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**Transcendentalism and its Relation to Intellectual Suppression in Middle-East**

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**TRANSCENDENTALISM AND ITS RELATION TO INTELLECTUAL SUPPRESSION**

**IN MIDDLE-EAST**

By

Afnan Alsharif

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Mary's University

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Arts**

In

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## **Abstract**

### **Transcendentalism and its Relation to Intellectual Suppression in Middle-East**

Afnan Alsharif

St. Mary's University, 2018

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Transcendentalism, a philosophical and literary movement, flourished in the United States beginning around 1836. The movement started as an American religious, philosophical, and literary movement; however, it should not be limited by a specific geographic area or time period, which would fail to maintain its uniqueness and value. Transcendentalism served to enlighten people and minimize society's intellectual oppression and its intention continues. It could lead to a healthier society, especially in the case of the Middle East. Religious oppression has taken over many Middle Eastern countries, particularly Egypt and Palestine where authors have reflected on living under oppressive regimes by writing against them to enlighten their people. Even though these writers were not, as far is known, directly influenced by or had any part in the Transcendentalist Movement, they arrived at many of the same principles and beliefs as the Transcendentalists. The political, religious, and literary oppression that they faced, and the ways they found to resist and push against it, made Transcendentalists of them. Transcendental aspects can be detected in the works of Mostafa Mahmoud, an Egyptian doctor, philosopher, and writer, whom has much in common with Ralph Waldo Emerson, the founder of the movement, and Mahmoud Darwish, a Palestinian poet, whom has much in common with Henry David Thoreau, a follower of Emerson whom put his theory into practice. A close reading of these four writers argues that Transcendentalism is more than an American movement confined to 1836; this movement is a worldwide solution for reducing intellectual oppression, which can be shown

through Emerson and Mahmoud's ideas on individuality and their redefining of religion and nature and Thoreau and Darwish's perspectives on solitude, the individuality of thought, and understanding of physical nature. By adopting Transcendentalist thought, these authors made political statements that they shared, subversively, with their readers, who in turn adopted these ways of thinking, resulting in the undermining of the current political situation.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Transcendentalism cannot and should not be confined to a single geographic area or historical moment. This movement very much presents itself in some of the most influential works of Arab writers of the last century. These Arab writers, like the American Transcendentalists, care deeply about the primacy of the individual as the core of a healthy society, and encourage the uniqueness of thoughts to guide their readers, rather than following others and traditions blindly. They forswore the oppression of inherited dogmatism, in religious, political, and cultural arenas. They, too, found salvation in and through a conception of Nature, that can and must be utilized in the realization of the self. Solitude in Nature, they argue, is a necessary experience, wherein a person can see more clearly and not be misled by the problematic and oppressive dictates of others. Individuality, solitude, and Nature are main principles of the Transcendentalism movement and can be found in the works of Emerson and Thoreau, as well as, in several works by Arab writers, Mostafa Mahmoud and Darwish.

Transcendentalism, a movement that railed against the orthodoxy of Calvinism and the rationalism of the Unitarian Church, in particular, the objection was to organized religion in general. Unitarianism was established as a non-organized religion, but then it became organized; Emerson in his essay “The Lord's Supper” (1832) found it to be bogus rituals. Religion was Emerson passion and it “inspired almost everything Emerson wrote” (Gelpi 3). The Transcendentalist movement started with a small group of writers, poets, and philosophers, including Emerson, in what came to be regarded as the Transcendentalist Club (Burkholder 1154). These intellectuals reacted against the religious limitations of the period and wanted to redefine the concept of God through literature. This literary movement was established by Ralph

Waldo Emerson, when he published his book *Nature* (1836). He asked in *Nature*, “[W]hy should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?” (7). Emerson and the other Transcendentalists writers relied heavily on the British Romantics, especially Coleridge and Carlyle. In *Nature* Chapter 1, Emerson reveals his attraction to “Coleridge’s literary criticism and poetry as well as to his fragments of 1834 and 1836” (Soressi 332). Transcendentalism was influenced by the German philosophers, the works of Coleridge has influenced “Emerson’s understanding of familiar classical figures, and, for the first time, introduced him to Spinoza and more contemporary German Romantic philosophers, especially Kant, Fichte, and Schelling” (332). Although, originally Transcendentalists writers looked to Europe, Emerson later calls for a purely American poet. Emerson encourages the individual to reach personal and spiritual fulfillment to find true revelation firsthand in nature, instead of through other religious leaders’ experiences. Emerson, in starting this philosophical movement, called for the individuality of thinking and liberation of the American style from the baggage of European influences. A small group of writers in that era were heavily influenced by Transcendentalism and philosophically accompanied Emerson. They include Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, and Bronson Alcott and later, “a wider set of admirers, including Margaret Fuller” (Andrew 6). This movement fundamentally altered the shape of American letters and culture.

Transcendentalism as an international movement can be found in several works. In the Middle East, political and religious oppression that most countries have been facing, specifically in Egypt and Palestine, have pushed intellectuals to represent Transcendentalist aspects in their works. Mostafa Mahmoud, an Egyptian doctor, philosopher and writer, wrote several books about the individuality of thoughts and redefining the religion. Moreover, he too values Nature and considers it as the source of art and knowledge. His thoughts are markedly similar to

Emerson's as expressed in *Nature* and "Self-Reliance" (1841), where he represents Transcendentalism movement.

Henry David Thoreau, a student and friend of Emerson, was deeply influenced by him. His book *Walden* is one of the most remarkable in American literature (Meltzer 9). In *Walden*, he wrote about practical ways in which Transcendentalism could be incorporated into one's life. He also, values the natural world, individualism, and solitude. Likewise, Mahmoud Darwish, a Palestinian poet known for his poetry of exile and for being the voice of his people, has written similarly about solitude and its great value for the human soul, as well as the necessity of individuality in one's thoughts. Darwish, too, uses nature as a metaphor for the human soul, and to describe his pain and his joy. He saw nature as a reflection of the inner soul.

The intellectual suppression that many Arab countries face in political, literary, and religious spheres created conditions in which their writers adopted Transcendentalist principles. Just as Emerson's essays are great examples of Transcendentalism, so is Mostafa Mahmoud's book *Allah and the Human* (1955), wherein he outlines his thoughts on the nature and need for individuality and non-conformity. Moreover, he wrote and directed a television show, and in one of its episodes, "The Magic of Nature and Art," he explains the values of nature and the self. Similarly, Thoreau's musings in *Walden* can be juxtaposed with those of the poet Mahmoud Darwish. In his poems, Darwish encourages his readers to be individuals, and to experience solitude, and to remove themselves from society. These works reflect the Transcendentalist movement, despite the vast differences in time and the geographical place.

It is important to note that Transcendentalism should not be confined to a specific time or area, because it has a higher value, than to be linked with a particular time. Transcendentalism has a significant prominent figure influence on its fellows, such as Mohandas Gandhi, an Indian

activist and the leader of the Indian independence movement, through the work of “Henry David Thoreau, and John Ruskin exercised something close to a seminal influence upon Gandhi” (Lal 281). Furthermore, Martin Luther King activist, and American Baptist minister, frequently quoted from many thinkers including Emerson in his speeches and writings (Miller 249). Transcendentalism has made a magnificent impact on different cultures, with many of them oppressed society, such as the case with the Middle Eastern writers. Although Transcendentalism started in America, its influence is universal and has lasted for a long time. It is necessary to examine the movement's principals, and how do they change society for better. Hence, the Transcendentalist thought in Mahmoud's works accommodated in changing the political statements of Egypt. Also, Darwish’s works supported the Palestinians to overcome their tragedy.

## Chapter II

### Transcendentalism and its Connection to Middle Eastern Authors

Transcendentalism as a philosophical concept evolves, grows, and adapts throughout the ages, and cannot be confined to a single geographical area. The principles of the movement portray between spirituality, nature, and the self. In many countries, writers follow the principles of the Transcendentalist movement and believe in them, without specifically labeling themselves as Transcendentalists. The region of the Middle East is one of these regions where it is common for authors to express ideas counter to socially imposed political and religious limitations. One example of that one indicative of Transcendentalism such as author Mustafa Mahmoud, who was accused of atheism and apostasy after publishing his book *Allah and the Human*. He is a fierce opponent of the restriction of speech and expression regarding religion (Hafez 2). Religion in the Middle East exerts a huge influence on society – so much so that writers can be subject to criminal charges and imprisonment if they violate certain religious taboos. It seems paradoxical that “Egypt may have become more modernized and westernized than any other Muslim state except Turkey, yet it never renounced the age-old fundamental Islamic unity of religion and state or the dominance of the Shari'a in determining personal status” (Hatina 35). These are the strange conditions in which Mahmoud found himself as a writer and thinker.

Transcendentalist thought, positioning itself against social expectations and norms and against an emphasis on religious practice over personal spirituality, has the potential to be found anywhere in the world. Similar to the American Transcendentalists Thoreau, Fuller, and Emerson, Middle Eastern writers inspire “the people” to find God in their inner selves and not in mosques or officially-designated houses of worship. They encourage people to form their relationships with God, recognizing no sponsorship, mediators, or restrictions whatsoever.

Moreover, these Middle Eastern writers share many similar philosophical perspectives toward life as established Transcendental writers, due to the suppression they face. Astute global readers, then, can find aspects of what is called American Transcendentalism in many literary works in different cultures and languages around the globe. The Transcendental author who believes in the spiritual laws of the inner self and nature also believes in the uniqueness of each person.

### **Transcendentalism**

American Transcendentalism was not only influenced by New England Romanticism, but also German Romanticism and the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (Sceery 9). It was a political, philosophical, and literary movement that appeared on the American literary scene at the end of the eighteenth century, but its roots were in Europe. It grew out of New England Romanticism in the 1830s and the 1840s. Critics point out that this literary movement was led by a remarkable group of American authors, novelists, and poets, including Ralph Waldon Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Margaret Fuller. It is true that Transcendentalist thought had been inspired by European Romanticism, but a nascent American culture offered the formative characteristics of the movement, such as the emphasis on individuality and the freedom of thought concerning the self and religion (Murray 1149). The Transcendentalist movement was based on reintroducing the spiritual into formal religion, by way of celebrating both a pure connection between nature and the self, as well as a revolutionary stance against the political *status quo* of that time. Like the revolutionary movements inspired by the French Revolution, Transcendentalism sought to affect social change in order to elevate the power and liberty of the individual. According to Joel Myerson, the movement that came to be known as Transcendentalism stemmed from the meeting of a group of American intellectuals in Boston in

June of 1836 when a minister from Bangor, Maine named Frederic Henry Hedge invited Ralph Waldo Emerson and others from various Unitarian congregations to meet. They named what soon became regular meetings the Transcendental Club, and it was there that they discussed philosophy and religion, as well as many social and political issues of the time (197-198). During these meetings, they took a stand against conventional religious thinking, which told people to find God in official worship places and to recognize an intimate relationship between God and the individual. Moreover, they recognized the authority of the inner self as the true source of individual belief and proposed the notion that each human being had the unique right to interpret religious texts whichever way intuition led. An example of this is Emerson's Last Supper sermon (1832), where he questions the Last Supper and the reenactment of it: "Having recently given particular attention to this subject, I was led to the conclusion that Jesus did not intend to establish an institution for perpetual observance when he ate the Passover with his disciples; and, further, to the opinion, that it is not expedient to celebrate it as we do" (9). Emerson here engages with and tries to redefine some of the most fundamental narratives and scenes in Christian religious history.

