

ISLAM AND TRANSCENDENTALISM IN THEOLOGICAL CONVERGENCE

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Abstract:

This paper explores the interrelation between Islam and the ideology of the Transcendentalist movement, as held by prominent Transcendentalists Thomas Carlyle, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. It examines the movement's theological principles that created interconnectedness with Islam's ideals, such as social reforms, the divinity of nature, and self-reliance. The paper then narrows its scope to a case study analyzing a selected piece of Transcendentalist literature, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, written by Thomas Carlyle. The results indicate that there are many points of convergence between Islam and the theological ideals of Transcendentalism, as evidenced by Carlyle's veracity within his work *On Heroes*.

Keywords: Islam, Transcendentalists, Thomas Carlyle, Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Résumé :

Cet article explore l'interrelation entre l'islam et l'idéologie du mouvement transcendantaliste, tel que soutenu par les éminents transcendantalistes Thomas Carlyle et Ralph Waldo Emerson. L'ouvrage aborde les principes théologiques du mouvement qui ont créé une interconnexion avec les idéaux de l'islam, tels que les réformes sociales, la divinité de la nature et l'autonomie. Ensuite, l'article réduit sa portée à une étude de cas analysant une pièce sélectionnée de la littérature transcendantaliste, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* écrite par Thomas Carlyle. Les résultats montrent qu'il existe de nombreux points de convergence entre les idéaux théologiques du transcendantalisme et l'islam, comme en témoigne la véracité de Carlyle dans son œuvre *On Heroes*.

Mots-clés : Islam, transcendantalistes, Thomas Carlyle, Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Introduction

Islam, as one of the major world religions, has often been a subject of curiosity and intrigue for Western writers throughout history. Western literature has played a significant role in shaping public perceptions of Islam, sometimes perpetuating stereotypes and misconceptions that lead to misunderstandings and adversities. However, it is important to recognize that the views of Western writers on Islam are diverse and multifaceted, reflecting the cultural, historical, and individual perspectives of the authors.

Transcendentalism is a philosophical and literary movement that emerged in 19th-century America (Packer 2007:189). The present work seeks to address how Transcendentalists traced religious interconnectedness with Islam through their principles and beliefs by delving into the writings and works of prominent Transcendentalist thinkers such as Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), and Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881). The study aims to uncover convergence, and interrelatedness between the ideas of Transcendentalism and Islam, unveiling a story of openness and tolerance that stemmed from the ideals of philosophers and the beauty of literature.

1 The Origins of Transcendentalism

In this part, the present researcher stresses the religious formation of the movement to create a basis for comparison with Islam. Our focus in these initial lines extends beyond the literary and artistic aspects to emphasize religious ideas. To begin, the dictionary definition of the word ‘transcend’ means “to rise above or go beyond the limits” (Merriam-Webster). This concept was adopted to reflect Transcendentalist ideas that exist outside of material existence and lie beyond our ordinary sense perception (Packer 2007: 189).

In a world driven by conformity and materialism, Transcendentalism emerged, challenging prevailing philosophical norms, and advocating the power of religion. The beginnings of American Transcendentalism did not arise solely from the minds of a few individuals, “it had its essential roots in earlier European and even in non-Western ways of thinking: German idealists, Swiss educators, British and Continental romantics, Neoplatonists, and Christian Mystics all contributed streams of thought to the philosophy that would shape the Transcendentalist movement” (Nichols 2006:9).

In addition, Transcendentalism was initially a religious movement that evolved from New England Unitarianism in the 1820s and 1830s (Robinson 2018). Equally important, Transcendentalist pioneers like Ralph Waldo Emerson were influenced by Buddhist and Hindu sacred writings and were attracted to idealist philosophies that saw permanent truth as residing somehow beyond the physical world (Nichols

2006:8). These influences fostered a unique theological openness within the minds of Transcendentalists.

