

## FOREWORD

“No part of this [Sufi] legacy is more relevant to our time than Rumi’s frequent assertions that all religions and revelations are only the rays of a single Sun of Reality, that all prophets have only delivered—albeit in different tongues—the same principles of eternal goodness and eternal truth, the ultimate goal of humanity, according to Rumi, is union with God through love.”<sup>1</sup>

Naji B. Oueijan, a distinguished scholar of Literary Orientalism, a fascinating subfield of English literary studies, has delved deep, for the first time, into the nexus between the universal Sufi path of love and knowledge and a host of the British Romantic poets—William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats. While the Romantics’ “Oriental” content and context has received some critical attention since 1990s, including Oueijan’s own substantial writings on Lord Byron’s Orientalism in particular, their affinity with the Islamic mystical tradition had gone so far almost unnoticed. The present study stands out on many counts: a) It goes a long way in approaching the Romantic poetry from a fresh angle, underscoring as it does the profundity and nuanced depth of their poetic corpus. b) It unravels how the life ennobling universal values, common to both Christian and Is-

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<sup>1</sup> Amin Banani. *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 3.

lamic mysticism, permeate their compositions. c) Notwithstanding his impeccable credentials as a Christian Arab scholar of English studies, Oueijan has articulated in this work a perceptive exposition of Islamic Sufi tradition, as is evident from his brilliant elucidation of the riches of the Sufistic oeuvre of such outstanding Sufi masters as Al-Ghazali, Imru Al-Qays, Attar, Hafez, Ibn Arabi, Jami, Junaid, Rumi, Saadi, Idries Shah, and Shamsi Tabrizi. The breadth and rootage of his critique is breathtakingly impressive. More ingeniously, he has accomplished the enviable task of identifying the congruence, confluence, convergence, parallelism, and thematic commonalities between the Sufi masters and the Romantics. In every instance which is indicative of the common ground between the two, he has provided ample textual references and scholarly footnotes which supplement and complement his thesis.

Oueijan's Introduction familiarizes readers with essential points about the Romantic poets' keen interest in exoticism and their quest motif, which were facilitated and accentuated by the scholarly writings and travelogues on the Orient/East by such distinguished writers as D'Herbelot, George Sale, Titus Burckhardt, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Sir William Jones, and Lady Mary Montagu. Moreover, the English translations of the Arabic and Persian literary works, which had increased considerably in both quantity and quality by early nineteenth century, introduced to the Romantics a new literary and socio-cultural perspective, of which Sufism was an ineluctable part. All this, in Oueijan's words, added a new "flavor to the pivotal aesthetics of the Romantic theory of art." Apart from the Islamic Sufi traditions, the Romantics, as illustrated by Oueijan, assimilated also the Eastern Christian mystical ethos, represented by a host of Fathers and saints. Another laudable pioneering strand of this work consists in demonstrating, "the kinship between Christian Mysticism and Sufism, particularly in the Arab world and Muslim Spain." Equally discerning, though largely unacknowledged point, pressed home in this study is the Muslim Sufis' inclination towards Pantheism.

Nonetheless, the Romantics' affinity with Sufism, the main thesis of this study, has been elucidated with specific illustrations from major romantic works. So doing, Oueijan has brought into sharper light the engagement of both the Romantics and Sufi thinkers and poets with "the supreme power of the human mind, the imagination ... their search for gnostic and mystical experiences, revealing Beauty and Truth beyond corporal existence." Admirably enough, this study is permeated with his commitment to fostering cross-cultural understanding, universal brotherhood and peaceful coexistence among all communities. This has rendered the present work all the more valuable and noble, apart from its features of ingenuity and solid scholarship. Let us hope Oueijan's brilliant work may prompt readers to profess and practice the Sufi master, Jami's supplication: "O God, deliver us from preoccupation with worldly vanities, and show us the nature of things 'as they really are.' Remove from our eyes the veil of ignorance, and ... show not to us non-existence as existent, nor cast the veil of non-existence over the beauty of existence."

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