Transcendentalists argued that the individual should be unbound by religious supervision or authority while worshipping, encouraging individualism even when it came to reading and understanding what were considered sacred texts. Thus, the person might become empowered to find the answers on their own. Further, they revolted against the established practice of religion and the concept of God as a being limited to a single, specific place – such as a church or a holy book. This movement represented a version of the American dream where individuals are free to practice religion in a way that best fits their inner beliefs. As critic Frederick Carpenter wrote, "Transcendentalism is the philosophy of the American Dream" (11). It may have been influenced

by European Romanticism, but Transcendentalism morphed into an American movement that sheds a positive perspective on life:

Transcendentalism is an American response to romanticism, by its objection to a “philosophy of emotional escape” (Rus 248). Rus adds, a lecturer at Petru Maior University, Târgu-Mures, that the Transcendentalism

proved the capacity of the American culture to formulate original and vigorous bodies of thought and to act lively and personally. It characterizes the spirit of the new land unaffected with centuries of dogma and oppression, out of which emerged a philosophical thinking which radically redefined man, land, nature, God and the interrelations these elements imply. (Rus 248)

Transcendentalism encourages a person to go beyond their own personal limitations and form an American point of view to focus on self-examination and to celebrate the individuality of each person (Rus 249). Transcendentalism grew out of the concept that each of us can reach “fundamental truth” by using and focusing on the power of the self’s intuitive understanding, without a need for experience in order to judge or understand the surrounding world – all because the individual is the “center of the universe.” The movement strives to inform each individual that he or she is both the center of attention and the core of the power in this universe. Moreover, human ability has no limitations if the person believes and understands his or her inner spirituality (Rus 207). The movement stands on “the concept of the New World as a place to start over and affirm one’s capacities on the fullest and ardent belief in the power of self-reliant American” (Rus 248). Further, Transcendentalism’s response to European Romanticism is to challenge European culture by way of offering a “philosophy of emotional escape” (248), which redefines an aspect of life in terms of a personal perspective. Transcendentalism



demonstrated that American culture was capable of formulating original thoughts and reshaping philosophical thinking about land, man, nature, and God (Rus 248).

Transcendentalists consider religion to be a spiritual matter more than an established worship practice. They encourage the person to find God in his or her heart instead of searching for God in places of worship. Transcendentalism suggests that since religions have failed in establishing their own principles by restricting God to a certain place, it is only by self-observation that the kingdom of God can be found somewhere else, in a place with no limitation – other than a person’s own mental barriers to be torn down – and within all people’s reach (Rus 250). Rus adds that the Transcendentalists writers rebelled against traditional European philosophy, and their centuries-old debate between Protestants, Puritans and the Catholic Church. Catholicism declared that the kingdom of God and heaven could only be attained through the Church, but Protestants did not see it this way. Protestants were concerned that such a theological arrangement could only inspire corruption and enslavement to supposedly holy mediators. On the other hand, though, “the Puritans assumed the difficult task of purifying the church of its worldliness and failed to do so. At the point Transcendentalism stood against these religions opinions, the movement started to search for a place for the kingdom of God that does not get corrupted by any worldly institutions” (Rus 250).

Transcendentalism does not deny the existence of God, nor fight the practice of religion, as many think. Rus explains that from Transcendentalist perspective: “God does not disappear, but He is no longer the source of ultimate authority to be found in the church. Man becomes God” (251). Instead, it counters conservative religious ideologies and redefines traditional thinking about religion within the early Christianity. Traditionally, God is accessible only through clergymen, who “are typically granted authority in their ordination to proclaim the Word

of God, administer the sacraments, and order the life of the congregation” (Carroll 99). In contrast, this movement held the view that God could be found within the self through Nature, unlike traditional thinking that assumed that God could be only found in officially-designated worship places. Also, man has the authority to define mortality. “Religion is not rejected; it simply undergoes a change of perspective, a totally new and innovative one, which confers American culture’s singularity and identity” (252). Redefining religious representation is among the movement’s core beliefs.

On the path to religious enlightenment, Transcendentalist values the virtue and necessity of solitude. It argues that each person should go through the experience of isolation in order to free her or his mind from the influence of other people. By experiencing isolation, the person finds the inner self, and that spirituality of the individual that enables the development of deep thought. It celebrates, rather than condemns, isolation, declaring that “man’s solitude is not a tragedy” (Rus 252). If a person maintains this spiritual development, he or she will have the power to decide her or his own destiny. The movement encourages isolation so that the person can understand and feel the inner self and in doing so create an individual destiny. Fundamental to the Transcendentalist movement is the notion that individuality, or self-reliance, derives from the act of finding the source of power in one’s self, not in others.

In addition to reflection, individuality, or self-reliance, is one of the main themes in the movement. It was initially proposed in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay “Self-reliance.” In 1841, he said, “To believe our own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, -- that is genius” (1). This essay best represents the American Transcendental movement. Here, Emerson expresses the belief that democracy works well with and even depends on freedom of thought. Which is giving the individuals higher value, without neglecting

the society, the individual life and the individual's needs are as important as the society's. One of the most famous quotes in this essay is:

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day. — 'Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood.' — Is it so bad, then, to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood. (103)

Emerson here articulates one of the most fundamental tenets of the Transcendentalist movement: the reality of this world is malleable and illusory and possesses no fixed rules. However, by following society's expectations and not becoming an individual, the person loses the inner self, the uniqueness, and the individual thoughts. In other words, a person should be receptive to new ideas and needs to realize that new thoughts are often misunderstood, rejected, or labelled blasphemous.

In order to find individual power, Emerson argues, the person must be connected to nature. A Transcendentalist sees God in man, but even more so in the natural world.

Transcendentalists believe that nature is the reflection of the man. That is why they advise people to experience solitude in nature specifically, and to meditate so that they can find their inner peace. According to the Transcendentalist perspective on nature: "nature is the true counterpart of man" (Rus 252). As a result, this philosophy is against industrialism, through which, they believe, man becomes a slave to the ever-quickenning progress of manufacturing. The life of man

in a factory, they contend, does not allow the spiritual fulfillment offered by working in nature and on the land. This work, in communion with the land, is not for the sake of getting rich, they believe, but for the “moral, religious obligation of the individual” (Rus 253) Transcendentalism thus defines its belief that nature is intrinsically connected to the spiritual. Also, it helps the human to understand the “Over-soul” which more as a spiritual, universal, higher power that Emerson describes it in his essay “The Over-Soul” (1841) as “this deep power in which we exist, and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one” (Emerson 5) God. Moreover, Transcendentalist sees the spiritual as the essential element of this world, not the material. A person should value their inner spirit, because they see the real world through it. (Funk and Sitka 56). If people accept their inner spirit, Transcendentalism argues, then people will live a better life and the material world will come alive as a source of spiritual sustenance, rather than just a place to live (Funk and Sitka 57). Emerson believes that there is also a connection between nature and moral law. He too regards nature as a reflection of the inner spirit. By observing and analyzing the mechanisms of nature, the person will be able to understand his or her inner self-mechanism (Funk and Sitka 63-64). And in doing so, they will be better able to function as moral beings in the world. It is necessary to highlight that “Nature” has two different perspectives in Transcendentalism. Emerson has a broader view of Nature than most other writers. He sees that Nature provides Discipline, that Nature is something larger that includes humanity and where an individual can learn, understand, and may find the inner self and the Oversoul, he reimagines the divine as a visible aspect and referred to as “Nature”. An, other view is nature as the outside world, such as trees, animals, or any natural elements. Emerson in his writing focuses on understanding Nature and learning from it, he says in *Nature* that “few

adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun” (3). Emerson claims that people take nature for granted, and by neglecting nature the person would never reach the inner self.

Transcendentalism gives the American dream a philosophical solidity. This philosophical movement encourages personal uniqueness and in doing so has allowed this conception of individuality to spread around the globe and to influence writers from many cultures, such as Ameen Rihani, and Jbran Khalil Jbran—two writers who were part of the first wave of Arab-American emigrants. “Ameen Rihani was influenced by Emerson and the philosophy of Transcendentalism” (Alshareif 17). Even though this theory is rooted in America, it has nevertheless influenced writers from different cultures. The concept that the new land is here to stay is at the core of the Transcendentalist movement. Walt Whitman described the forward-looking literary movement by saying: “There was never any more inception than there is now/ Nor any more youth or age than there is now/ And will never be any more perfection than there is now/ Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now” (25).

### **The History of Egypt and Palestine of The Mid-1900s**

Transcendentalism due within the political context and the tradition regarding its effect on the literature of Egypt and Palestine in the mid-1900s. Egypt in the early 1900s, was undergoing a period of violent change in the country due to the uncertain political situation. This period of uncertainty was exacerbated by changes in Islamic doctrines and the common beliefs of Muslims, resulting an Islamic extremist groups rapidly accruing more power. The suppression that these writers struggled with led them to adopt the Transcendentalist principles.

The political situation played an important role in shaping Transcendentalism in the Middle East. The followers of the movement and they, whom, unintentionally, adopted the Transcendentalist principles, consider the political situation of their countries. The political

situation of Egypt at the mid-1900s was complicated. Most scholars agree that Egypt was suffering from several institutional crises after World War II: economically, socially, and politically. These crises stemmed from the inevitable contradictions born after Egypt emerged as a participant in the international capitalist system (Rizk 579). Rizk, a modern Egyptian historian and head of the History Department at Ain Shams University in Egypt, states that this capitalist system did not serve Egypt well, nor did it any benefits. Rather, it devastated the country. In the aftermath of this chaotic period, Gamal Abdel Nasser, the second President of Egypt, founded the Free Officers Movement. This movement was established in 1945 and instigated the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 (580-581). As Rizk explains, this revolution was against King Farouk—the last King to rule Egypt and against the political system at that time. After Egypt removed its monarch, the Free Officers had to face the economical and the social problems that had long been plaguing the country since its emergence in a capitalist global system. Egypt was thus reborn, after the overthrow of the king, and the Free Officers knew the mission to resolve the various degrees and systems of chaos and uncertainty in Egyptian society would be complicated.

