
And gave herself to longing, to the fire
Of passionate, insatiable desire. (3830-3849)

The journey the hoopoe presents to the birds consists of seven valleys or steps, with love being the second one after the first (the Quest). The Valley of Love is the prerequisite to discovering the Simorgh. This proves Attar's emphasis on the importance of understanding love and cultivating it in oneself if one aims to reach the truth of existence. According to Attar, in this valley the flame of love burns the soul of the lover as his desire "Will plunge the pilgrim into seas of fire / Until his very being is enflamed" (3331-3348). In this state, the lover is fixated only upon his beloved and knows nothing but the love he seeks. He is someone "Who knows of neither faith nor blasphemy / Who has no time for doubt or certainty". In short he is someone "To whom both good and evil are the same / And who is neither, but a living flame" (3331-3348). Therefore, in this stage reason has been completely annihilated and love has taken over the mind.

The Purposes of Love

Another major difference between Emerson and Attar is that while Attar is sensitive to beauty, his descriptions of it ultimately serve another purpose. All this beauty and love is nothing compared to the everlasting heavenly love. Earthly love is temporary and fading. What Attar (1984) actually does by talking about beauty is that he tries to warn us of superficial, fading beauty. For instance, he tells the nightingale (the lover of the rose) that "Each spring she [the rose] laughs, not *for* you, as you say / But *at* you – and has faded in a day" (776-797). Emerson, on the other hand, has a more humanistic approach to love as he specifically focuses on love, the earthly relationship of a man and woman with all its challenges and the relation of love to society, culture and the human race.

Emerson writes about how the two lovers can go on despite facing challenges in their relationship. Therefore, he tries to be realistic towards the matter as he brings out the challenges as well. Challenges faced not before the reunion with the beloved

but actually after. He knows and wants his reader to know that true love is an everlasting, character-building state which does not stop at the moment of reunion. The same people who one day regarded one another perfect will be disappointed to find flaws of character after the match has been established. In other words, they do not tolerate any error in the beauty they are looking for:

The union ... is yet a temporary state. Not always can flowers, pearls, poetry, protestations, nor even home in another heart, content the awful soul that dwells in clay. It arouses itself at last from these endearments, as toys, and puts on the harness and aspires to vast and universal aims. The soul which is in the soul of each, craving a perfect beatitude, detects incongruities, defects and disproportion in the behavior of the other. Hence arise surprise, expostulation and pain. (Emerson, 2004, p. 145)

This state creates a challenge for the lovers, i.e. what they once considered perfect in every way now proves faulty. Disappointed, many lose against this complication. However, true lovers, those who seek and create beauty, will endeavor to enhance not only their own life but also the beloved's: "Meantime, as life wears on, it proves a game of permutation and combination of all possible positions of the parties, to employ all the resources of each and acquaint each with the strength and weakness of the other" (Emerson, 2004, p. 146). According to Emerson the lovers' attempt to fix and build their lives together "is the nature and end of this relation, that they should represent the human race to each other. All that is in the world, which is or ought to be known, is cunningly wrought into the texture of man, of woman" (p. 146). Thus, Emerson believes that lovers are greater than a mere relationship: they are representatives of the whole human race; that if one is to find out what it means to be human, one can discover that in the hearts of a man and woman in love.

Conclusion

Emerson and Attar's shared ideals lie in their views towards many aspects of love including love's origin, its values, and its effects on man and its connection to self-knowledge and nature. Regarding the similar ideas Emerson and Attar shared, the following conclusions can be made: Love elevates the lover, opens us new perceptions and puts the human soul on the path to self-discovery as well. It transforms the individual and is a progressive force that guides life forwards. Beauty is its source as human beings are naturally inclined towards beautiful things.

Emerson and Attar's differences exist in their attitudes towards life in the material world. To Attar, the lover of God, everything must be given up for the beloved. Earthly love, nature, and the self are to be forgone if one wishes to gain the ultimate Beloved or God. However, to Emerson, man's life in the physical world is of importance as well and he should learn how to live both in solitude and in society as well. In short, Emerson's philosophy revolves around man as the measure of things, while Attar's thoughts are centered on God and the spiritual world. In that, Attar is regarded as a Sufi mystic, while Emerson is closer to a humanist philosopher than a mystic as Quinn (1950) also believes that "Emerson was a humanist, not a mystic" (411).

Finally, the fact that Emerson was inspired by Persian poetry and that he himself translated several lines from Attar is itself proof that he was interested in Attar's views. Additionally, when one lines up Emerson's thoughts regarding love with those of Attar as discussed in this study, interesting similarities between the two are revealed. Therefore, Attar's views are definitely among other eastern and Persian thoughts that influenced Emerson, each to a certain degree. As Emerson was not as familiar with Attar as the other two masters of Iranian poetry, Saadi and Hafiz, therefore, Attar's influence was not as great and direct as them on him. Nevertheless, there was still a ray of influence which was delineated in this study.

Notes

- 1 Wherever the quotations were originally written in Persian, they were translated into English by the researchers.
- 2: Since the analyzed book *The Conference of the Birds* was in the format of an E-book without page numbers, wherever the poetry lines were quoted, the approximate translated lines (according to the book) were given instead.

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