To continue, it should be mentioned that both tradition and religion hold great power in shaping the political situation in the Middle Eastern world. Critic and scholar Talal Asad, a professor of anthropology at the CUNY Graduate Center, clarifies and provides the reader with his definition of tradition:

Primarily a matter of linguistic act passed down the generations as part of a form of life, a process in which one learns and relearns how to do things with words, sometimes reflectively and sometimes unthinkingly, and learns and relearns how to comport one's body and how to feel in particular contexts. (166)

Asad highlights the concept of traditions as acts or words passed down by generations, rather than the development of personal, private thinking or preference. For Transcendentalists, those who follow traditions do not question them or doubt them. Instead, they follow the tradition unconditionally. But, it must be emphasized that “people do enter traditions they have not inherited” (168). Which means even though traditions come from the eldest generations, a person has the choice to follow them or not. And that what most individual thinkers in Middle East, who adopt the Transcendentalist thinking were against, they did not agree with the idea of receiving thoughts without doubting them. The importance of the traditions in Middle East made some writers rebel, and it created the Transcendentalist principles which helped in creating a better society.

One aspect of the Transcendentalist movement is religion. American Transcendentalists attempted redefining the concept of the Oversoul, like Emerson. Intellectuals in Egypt, also, strove to redefine the concept of religion. The intellectuals struggled in redefining the religious concept, and still. In Egypt, religion became one of the foundations of the country after the Islamic Awakening 1970 (as-sahwa), a profound shift toward religious and cultural conservatism. However, with that movement’s rise, as is so often the case, there was also a parallel movement– with the rise of a group of the radical secularists. They were against the institution of any religious acts or laws; their opinion was that religion should be expressed in ceremonies as a private matter and not as a part of public policy (Asad 170). The status of religion has been one of the controversial issues in Egyptian politics since the encounter with the imperial West in the nineteenth century. “The tension between tradition and change has also defined the parameters of intellectual discourse in Egypt in matters of faith and religious conventions” (Hatina 5). Egypt’s encounter with the West had a marked effect on the beliefs of

the people. For example, the matter of faith and religion became a topic possible for public discussion and debate. During the modern history of Egypt, a number of Muslim thinkers were inspired by the notion of separating religion and the state. However, the government ignored them, and the Islamists denounced them (Hatina 35). Undeterred, secular literature has been published widely and frequently since the Islamist movements emerged in the Middle East in the 1980s. This vast literature “offers different rationales for the emergence of new kinds of foes to the political regimes of the region. Filling the void left by the leftist opposition, the Islamist militants appeared around the 1970s as new political act” (Zeghal 371). Further, the Transcendental principles have a huge influence on the literature. Whenever writers adopt the Transcendentalist principals, their writing changes, and they become individual and reject the past.

Additionally, the political situation and the country’s traditions have had a profound effect on Egyptian literature. This was in conjunction with the influences of colonization by western countries on Egyptian writers. Ahmed Heikal who is a professor and the Minister of Culture in Egypt, gives a detailed history of the changes that influenced literature in Egypt from the early nineteenth century until the Great War. Literature before colonization, that is to say Arabic literature, was mostly conservative and inspired by the past. Writers sang the glories of golden age Islam and its rise. These earlier writers honored the value of the heritage derived from the Middle Eastern Arabs and largely ignored their own age of prosperity. This was the start of modern Arabic literature (Heikal 108). Heikal continues, that though the influence of Western culture was not as obvious in the novels and poems of the time, this was not because it was not present or pervasive, but because Egyptian society and culture was about to undergo a shift in terms of thinking about its own identity. (108)



After that, colonialism actually emerged as a movement against the conservative religious literature firmly rooted in the Arab readers' mind as "true" literature (Heikal 108). By the mid-twentieth century, a group of writers, some of whom had earned their bachelor's degrees in England and had been exposed to both the Middle Eastern culture and Western culture, inspired a new movement, one which mostly manifested itself in poetry. Heikal refers to it as the Renewal Thinking Movement. The writers of that movement appealed more to rational thought than emotional expression because they were ambitious to promote logic, rationality, and the concept of reason, and sought a higher value, even though it was difficult for them to spread their ideas and promote their work at that time (148).

This movement was predicated on two major concepts: renewal and thinking. Renewal meant providing a new perspective through their poetry, derived from what they considered to be the true definition of poetry—an expression of the human soul, which shows its individuality and demonstrates its uniqueness. Second, they were concerned with the form of the poem. As for the rational thought aspect, they argue it should focus on logic and organized thought, as well as romanticism. According to their aesthetics, poetry should affect the person both emotionally and mentally. The poem should express the self of the human from both the heart and the mind (Heikal 150). These writers rebelled against the conservative literary establishment and rejected the past as an unproductive ideal. Moreover, they were against writing poetry as mere entertainment. According to them, poetry should be intrinsically connected to the soul and should stem from a deeper place of universality than the particular details of the present. Predictably, these beliefs evoked rejection and condemnation from the reigning literary establishment, so they took it upon themselves to write a series of articles condemning in turn the dogmatic literary system that rejected them (Heikal 150-151). They argued that the earlier

literature had been written largely for pleasure and amusement. In contrast, the writers whom supported the Renewal Thinking Movement believed in the soul, as well as the poetry, and they wanted to see if poetry reflected the inner soul of an individual. Further, they believed that poetry that was read during official celebrations or public events would lose its real value, which was to express the human soul. Heikal presents the style of writing of the Renewal Thinking Movement by saying that they rejected the past completely and refused to accept it as a worthwhile ideology in their writings. Moreover, they focused on the essence of the writing, which they claimed to be the fundamental truth, and they valued the soul and the inner self—not just the material (161). It should be pointed out, however, that while the Renewal Thinking Movement fought aggressively against the traditional literary world of Egypt at the time, no one can deny that this more conservative literature was ultimately the force that led to the modern writing. This modern style was moderate without affectation, and its authors encouraged originality, affection, and honesty in writing. It is true they cared about the rhythm and the rhetorical images, yet, in a simple and un-complex style (Heikal 166). The writers of the Renewal Thinking Movement represent the Transcendentalist in rejecting the old philosophy and call for a new one invented by the writers of their time.

It is well known that Palestine has been at a war for many decades now. Their political situation has long been unstable, as their people have fought against multiple occupations: “Palestine was successively conquered by Canaanites, Philistines, ancient Israelites, Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, Romans and Turks, by Muslims and by Christian crusaders” (El-Hasan 5). Nevertheless, their history of experiencing violence and oppression has produced many great writers. The Middle East, and especially Palestine, “has historically been the most colonized part of the world” (Hamdi 22). Palestine is a country with an ancient history: “The past is at the same

time, therefore, the present in the modern Middle East, as it is in most countries with a long historical tradition” (Bowersock 57). In 1948, with the declaration of the creation of the state of Israel, the expulsion of Palestinians from their own land began: “Zionism started to exert mighty efforts in facilitating the immigration of the Jews to Palestine and it issued what is known as the law of ‘Return’ that was ratified in 1950 and dictated that every Jew has the right to return to the country as a returning Jew” (Al-Ghadiry 49). The Zionists, militant supporters of the state of Israel, wanted to draw ever more immigrants from all over the world to live in Israel and consequently to push out the largest possible number of native Palestinians (Al-Ghadiry 54).

The conflict between Palestine and Israel is complicated, as both countries believe that they have the theological destiny to possess the most holy place in the world. Each one of these countries claims a historical and religious history that proves that this holy land belongs to them. The Zionists always wanted to establish the State of Israel in the Middle East. The conflict heightened when the Zionists occupied Palestine and they exiled the native Palestinians. In 1948, “the “Jewish Question” had been resolved” (El-Hasan 5), after the “War of Independence”. Moreover, “the “Law of Return” was passed and absorption centers were established to incorporate into the Israeli society the new waves of Jewish immigrants who flooded the country, but the Arab Palestinian refugees were not permitted to return to their homes” (5). That complicated situation that the Arab faced had a role in shaping the Transcendentalism principles of there intellectuals.

Out of war and this ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine, many literary, political, and social movements sprung up in Palestine. In October 1988, a group of civilians in the country formed the Resistance Movement, known as Hamas, to protest actions in their country that they do not approve of, and to publicize the horrendous living situations in their own

territory (Taraki 30). The movement was a simple one, yet, ambiguous as well, receiving support both from within Palestine and from several Arab countries (Hudson 77). It is considered to be one of the largest Islamic movements, dealing not only with the political situation, but also with economics, education, and social issues (Maqdsi 123). Moreover, the Palestinians who support Hamas affirm that Islam encourages them to stand against the occupation. In this theological sense, Hamas represents the role of Mujahida (struggling), Maqdsi, an Islamist Jordanian-Palestinian writer, explains this situation:

The Resistance Movement went forth to perform its role Mujahida (struggling) for the sake of its Lord, The Movement placed its hands in the hands of all the Mujahidin who strive to free Palestine. The souls of its Mujahidin gather with all the souls of the Mujahidin who strove with their souls on the land of Palestine for all time since it was conquered by the companions of the Messenger of Allah (saas) until today (123).

Thus, Hamas strove to create a counter-weighted argument to the Israeli stance that the land in question belonged to them because of divine right. If it belonged to Israel because of certain theological declarations in Israel, then Hamas would argue that the land belonged to the Palestinians because of certain statements in Islamic holy writings.

At the time of the resistance, the writers who wrote against the bemoaned situation in Palestine also put their lives on the line. This act by the colonizers- Israel, called the “death of the author” or “bearing witness,” the oppressors – both the Israel and Palestine government- wanted to kill the writers’ stories as well as their history of dispossession (Hamdi 23). The writers were not only bearing witnesses to these radical and endangering events, but also by writing, they were reclaiming and restoring what had been lost (Hamdi 24).

Palestinian literature is a category of the Arab literary movement, influenced by popular writers from Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon. After the events of 1948, Palestinian literature inspired a new, well known literary movement called the “literature of Exile,” after 1948 (Kanafani 3). This literary movement, like the one in Egypt, also represented “renewal” as it laid the foundation for a new literary movement that sought to reject “the old sentimental outbursts and emerged with unique feeling of profound sadness more commensurate with the realities of the situation” (4). Conversely, resistance literature “was confronted, with radical differences in tenets” (Kanafani 4). Due to the mass emigration of a whole generation of Palestinian writers and a subsequent influx of largely European emigrants, Arab literature largely disappeared in Occupied Palestine (now called the state of Israel) after 1948. But the “non-emigrants constituted a society which was mostly rural and was subjected to political, social, and cultural persecution unmatched anywhere else in the world” (4). Moreover, unlike the poetry of exile, the poetry of resistance “emerged with an astonishing revolutionary spirit completely free from the sad and tearful trend” (4). Moreover, it “rejected the traditional poetic forms and adopted modern techniques without losing force” (Kanafani 7). Poetry, for its brevity and intensity of emotion, reached the heart more easily than other literary forms, and could be more easily reflect the sentiments of the times. Under this siege, then, it is no wonder that poetry has been the most popular literary style. Moreover, poetry has played a large role in the history of Palestine and in the social life of the Palestinians. Under the influence of these poets it was inevitable that “[p]opular poets were put in prison or confined under severe restrictions. And as the trend of popular poetry grew and expanded, the occupying forces extended their tyrannical, measures, killed some poets and prohibited all Arab gatherings” (Kanafani 5-6). Both the poetry of exile and the poetry of resistance reject the past and aim for social change. These movements have had

a strong influence on the nation, especially since many of these Palestinian writers became political martyrs as a result of their writing.

The history of the Transcendentalist movement, as it focuses on the self, God, and nature, encourages one to be an individual and to not let the opinions of others prevent him or her from listening to the inner voice. This came to represent American literature in the Nineteenth Century. In a similar fashion, the histories of Egypt and Palestine are reflected in Arab literature and the creation of various Arab literary movements. Such as, the oppression that Egyptians faced by their own government mirror oppression with the occupation in Palestine. In both cases, writers of Egypt and Palestine, like Mustafa Mahmoud and Mahmoud Darwish, endured these hardships, and encouraged their people to rebel against their situation and reject the past to also find inner peace—just as Emerson advocated. The history of the Transcendentalist movement and the histories of Egypt and Palestine set alongside one another show that the oppression experienced in these Arabic countries led to an embrace of the ideals and beliefs celebrated by the Transcendentalists.

## Chapter III

### Transcendentalism, Emerson, and Mustafa Mahmoud

Society plays a formative role in shaping one's adherence to a dogmatic ideology; Transcendentalism rejects this dogmatism as unhealthy societal conformity. It rejects the unnecessary laws of the past and moralistic generalizations. It encourages one instead to shape a conception of the good through the lens of personal experience. It ultimately strives to inspire its followers to ignore society's voice and to listen to their own. Transcendentalism is revealed in Emerson's *Nature* (1836) and his celebrated "Self-Reliance" (1841), as well as in the Egyptian writer Mustafa Mahmoud's *Allah and the Human* (1955) and an episode, "The Magic of Nature and Art," from his television series *The Knowledge and the Faith*. These authors both present crucial elements of the Transcendentalist movement, such as spiritualism, individuality, and the sanctity of nature. They reject the validity of an intermediary, such as a priest or scholar, in interpreting religious texts. Rather they advise having, as Emerson espouses, an original relationship with the universe. The Transcendental elements in these authors' works come into clearer focus through careful analysis, which will reveal how these two writers from different regions, religions, and historical periods share similar Transcendentalist perspectives and insights. Comparing these two authors reveals a neat vision of how Emerson's principles find their reflection in Mahmoud's books. Even though Mahmoud never acknowledged any relationship between his works and any other writer or aesthetic movement, Emerson's work, through the sheer breadth and transnational influence of Transcendentalism, still finds an ideological descend in his work. Mustafa Mahmoud was one of the writers that lived during the extreme suppression era in Egypt in the mid-1900s, and that influenced him to express his individual thoughts—the political, religious intellectual oppression that he faced and made a

Transcendentalist out of him. He fought for the individuality of thoughts and the redefining of religion; moreover, he appreciated nature and encouraged his reader to connect with it.

### **Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the American poet, essayist, and philosopher, was born in 1803 in Boston, Massachusetts. His father was known to be an eloquent clergyman, who died at an early age. Consequently, Emerson was raised by his mother and his intellectually gifted aunt. (Cameron 1836). As a child Emerson was known to have been shy and with no demonstrable intellectual gifts, although he was a dreamer and a voracious reader and possessed with an active imagination. Although not initially known for his intellectual prowess, growing up in both the wake of his father's reputation, and in the rigorous educational environment of his childhood affected him deeply. After graduating from Harvard in 1821, he became a teacher (Cameron 1). "He went his own way, untroubled in soul, a seeker and a seer" (2). In 1826, Emerson became a licensed minister, and after three years he was called to be a pastor in the Unitarian church. Tragically, his wife Ellen Tucker died in 1831, at the age of just nineteen. This affected him both personally and professionally, which led eventually, along with certain theological disagreements with the institution, such as disagreeing with the act of reenacting "The Last Supper," to leave the clergy. Subsequently, he traveled to Europe, where he met the philosopher and essayist Thomas Carlyle, who became a significant friend and a great literary influence (2). Living simply and reflectively, Emerson kept a journal and wrote whatever came to mind. June 1836 marks the publication of his *Nature*, and with it the beginning of the Transcendentalist movement (Myerson 197). Emerson believed in the power and sacredness of individuality and developed a vision for a philosophy. Emerson was part of a group of intellectuals with whom he engaged in stimulating conversations, including Henry Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, and Amos



Alcott. “He read endlessly. Without much plan, sauntered endlessly, without definite objective, except keeping an open eye and a listening ear” (Cameron 3). Emerson’s works subsequently influenced many writers in America, such as Walt Whitman. “He has been seen as beginning a line in American poetry that runs from him to Walt Whitman to Allen Ginsberg” (Myerson 3). Emerson did not believe in the limitation of thinking nor the limitation of knowledge. He was exposed to and interested in many different philosophical doctrines, religions, and literatures—particularly in Germany and England as well as Islamic, Persian, and Chinese worlds as well (Akrami 2015). Akrami, who is an independent scholar and a lecturer in Allameh Tabataba’i University, has demonstrated that Emerson was especially interested in Persian poetry and thought shown through repeated references to the two Sufi Persian poets Sa’adi and Hafiz in his writing: “The poetry of Khajeh Mohammad Hafiz Shirazi has vastly influenced the poetry of Ralph Waldo Emerson, as many critics have noted but have not demonstrated” (Roosbeh 174). Thus, a strong link of influence exists between Middle Eastern thought, culture, and spirituality, straight through to Emersonian Transcendentalism. Emerson, also read Goethe. For Emerson “Goethe was a great poet whom he adored. This great poet of German culture adored Hafiz a lot and when Emerson observed that Goethe considered himself small in comparison to Hafiz, Emerson came to recognize the richness of Hafiz” (176). Although often seen as a fundamentally American school of thought, with European Romantic influences, Emerson’s fascination with Persian and Islamic art and thought demonstrate a larger worldliness to the movement and make it far from unreasonable to assert that he in turn influenced the cultural development of that region.

Two of the most remarkable works by Emerson are *Nature* and “Self-Reliance”. First, *Nature* is the derivation of Transcendentalism, and it inspires the individual to find the absolute

truth though Nature. For Emerson the natural world is as he declares in *Nature* “is a symbol of some spiritual fact” (Emerson 26) and it “could be the most accessible entry into an intangible realm of the spirit” (Robinson 82). Moreover, for him the natural world is the “code of fundamental laws that defined the purpose of human experience” (83) through which a person can explore the religious questions in the natural world (83). This main point of this work is found in the first chapter. He opens his book by a strong statement saying that “[u]ndoubtedly we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable” (Emerson 1). In the beginning of the book, Emerson gives the reader a sort of an idea of his philosophy. He sees that any issue in this world is answerable, however, he does not mean that all questions are or will be answered, but at least there are some answers for each question. He does not only mean the scientific answers, but also answers found through faith. He adds, “Every man’s condition is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put. He acts it as life, before he apprehends it as truth” (1). He sees that if a person lives life by his or her choices, he or she will find the answer to any question. In subsequent chapters, “Commodity,” “Beauty,” “Language,” and “Discipline,” Emerson questions the use of Nature and finds his hypothesis proven. In the final three chapters, Emerson questions the reality of the materialist world. In “Idealism,” he discusses the relationship between the person and God in “Spirit,” and he suggests improvements and ideas for the future in “Prospects.” Emerson claims that people take nature for granted, and by neglecting nature the person would never reach the value of Nature. The book *Nature* established the foundation of the Transcendentalist movement that was founded by Emerson.

On “Self-Reliance,” which reflects its title, Emerson encourages the individual to trust the self instead of trusting the society’s thoughts, advising his audience to “[t]rust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string” (98). In this essay, Emerson highlights, “To be great is to be

misunderstood” (103). He suggests that being one of the majority in the society is wrong path; instead, one should be an individual and unique. Transcendentalism gives a higher value to the individual rather than to society. In “Self-Reliance,” Emerson points to the individual and encourages the person to listen to the inner self’s voice instead of society’s voice.

### **Mustafa Mahmoud**

Born in Egypt in 1921, nearly forty years after Emerson’s death, Mustafa Mahmoud was a doctor, philosopher, and writer. The village where he grew up mainly practiced Sufism, which may have accounted for Mahmoud’s deep affection for spirituality over religiosity (Hafez 1). Sufism, a sect of Islamic doctrine, is “one of the most dynamic and interesting dimensions of Islamic religious and cultural expression. It is an umbrella term for a variety of philosophical, social, and literary phenomena occurring within the Islamic world” (Elias 595). Similar to Transcendentalism, Sufism values the spiritual connection, directly linking humans and the divine, and encourages people to focus on their spiritual development more than their adherence to formal practice. It may follow, then, that one steeped in Sufi thought and culture would end up supporting many similar ideals and beliefs to a Transcendentalist.

From an early age, Mahmoud was interested in sciences, such as chemistry, physics, and biology, and subsequently earned his diploma in biology. Additionally, he was deeply interested in philosophy, literature, religion, and the human sciences. Fiercely opposed to the materialist world about him, he led a simple, spiritual life meditating and reflecting on the spiritual nature of things and the world around him and its creatures (Hafez1). Mahmoud worked as a doctor but then he quit his job because “[h]e thought that people need a social and cultural improvement of their whole environment” (Salvatore14). Mahmoud wrote eighty-nine books in his life, in many different genres (novellas, stories) and on various topics, such as philosophy, politics, and

religious thinking, as well as a TV series titled *The Knowledge and the Faith* (1) was to “show and explain phenomena and creatures of the natural world to a mass public, and finally pointing to God as the primary cause behind the wonders of the created world” (Salvatore13). Mahmoud did not define nature exactly as Emerson describes it, however, he valued nature as a source of enlightenment.

In his work, Mahmoud navigated various fields of thought with the aim of enlightening those around him about the value of liberating the inner self in a society that cared only about materialism and went through the dogmatism. However, intellectuals of his time rejected any knowledge or practice that had no basis in either science or religion. Mahmoud believed in God, even though he was accused of atheism. He was simultaneously able to honor the creator of the world as well as religion but in a different interpretation from what was dominate in the mid-1900s. Rather, he saw religion as a spiritual belief rather than a physical practice (2).

Mahmoud wanted to prove that the practice of Islam and other religions did not need to be divisive. Instead he envisioned religion as a reflection of the inner soul, fulfilling spiritual needs, rather than just being a practice. Mahmoud’s writing style reflects a combination of a sense of a writer and the realization of a philosopher. He immersed himself in the knowledge of existence and portrayed his ideas aesthetically in words. Mahmoud’s writings are full of questions concerning the ability of the human to attain inner fulfillment. Furthermore, he wrote against the obstacles typically faced during a lifetime journey, such as the self, society, time, and history. As Transcendentalism encourages people to be more spiritual than dogmatic and materialistic when it comes to religious beliefs, Mahmoud also sought to encourage people to embrace a more open, spiritually-fulfilling conception of Islam.

Politically, Mahmoud held a range of views in his life. Mahmoud had a long record of stirring controversy in the intellectual and political communities. A Marxist during his early years, as well as a firm believer in the human sciences and their value, many debates were held over his expressed ideas. For example, he once proposed the notion of “Quran Psychology,” a means by which one can understand the self by using the Quran, rather than receiving uniform instruction from it. In 1955, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser placed Mahmoud under arrest after he was accused of apostasy by the Imams of al-Azhar for his book *Allah and the Human* (1955). He was cleared in a trial, but the book remained banned for decades. Undeterred by the trial, he continued to write and publish prolifically (Salvatore 13). He eventually came to disavow Marxism. He expressed his reasons for the change in a book titled *Why I Rejected Marxism* (1976). Eventually, he placed himself in a position between Marxism and Capitalism, one which he felt called for a balance between the individual and society. He never, even as his political beliefs evolved, stopped encouraging the people to have individual thoughts and to celebrate them. Similar to Transcendentalism that rejected “capitalist culture” (Schiff 131), also, “Marx perceived religion as an expansive self-consciousness by human beings of themselves in their fullest possible dimension, as it were, as opposed to transcendentalism” (Labrie 4). Transcendentalism stands in the middle of Capitalism and Marxism, like Mahmoud who eventually rejected Marxism and chose to exist in between. Like Emerson and the rest of the Transcendentalists, he sought always to liberate people from the burden of religious dogma and social conformity, no matter in which context. He died on October 31, 2009. Mahmoud’s writing holds many Transcendentalist principles that he adopted due to the elimination that he faced while writing and expressing his ideas in his country, Egypt.

In one of his most famous work; *Allah and the Human*, Mustafa Mahmoud discusses an extremely sensitive Middle Eastern topic, which is found in other Islamic countries as well: the individuality of beliefs and why they should be celebrated. In this book, Mahmoud presents his philosophy of life and religion. Starting on page one, he depicts a conversation in Egypt between two men, one from Tunisia and the other an Egyptian. The Tunisian man, traveling from his country on foot, asks the Egyptian, who is about to get on a tram to go to a bar, about the direction to Mecca. Their distinct paths represent Mahmoud's idea that each person chooses in life. The man from Tunisia chooses the path to Mecca and decides to walk to his destination instead of using any form of transportation. In contrast, the man from Egypt chooses to use the tram, to arrive as quickly as he can to a bar (note that drinking alcohol is forbidden in Islam). This book does not prescribe a specific path, idea, or way of thinking; rather, it suggests that people will find inner peace by discovering their own philosophy and the unique characteristics of the God they worship. This philosophical book seeks to enlighten people by giving them another interpretation of religion. Rather than being one unit, the book is divided into sections retaining the first narrator but without a continuous story line. Mustafa Mahmoud's book argues for the importance of an individual's thoughts and beliefs. However, after publication, and Mahmoud's trial for apostasy, it was banned due to its unconventional thoughts and the rejection it faced. "Mustafa Mahmoud's mediatized moral person authorizes within a varied public reflexive repositioning of faith in the context of a complex society, where the discourse of science occupies an important place" (Salvator 28). Mahmoud's book sought to provide a path out of the oppressive religiosity of social life in Egypt.

## The Similarities Between Emerson and Mahmoud

Many details traditionally associated with American Transcendentalism are evident in *Allah and the Human*. Such as: the reconstruction of religious belief and the emphasis on individuality in thinking. Although the Transcendentalist movement cannot be easily classified under just a political label, “Transcendentalism as both a religious and social movement largely participated in the questioning of established authorities, institutions and traditions that were so valuable...” (Remanofsky 67). In the nineteenth-century United States, Transcendentalism manifested itself by questioning the principles of “the Whigs and the detestable the Democrats and too many trade unions” (67). Although it emphasizes the spiritual realm of the material, it nonetheless remained an active participant and vocal critic of the political situation of its time. Similarly, Mahmoud’s book, while stemming from a similar emphasis on the spiritual, also critiques the oppressive system at hand.

### Individualism

Emerson’s and Mahmoud’s works stress individuality in beliefs, thoughts, and opinions. In *Allah and the Human*, Mahmoud places the creator parallel to the creatures, as if they were both equally viable to be questioned and examined. In addition, Mahmoud questions religion, expressing his opinion in an indirect way. Religious thought is highly controlled in Egypt and presents a strong influence on the people’s thinking. Due to the lack of freedom of expression, Mahmoud devised a subversive means to express his ideas in writing. In the introduction of his book, he calls for individuality in thinking and choosing the path of life. He reminds us that virtually every position is constructed in a context, and therefore subject to change, rather than being eternally the same. He cites the phenomenon of slavery, and how it was widely perceived, at one time, as morally acceptable, even on religious terms. It follows, then, that the same logic

of should be applied to all religious laws and positions. At the end of his introduction, Mahmoud adds that his works should be classified as literature, not philosophy (9). “In my point of view literature is as life, knowledge, and pleasure.” (11). Mahmoud instructed his readers in the importance of changing their views over time. He noted that just as life is constantly changing, so should human beliefs (10). The Transcendentalists principle is noted clearly in his book. The oppression that was imposed by his country, Egypt, at that time on Mahmoud and other intellectuals led them to express their ideas on individuality in intention to create a better society.

In “Self-Reliance,” Emerson’s position is similar to Mahmoud’s. He writes, “Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradicts every-thing you said to-day” (103). He explains how all thoughts are malleable and that the person should only cite current beliefs, as each individual’s beliefs are subject to change. Both writers argue against the anxiety of change in order to convince their readers to act according to their inner voices, or the interior divinity, and to be fearless in the face of change, as it is the natural course of life.

Emerson encourages belief in one’s inner thoughts and to not listen to the thoughts of those outside of the self, Emerson wrote:

Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world. (99)

In an essay in the book “What is your Philosophy?,” Mahmoud challenges the reader by presenting five paths that any person could take to understand life. He introduces these paths by giving example of five anonymous and nameless people. First, a person sees life as a desire for



glory, for food, for love, for sex, as fulfillment in life. Second, a person believes that life's essence is to attain its highest levels, regarding the drives to invent and create. Third, a person who considers life to be a waste, so that person is continuously destroyed life by using drugs. Fourth, a person who rejects understanding life and lives without doctrine or principle, as someone who takes life merely as it comes and goes. Finally, the fifth person wonders about everything in life and, finding no meaningful answer, is left ultimately disappointed (14).

Mahmoud provides these examples to prove that there are multiple paths in life. He writes that “[h]aving no essential principle in life, it is a principle itself” (15). He declares that each person has a unique philosophy, and the person must understand his own philosophy, before understanding the God that he or she worships. The soul is unique and individual. The great person is the one who succeeds in reaching through to the self and acts upon true to their inner beliefs without adherence to society's laws. Both writers Emerson and Mahmoud set out to prove that there is no consistent reality to the world, thus enabling the reader to understand that principles can and should change over time. This gives the reader both permission and encouragement to question and rethink their stances, their realities. Through understanding this concept of transience, the reader's mind will search for the answers in the self, rather than through the experiences and beliefs of others.

Emerson anticipates Mahmoud's idea about society, dignity, and self-comportment. First, Emerson in “Self-Reliance” claims that “society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members” (99). Further, Emerson says “society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater.” (99). In other words, Emerson says that a truly great or self-realized person should be able to decide independently what is wrong and right, and

not rely on the dictates of social mores. Society's rules are man-made, and as he describes them, they are subject to alterations and evolutions that do not serve all people equally. "Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs" (Emerson 99). Also, In *Nature*, Emerson asks "why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?" (1). His objection rests on the dependence on others' experiences and reliance on a previously-established philosophy, rather than inventing a new one. Furthermore, Emerson in "The American Scholar" (1837), express his perspective on dignity in humanity. He claims that the workplace in American industrial capitalism was not uplifted or inspired by the dignity of their labors; instead Americans were exhausted from the dull routine that stripped them out of their humanity. Emerson says that:

The planter, who is Man sent out into the field to gather food, is seldom cheered by any idea of the true dignity of his ministry. He sees his bushel and his cart, and nothing beyond, and sinks into the farmer, instead of Man on the farm. The tradesman scarcely ever gives an ideal worth to his work, but is ridden by the routine of his craft, and the soul is subject to dollars. The priest becomes a form; the attorney, a statute-book; the mechanic, a machine; the sailor, a rope of the ship. (342)

Emerson sees that when there is leak of dignity, there will always be leak of learning.

In *Allah and the Human*, in essay called "What is Dignity," Mahmoud explains his perspective of dignity, and how it is a predominate issue in most cultures. However, he criticizes the practice of accusing others of a lack of dignity if they do not conform to the standards of a society, adding that to shift from one culture to another requires an adjustment of the concept of dignity relative to that new culture (40-43). Finally, he concludes this essay with the advice to

consider interlinked the concepts of dignity and spirituality: “The honorable man is not he who has more money or degrees; rather he is the simple man who works in this life with honesty and a free motive” (44). Mahmoud sees dignity in honest, independent motives, and disagrees with the opinion that sees dignity only as the reflection of the social standards of each culture.

Mahmoud and Emerson also both advocate for the rejection of generally accepted social norms, as well as harsh judgment of others. In their works, the self becomes the arbiter of personal right and wrong. They recognized that external forces exert pressure to conform and stifle originality. They claim that inner thoughts and philosophies should form the basis of personal behavior and thought.

Both writers encourage individual thinking and ask people to look into their hearts and to act from their inner true selves. Also, neither writer believes in destiny, but rather the power to create one’s own reality. “To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, -- that is genius” (Emerson 97). In this sense, both thinkers’ conceptions of personal liberty are remarkably similar.

Destiny is in the people’s hands. According to Mahmoud, the person has full control over his or her own destiny, and consequently should believe deeply and truthfully in their inner selves and his or her intuition, and by so doing the power to control it. The scholar Dana Rus argues that Transcendentalism rejects the belief that our destiny has been written before our birth. Emerson does not believe in an inevitable destiny (1). In *Nature*, Emerson suggests, “Our age is respective,” (1) and he emphasizes an ostensibly paradoxical view that the people look back upon history to understand their present. However, Emerson does not trust in the experience of others, nor the reliance upon tradition to healthily construct reality, but rather in the self and its “true” experiences, also the intuition. Rus continues, stating that “Emerson is the initiator of

the cultural breakup with European tradition, preaching the necessity of the nation to accomplish its new destiny, given the uniqueness of the American experience” (253). For Emerson and Mahmoud alike, to control the destiny a person must realize that intuition is the essence of life, and a person with a belief and trust in the inner self will attain the highest levels of self-observation. In *Nature*, Emerson also writes that “we learn that the highest is present to the soul of man, that the dread universal essence, which is not wisdom, or love, or beauty, or power, but all in one, and each entirely” (Rus 36). Both writers focus on intuition, and the notion that a great person must work purely from the heart. The imposition that the writers in the Middle East faced made some of them represent the Transcendentalists’ principles. Although Mahmoud has changed his direction politically, however, he always holds his perspective over individuality.

### Religion

Religion and the authority of Islam were, for Mahmoud and many other intellectuals, ripe subjects for the “process of transformation, fragmentation and recompositing” (1). Writing religious interpretations at such variance with accepted norms inevitably created controversy for Mahmoud, and this remains, to a degree, the case in much of the Middle East today. Emerson and Mahmoud both held original views on this topic. As a result, they were plagued by accusations of atheism and unbelief throughout their lives. As previously mentioned, Mahmoud stood trial over the accusations of atheism following the publication of his book *Allah and the Human* (Salavatore 2). Mahmoud, never denied the existence of God. In the section of his book titled “Allah and International Politics,” Mahmoud points out that “Allah is closer to those who strive to understand him than those who believe in him blindly” (131). Subsequently, in his later book *My Journey from Doubting to Faith* (1970), published after his trial, Mahmoud explains his perspective on religion by describing his search for answers, spanning a period of over thirteen

years. Emerson, on the other hand, had more freedom to express his thoughts. “Emerson's self-worship, however, never proceeded to an atheism that eradicated the objective reference of religion” (Hurth 484)” In this regard, “Emerson was conservative to the core and adhered to a basis for religious truth that corresponded to the reality of a spiritual realm” (484). For this, however, he was mocked by many other writers, such as Edgar Allan Poe, and those in his school of thought were also ridiculed. Neither Emerson nor Mahmoud denied the existence of God; they reinterpreted the common understanding of their religions and attempted to redefine them. Emerson, a pantheist who believed God could be found in many places, never called for atheism and was in a sense conservative. However, his thoughts were in search of the fundamental truth, and as Mahmoud said: those who search for God are closer to God than others. “Emerson never fell prey to an atheism that eradicated the objective reference of religion. When it came to objective religious belief, Emerson, the alleged radical, was in fact more conservative than is commonly assume” (Hurth 484). The previous, shows that Mahmoud and Emerson did not believe in blind worship; instead, they advised their followers to search for inner peace and spiritual progress. And that appears in their works. Religion holds an important role in the Middle East, its power used to determine people’s thoughts. Mahmoud as many other intellectuals at his time were against the idea of forcing religious beliefs over people, so it led him to rebel against it and redefine the religion, and that is one of the Transcendentalist features.

#### Nature

While Transcendentalism sought to emphasize individuality of thought, to redefine religion, and to find and celebrate the inner self, it did so primarily through the prism of a relationship to nature. Nature, and the relationship to it, is a fundamental detail of Transcendentalism. As a reflection of Transcendentalist thought, it is the most tangible, purely

physical aspect in the theory. Both Emerson and Mahmoud provide clear statements about nature and its importance to the life of the person. Emerson does so in *Nature*, and Mahmoud does in an episode of his show “The Magic of Nature and Art.” However, Mahmoud focused on nature as the natural world, while Emerson focused on the natural world and Nature as the spiritual manifest in the physical realm. These writers present and celebrate the effects of Nature on the inner self.

In *Nature*, Emerson describes and presents the importance of nature for the self. Emerson asks people to observe nature and advises people to be open to all aspects of nature in order to receive all its benefits. He says that “all natural objects make a kindred impression, when the mind is open to their influence” (9). Emerson shows how a man becomes a child to seek the secrets of nature;

The stars awaken a certain reverence, because though always present, they are inaccessible; but all natural objects make a kindred impression, when the mind is open to their influence. Nature never wears a mean appearance. Neither does the wisest man extort her secret, and lose his curiosity by finding out all her perfection. Nature never became a toy to a wise spirit. The flowers, the animals, the mountains, reflected the wisdom of his best hour, as much as they had delighted the simplicity of his childhood (Emerson 9).

Emerson refers to nature as female because in English nature is typically personified as Mother Nature; consequently, he equates nature to a loved one in whom we can hide and be at peace within the materialistic world. If Nature is a “she” and the person who seeks her out is a child, then it follows that nature could be the mother, the place where all creatures belong and from whom all of life stems. Mahmoud espouses a markedly similar perspective.

Mahmoud uses nature to reflect his ideas and thoughts and to show the “relation between God and nature” (Salvatore 15). Mahmoud starts his video by saying that “Nature and everything in it, from animals and birds, is a museum for the human” (00:00:24-00:00:30). The Arabic language uses gendered nouns and assigns the feminine to Nature. Mahmoud, like Emerson and the Transcendentalists, also describes nature as the source of life and the spiritual home (00:01:20-00:01:30). He also refers to it as the human museum, which means that the person should gaze upon, question, and enjoy it. Museums display human histories, he implies, and the natural world records that and other histories. Furthermore, Mahmoud claims that most artists take their inspiration from nature. Therefore, art is born from nature (00:03:22-00:03:30). Mahmoud, like Emerson, sees nature in the birth of humanity, art, and love. Basically, he sees nature at the very heart of life.

From Emerson’s point of view, Nature is instructive and teaches us the right lessons. Emerson rejects the past and refuses to receive lessons from human history, or from anyone else’s experiences. The true lessons in life, he argues, are learned from Nature. For Emerson, “Nature is a discipline of the understanding in intellectual truths” (23). Mahmoud also supports this point of view, saying that “those who neglect nature have not achieved anything” (00:03:30-00:03:35). He agrees with the idea that the only way to achieve anything in life is by being in spiritual contact with nature, and that the person who neglects nature will never attain the highest levels of being.

In the sixth section of *Nature*, titled “Idealism,” Emerson states that nature has the power to free the human soul. For a person to be a Transcendentalist, he or she must be freed from the inherited thoughts of the materialist, human world, and to celebrate the originality of the soul. The person should judge by what he or she sees, not through the unreliable lens of reality. He

says, “Nature is made to conspire with spirit to emancipate us” (29). Emerson claims that there is no place where the person can be truly free as he or she may be in nature. In the wildness, Emerson faces the most daring and rewarding experiences, saying that “in the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages” (10). Nature, as Emerson and Mahmoud both saw it, is a liberator of the human spirit.

For Mahmoud, each step he takes through nature is surrounded by mercy and care. Likewise, Transcendentalists believe “if a man only were spirituality awakened, Nature would be for him the most Admirable Companion” (Cameron 101). Nature for Emerson and Mahmoud is the truest and most reliable companion on the road to freedom, to the self, and to individuality. They argue that a person should learn to worship Nature, in it and with it, rather than in a church or mosque. Nature is the place where the person finds the inner self, according to Emerson and Mahmoud. The person must be awakened and feel her, and only then will Nature reach the heart of the person and lead him or her to freedom.

Transcendentalism is built on principles such as the individuality of thoughts and the importance of a connection to Nature. One’s thoughts contribute to a person’s identity, but a vision of life may remain blurry with the weight of an oppressive society’s norms and religious beliefs, often instilled from childhood on. In “Self-Reliance” and *Nature* Emerson educates readers about the importance of self-dependence, spiritual independence, and how a person should be freed from the social realm. He pleads with us to decide for ourselves instead of building the ideas and perspective upon other’s experiences and traditions, which were in turn handed to them. Mahmoud also strives to enlighten people to be individuals, and to not follow religion conventionally, but genuinely. Since freedom of speech did not and still does not exist in Egypt, Mahmoud faced trials much harsher than Emerson in publishing his ideas and thoughts.



Regardless, Mahmoud managed to influence many people to unshackle themselves from oppressive inherited thoughts. “Mustafa Mahmoud’s success story and impact on the public help many people to become reflexive about the power of religious authority on their own life choices, without having to confront it directly” (Salvatore 14). Even if Mahmoud sometimes cannot be so direct in his writing, due to fear of persecution, he nonetheless succeeded in exemplifying Transcendentalist thoughts in his work, just as Emerson did in encouraging people to buck tradition and to be individuals. Both writers argue that nature is the true source of freedom. She frees the individual from the rotten thoughts of the social arena, and makes them aware of their inner selves. If people reach the full understanding of the self, they both argue, they will be fully-realized individuals. Mahmoud’s works proves that the suppression that he faced made a Transcendentalist out of him.

## Chapter IV

### Transcendentalism, Thoreau, and Mahmoud Darwish

Henry Thoreau and Mahmoud Darwish share the same Transcendentalist thoughts and motives for writing. These two writers have written about their personal experiences based on their reflecting. Transcendentalist writers reflect on their thoughts as well as on their Transcendentalist experiences. Thoreau reveals the necessity of isolation and encounters in the natural world in his most celebrated work *Walden*, drawing on his experience with simple living, and in his essay “Civil Disobedience” (1849) in which he calls for resistance to civil government stemming from the due to Mexican-American War and rejects the idea that government is ruled based on the people’s ideas. Thoreau does not only write from a philosophical point of view, but also from experience. Darwish, the Palestinian poet, did not publish any philosophical books. Rather, his poems reflect aspects of Transcendentalist ideology, including individuality, self-isolation, and the value of nature. Most significantly, he rejected the rule of the Government of Israel over his people and his country. This international writer presents his Transcendentalist thoughts through literature. In addition, he is a poet of exile, due to the occupation of his country. Darwish and Thoreau align in that they both drew from personal experiences of exile and alienation for their politically, charged writings. Thoreau’s self-imposed exile at Walden Pond, and his imprisonment for refusing to pay a poll tax in support of the war in which he did not believe, is similar to Darwish’s actions. Darwish, whose poetry grew out of persecution by occupying Israeli forces in his native Palestine and the various forms of internal and external exile that were thrust upon him, faced suppression during the mid-1900s in the Middle East; his act of rebellion shaped him as a holder of Transcendentalists’ thoughts.

## Henry David Thoreau

Henry David Thoreau is one of the influential writers, poets, thinkers, whose name is rightfully associated with Transcendentalism. Thoreau was born in Concord, Massachusetts. His father's origin was French Protestant, and his mother is of Scottish heritage. They first Thoreau arrived in Boston in 1773 (Meltzer 10). When Thoreau finished school at the Concord Academy, his family supported him to continue his education at Harvard (Meltzer 18). In college, Thoreau mostly focused on language, studying Spanish, French, German, and Italian. His ability to read these languages helped him to understand multicultural literature (Meltzer 19). In the fall of 1837, Thoreau started to attend the Transcendentalist Club, where he was exposed to new ideas, concurred with Transcendentalist thought, and had the chance to meet intellectual thinkers (Miller 27). Both at Harvard and through the Transcendentalist Club, Thoreau encountered the person who exerted the greatest influence on him: Emerson (Meltzer 30). That Emerson was a great "influence upon Thoreau, who was fourteen years younger, is almost certain" (Moore 241). Thoreau, inspired by his mentor and friend, came to live and embody the spirit of Transcendentalism. Then, later in 1837, Emerson and Thoreau established a strong friendship, sharing books as well as ideas (Meltzer 31). Emerson suggested to Thoreau that he should keep a journal, which eventually was published in fourteen volumes (Meltzer 35). Thoreau saw Emerson as his guide in writing philosophy. Thoreau graduated from Harvard with a Bachelor of Arts in August 30, 1837 (Meltzer 24). After his graduation, Thoreau went back to Concord and received an offer to work at his old school in Concord (Miller 23). However, he quit his job because he did not agree with the school's rules of punishing pupils to teach them classroom manners. (Meltzer 28). This specific act of resistance aligns him with other thinkers of the time, such as Bronson Alcott and Elizabeth Peabody, who were also teachers known for similar beliefs

(28). After that, he opened a private school in 1838, and established his own rules (Meltzer 40). Later on, he worked on his book *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* inspired by a trip that he took with his brother John in 1839 (Miller 54). Then in 1850, Thoreau started to become interested in traveling and made a trip to Montreal and Quebec City, his only trips out of the states. He started to travel and learn new thoughts and met great writers (Miller 67). Thoreau, however, after much reflection found that traveling was unnecessary for him. Instead, Thoreau devoted his life to observing and learning from nature immediately around him (Miller 96). Thoreau was not well-known within his society, and he only published two books in his lifetime. However, this changed when many of his writings and journals were discovered posthumously. Thoreau died at the age of 45 of tuberculosis in May of 1862 (Miller 101).

Thoreau wrote one of the most important books in American literature, *Walden* (Meltzer 9). This book reflects his Transcendentalist observations and beliefs. In *Walden* (1854), a collection of eighteen essays, Thoreau reflects upon his experience in living at Walden, from which was owned by his friend and mentor, Emerson. In this landscape, he lived for two years, two months and two days (Thoreau 5). This book is considered one of the most “profound books of nature in the familiar sense—describing it, intuiting it, knowing it, and I think this is what Henry Thoreau intended—in part” (Friedrich 45). In addition, this book combines all the aspects of Transcendentalism, such as the self, nature, and individuality. *Walden* is considered “the most taught book in university courses on nineteenth-century American literature” (Malachuk 283). In the second chapter, Thoreau explains clearly his motivations for going to the woods:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish

to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it.”

(Thoreau 88)

Thoreau’s purpose for living in the woods for two years, then, was to find life and to understand it through nature. In a way, it was an exile from the human world that would allow him to better understand it.

### **Mahmoud Darwish**

Critics claim Darwish was one of the most important poets in the Arabic language; he is “the mirror of the Palestinian people. He created a national Palestinian identity that no other poets could achieve” (Nofal 67). More significantly, he became the voice of the people in Palestine who would come to “open new possibilities for poetry while assimilating one of the world’s oldest literary traditions” (Akash and Forché xvi). Darwish was born in Birwe, Palestine, on March 13, 1942. He faced a painful and difficult life. When he was only six, his village Birwe was occupied and destroyed by the newly-established state of Israel. Consequently, his family had to escape to Lebanon to avoid the ensuing massacres. After a year, they returned to Palestine “illegally” and moved to a village called Dayr al-Asad. Sadly, their return was too late to be counted among the Palestinians who survived, and they remained within the borders of the new state (Akash and Forché xvi). In this situation Darwish, at that time was considered an “internal refugee,” classified as a “present-absent alien.” He reflects on this situation in several poems<sup>1</sup>. “Darwish recited a poem of lamentation at the school celebration of the second

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<sup>1</sup> The Palestinians could not travel without permission within their homeland due to the military rule imposed by Israel.

anniversary of Israel without subsequently incurring the wrath of the Israeli military governor” (xvi). During his high school years, he was imprisoned several times for “reciting his poetry” and traveling within the country. He left the country in 1970. Darwish’s hometown Birwe was destroyed and completely erased in 1997 by the Israelis. In 1996, Darwish’s exile came to an end, and he was “granted a permit to visit his family and was warmly embraced by his compatriots” (xvii). After six years of exile, the Palestinians welcomed Darwish in celebratory ways, singing his popular poems. Darwish died on August 9, 2008, in Houston, Texas.

### The Similarities Between Thoreau and Darwish

Transcendentalism calls for independent experience and thinking, and Thoreau and Darwish reflect their own experience along with their thoughts. In *Walden*, Thoreau’s establishes his love for nature and delineates his experience with isolation to find his inner self. Also, his essay “Civil Disobedience,” written after a night in jail, rejects the control that the government has over people’s freedom. Darwish’s life, is reflected in his poems, and represents his impressive and wide range. “Darwish subjected his art to the impress of exile and to his own demand that the work remains true to itself, independent of its critical or public reception” (Akash and Forché xvii). Darwish bore the weight of his people’s experience: he was their voice, manifest in poetry. “His poetry is both the linguistic fruit of an internalized collective memory and an impassioned poetic response to his long absorption of regional and international poetic movements” (xvii). Even though Darwish’s poetry often represented the Palestinian tragedy, he also moved from city to city, and wrote many poems about the human soul and nature. Darwish wrote about the love of nature and the isolation. He was, also rejecter of the oppression of the government, and the Transcendentalists aspect that can be seen clearly in his works.

In Darwish and Thoreau's works, both writers reflect their Transcendentalist values through their own actions that were then distilled into words. Transcendentalism, as they saw it, was more than a spiritual revolution. It was also a political cry, a call to action.

### Individualism

Thoreau sought peace and perfection of the soul. The individual's soul is the essence of this life, and by finding its peace the person would produce more peace. The individual must know the inner self and not let society decide right or wrong: "Things do not change; we change" (Thoreau 110). Right and wrong are nothing but changeable concepts for the Transcendentalists, changing throughout the ages and between societies. What is wrong in the West might be right in the East, and what is right today might be wrong tomorrow. The person who follows social norms will not be able to identify what is right or wrong for the self. Darwish too encourages individualistic thought. Consider his poem "Attack"<sup>2</sup> (109), where he uses his individuality as an example and condemns the critics who unfairly attack his work. However, the spirit of Thoreau and Emerson, he neglects them and follow his own poetic intuition.

يغتالني النقاد أحياناً

يريدون القصيدة ذاتها

...والاستعارة ذاتها

Sometimes the critics attack me:

They want the same poems

The same metaphors...(109)

وإن رأيتُ الوردَ أصفرَ في الربيع

تساءلوا: أين الدَّمُ الوطنيُّ في أوراقه؟

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<sup>2</sup> Translated by me

If I saw the yellow flowers on spring

They wonder: Where is the blood of your country on your papers? (109)

يغتالني النقادُ أحياناً

وأنجو من قراءتهم،

وأشكرهم على سوء التفاهم

ثم أبحثُ عن قصيدتي الجديدة!

Sometimes the critics attack me:

And I survive their attacking,

And I thank them for their misunderstanding

And then I search for a new poem! (109)

Darwish chooses to ignore his critics and their opinions and instead writes a poem further celebrating his ideals. Darwish not only refers to the literary critics, but also to the occupying state of Israel, which put him in jail for his revolutionary poems but was unable to deter him from writing (Akash and Forché xvi). Moreover, he condemns anyone who tries to oppress others. People, if they are to be free, must not bend their heads to any power that tries to stifle their dreams and aspirations for freedom.

In the political dimension, Thoreau, like Darwish, also refused to support the political situation in his country. “Civil Disobedience” is a term “coined by Thoreau, to signify his own resistance to the laws of a slave state” (Gandhi 51). Thoreau stood against the oppressive nature of the government, as he saw it, in several distinct ways. Thoreau refused to pay the poll tax “to Massachusetts as a means of withdrawing his allegiance from a federal government which was protecting slavery and making war on Mexico” (Herr 87). He also “deliberately violated the Fugitive Slave Law by helping several escaped slaves avoid recapture” (88). Finally, he “spoke



in defense of men who had stormed a Boston courthouse in an attempt to free a recaptured slave. (88). Thoreau wrote: “There will never be a really free and enlightened State, until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly” (54). Thoreau believed in the power of the individual, and if the government wanted to improve society, it needed to give the individual more agency and respect.

Thoreau, as Darwish, believed in the power of the individual and that each person is unique and must make an individual journey. He mentions in *Walden*: “Every path but your own is the path of fate. Keep on your own track, then” (41). He highlighted the fact that each generation criticizes the previous one “but follows religiously the new” (10). Transcendentalists do not believe in the inevitability of fate; however, they believe in the free will of the person and that the person has a choice (Rus 252). Darwish, like Thoreau refuses the inevitable destiny, or to follow blindly without questioning and thinking as an individual. In his poem “If We Wanted” (107), he claims that society would be better “if we forgot what the tribes have said, if the individual noticed the small details” (107). He continues, writing, “We will be a nation if we respect both right and wrong” (107). Darwish wants the people to respect each other’s opinions and individuality, to not follow what they have been told, and to look around them and decide for themselves. This is all very much in the spirit of Thoreau and his fierce declarations of the inviolability of the self against a corrupt society. He wrote: “I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion. Let us see who is the strongest” (36).

Transcendentalism honors Nature as its foundation, a place and an ideal in which one can find inner peace and to discover original thoughts, rather than have society instill them. Experiencing solitude will increase the opportunity of becoming an individual, the first step in

creating one's own philosophy. Thoreau and Darwish put their experiences of solitude, oppression, Nature, and individuality into their writing. Thoreau lived two years in nature and experienced solitude. He went to jail for maintaining his integrity by refusing to pay a poll tax because he did not agree in the actions of the government at that time. Likewise, Darwish became an exile in his own country, experienced solitude and valued the nature of his homeland. He also was imprisoned for his revolutionary writing, and refusal to bow to injustice. The oppression that Darwish faced, and more importantly the means by which he chose to respond and transcend those conditions, is one of the details that enabled him to become a remarkable poet, and very much a literary and philosophic descendent of Thoreau and the Transcendentalist spirit.

### Solitude

Solitude is another significant component of Transcendentalist practice.

Transcendentalists believe that there is no fulfillment without solitude. The truly solitary person can maintain the highest level and hear the inner voice without the interruption of the others. Emerson comments on the necessity of isolation saying that "Isolation must precede true society" (238).

In *Walden*, Thoreau expresses his perspective on solitude by saying that he finds it "wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone" (Thoreau 47). Thoreau best presents Transcendentalist perspective on solitude and its benefits for the individual soul. For Thoreau, being with others may bring joy, but it is tiring; however, solitude is the company that never becomes boring, whenever he is with nature he "never found the companion that was so

companionable as solitude” (Thoreau 47). Darwish has the same perspective on solitude, as described in his poem “If I were Another”<sup>3</sup> (107), where he writes:

في العزلة كفاءة المؤمن على نفسه،  
يكتب العبارة , وينظر إلى السقف.  
ثم يضيف: أن تكون وحيداً... أن تكون قادراً  
. على أن تكون وحيداً هو تربية ذاتية  
العزلة هي انتقاء نوع الألم , والتدرب  
على تصريف أفعال القلب بحرية العصامي ...

In solitude a person can protect the self,

He writes a sentence, then he looks up.

And he adds: To be lonely... To be capable

To be capable of being alone is a self-educating

Solitude is to select the kind of pain, and to practice

On how to control the hearts acts freely as the self-educated person. (107)

Solitude offers one the power of control. It allows one to know pain of the world and to learn

how to control one’s inner desires. In order to be as free as the self-educated person who works

to develop the true self, one must experience solitude and be patient while doing so. He adds that

“if I were isolated, that is my free wellness” (107). Like Thoreau, Darwish chose to isolate

himself, to write, to have his individual thoughts, and to control his inner self. Thoreau says, “I

have, as it were, my own sun and moon and stars, and a little world all to myself” (45).

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<sup>3</sup> Translated by me.

Solitude and nature are what enable a person to be an individual, but it does not mean neglecting society; rather, it creates a society out of educated individuals. The main impetus in these tenets are in individuals:

For, if Thoreau and Emerson were alike in finding a transcendental guide to perfection within one's conscience or soul or whatever term is used to designate that internal polestar in which they had such faith, and if they were also alike in attempting to describe a complex role for the state in all of this, Thoreau differed from Emerson in more often finding an equally complex role for nature in all this. (Malachuk 295).

Which shows the similarity between Emerson and Thoreau in encouraging the individuality, however, they differ slightly in their perspective of nature. Thoreau appreciates physical nature, while Emerson sees Nature as higher power.

#### Nature

Nature, as it has been demonstrated, occupied a central position in the Transcendentalist philosophical framework. As the founder of Transcendentalism, “Emerson became aware that the tangible natural world could be the most accessible entry into an intangible realm of the spirit” (Robinson 82). Transcendentalists, such as Thoreau, found the “realm of the spirit” (82). in nature that could not be found in any other place.

In *Walden*, Thoreau, like Emerson, refers to Nature as a maternal figure: “Every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity, and I may say innocence, with Nature herself” (32). Also, he focuses on nature as a conduit to find the inner self and describes it in a charming way and gets at the depth of the it. As a Transcendentalist, he strove to deliver a message to his readers, urging them to focus on Nature and its might in order to find the self, both its weakness and its strength: “Nature is as well adapted to our weakness as to our

strength” (5). He argues that a person should live truly and deliberately through Nature: “let us spend one day as deliberately as Nature.” (95). He also recognizes that, rather than loneliness, he found much peace in his time alone in the natural world, writing “I turned my face more exclusively than ever to the woods, where I was better known” (38). Thoreau uses nature metaphors to claim that the seasons symbolize human life “I want the flower and fruit of a man; that some fragrance be wafted over from him to me, and some ripeness flavor our intercourse” (122).

Likewise, Darwish is connected to nature, and especially to his homeland. Like Thoreau, Darwish, in his poetry, celebrates trees, rivers, rain, and wind. Because the city where he grows up, Birwe, was destroyed by the Israelis, he can, however, never fully understand his own country (Akash and Forché xvii). Darwish portrays his identity using “poetry through a variety of symbolic resources, particularly language, land, origin, goals, beliefs, desires, attitudes, values, culture, nature, and heritage among others” (Nofal 67). Darwish, like Thoreau, also uses nature as a representation for his identity. In his poem “My Roots,” he says that “my roots were deeply entrenched” (70) as Darwish believes his land, “(borrowed from the world of plants) evokes the sense of rootedness between the poet and his homeland” (70). Moreover, he adds “This sea air is mine” (70). Darwish cannot be separated from nature, no matter to what extent the Palestinians may be isolated and confined (Darwish 71). For Darwish, people may lose their homeland, but a new one may be forged in or to reserve and sanctify the self, as Darwish did through identifying so fiercely with the natural world after his own world was destroyed.

Darwish is known for his nature metaphors. He does not see nature as an element separate from him; instead, he sees as a central component to his being. He sees aspects of nature in Palestine can be used to describe both the joy and the great tragedy that humans face.

Likewise, Thoreau describes *Walden*, the landscape that he lived in, as the “perfect forest mirror” (64), not only as the physical mirror that the people use, but also “a mirror in which all impurity presented to it sinks” (65). These two poets show the power of nature in reflecting their inner souls. They both understood that Nature, as an ideal and tangible reality, could be used to reflect the plight and joy of humanity. For Transcendentalists, Nature is the place where the person can find the true essence of this world. Darwish presents this thought by using nature as a metaphor to describe his deepest and most acute feelings. On the other hand, Thoreau “attempts to translate his activities—ranging from digging to bathing to fishing to planting—as well as the phenomena he studies—such as loons and owls and leaves that blow—into windows through which we can see the constant laws and mirrors in which he can view his own essential nature” (Wilson 189). Thoreau discovered his true self in the natural world, and then wrote his book drawing on the experiences he had there. For him “Nature is as well adapted to our weakness as to our strength” (5). As a mirror reflects the physical appearance of things and offers one a method to see themselves from the outside, Nature is the mirror for the soul, and represents the opportunity for one to see the spiritual self-reflected in the world. Similarly, in “If I were a Hunter”<sup>4</sup> (185). from *Butterfly Effect*, Darwish demonstrates his love for nature’s creatures and his kindness toward a deer:

لو كنت صياداً

لأعطيت الغزالة فرصة أولى

وثانية

وثالثة

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<sup>4</sup> Translated by me.

If I were a hunter  
I would give the deer one chance  
And second  
And a third  
And a tenth  
To sleep. . . . (185)

Darwish's love for nature was not limited to its inanimate aspects, but also to its creatures, such as the deer. Nature, as he saw it, is capable of awakening our innermost feelings, though one must first be open and willing to listen, for "nature would awaken a fulfilling and purposeful life. But to activate this potential, one must renounce settled doctrines and conventions" (Robinson 84).

## Chapter V

### Conclusion

The oppressive social and political regimes that Mahmoud and Darwish faced in Egypt and Palestine, respectively, led to them both to embrace certain ideals and beliefs markedly similar to Emersonian Transcendentalism. Mahmoud, in his book *Allah and the Human*, expresses what can only be considered Transcendentalist values, such as the value of individuality, in both thought and comportment, and the independence of the personal in both religious and political opinions. Further, on the episode of his show, titled *The Magic of Nature and Art*, Mahmoud offers his perspectives on Nature, and how valuable it is to the self's formation. Mahmoud comes to closely resemble Emerson's thoughts on and celebrations of individuality and the important of Nature.

Darwish in many of his poems, charts and celebrates the nature of and need for solitude, as well as his own thoughts on the sacred individuality of the person and the need to reject the existing rules, should they be in violation to the self. He uses Nature and its elements to express his emotions, and how he has allowed them to shape his experiences as a freethinker, similar to the American Transcendentalist Thoreau.

Transcendentalism is not supposed to be limited to a single geographic area or time period. The movement can be detected in several works worldwide, including in the works of Mahmoud and Darwish two of the most influential Arab writers. As the Transcendentalists, these Arab writers, give a high value to the individual and encourage each person in society to express their thoughts without the influence of tradition or a higher power in their country. That can be seen in Mahmoud's work *Allah and The Human*, when he keeps on encouraging the individuals to ask themselves about their own philosophy and create their own perspective of life, Mahmoud



push his reader by saying “Ask yourself before you sleep... why you were born... what do you live for... what is your goals” (16). Likewise, Emerson who encourages his readers to be individual by writing an essay about the “Self-Reliance” Furthermore, Emerson as Mahmoud found Nature as the essence of life, and knowledge and art always come from Nature. However, Thoreau and Darwish valued the natural world more. they all argue that solitude in Nature, wherein a person can be able to dive into the self and free the mind from the outside voices. Celebrations of and appeals to individuality, solitude, and Nature rest at the core of these Arab writers’ work, just as it did Emerson’s, Thoreau’s, and the rest of the American Transcendentalist’s movement. That make the Transcendentalism a worldwide movement, otherwise, it would lose its uniqueness and value.

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