In the same religious vein, Transcendentalism was initially an attempt to produce a new philosophy that emerged as antithetical to established terms. In other words, the movement was initially anti-skeptical, opposing the skepticism of empiricists of John Locke (1632–1704) and David Hume (1711–1776), who argued that all knowledge comes through the five senses. According to Locke and Hume, if something could not be seen, touched, tasted, smelled, or felt, it did hold any direct importance as an aspect of knowledge (see Packer 2007:23 ff). Transcendentalists, however, embraced the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), particularly his ideas on how to reach an understanding of God, positing that knowledge is transcendental.

Kant's idea that the material world is a version of reality brought to us by our senses, with something beyond sense perception as the most fundamental form of existence, is a central theme in his philosophy. This concept is most notably explored in his work *Critique of Pure Reason*. In this seminal work, Kant distinguishes between the phenomenal world (the world as it appears to us through our senses) and the noumenal world (the world as it is in itself, beyond our sensory experience). Kant argues that while we can only know phenomena, our understanding is limited by the structure of our minds, and we can never directly perceive the noumenal realm.¹

The accumulation of theological influences within the Transcendentalist movement has led to a universal connection with Islamic principles, which is appealing to the writer and motivates further exploration.

2 Transcendentalism and Islam in Spiritual Connections

Rooted in the belief that individuals possess an inherent connection to nature and the divine, the Transcendentalist movement sought to challenge traditional societal norms and encourage personal growth and self-reliance. Packer (2007:192) confirms: "Led by influential thinkers, the new literary trend sought to inspire individuals to break free from societal constraints and connect with their inner selves and the beauty of nature". This part of the present research seeks to address the interconnectedness of the movement's theological principles with Islamic ideals.

¹ Kant, *Critique* 338–365, Chapter 3 "On the ground of distinction of all objects in general into *phenomena* and *noumena*". For a summary of Kant's views on this question, see Guyer and Wood 1998:12–13. See also Thielke 2022, and especially Allais 2022.

2.1 Islam and the Stand of Transcendentalism for Social Reforms

Transcendentalism was primarily concerned with personal spiritual development and aimed to impact other social reform movements of the time. The movement actively supported causes such as abolitionism, women's suffrage, and education reform, all with the goal of making society more just and equitable. As Boller (1974:99) claimed, the movement, acting as a catalyst for social change, was strongly connected to individualism, self-reliance, and the pursuit of truth, all of which led its adherents to actively fight against apartheid, which they viewed as a violation of individual freedom and equality.

The most influential essays of Transcendentalism regarding the issue of slavery were written by Ralph Waldo Emerson (*Self-Reliance*) and Henry David Thoreau (*Civil Disobedience*).² Emerson's essay calls for individuals to trust their own instincts and moral compass, inspiring many to question the morality of slavery and actively support its abolition. Thoreau's essay advocated for nonviolent resistance against unjust laws, inspiring many abolitionists to take a stand against slavery. Transcendentalist communities exemplified how the practical ideals of Transcendentalism translated into concrete actions. The experimental communities of Brook Farm (founded in 1841 in West Roxbury, Massachusetts) and Fruitlands (founded in 1843 in Harvard, Massachusetts) provided platforms for like-minded individuals to discuss and promote abolitionist ideals (Packer 2007:189).

The positive stance of Transcendentalism on the issue of slavery is regarded by the present author as an example of interconnectedness with the principles of Islam, though historical practices in many territories under Muslim rule often reveal the opposite. This article discusses the principles of both Islam and Transcendentalism, not the human practices of either. The principle of racial equality in Islam promotes justice for all individuals, regardless of their race or ethnicity. Islam recognizes that all human beings are descendants of Adam and Eve, emphasizing the inherent equality of all races. The Holy Qur'an states, "O people, We have created you male and female and made you races and tribes that you may know one another. The noblest of you in the sight of God is the most god-fearing." (Q. 49:13).³

² "Self-Reliance" was first published in 1841 in Emerson's collection of essays titled *Essays: [First Series]*. "Civil Disobedience" was first published in 1849 under the title "Resistance to Civil Government" in an anthology called *Aesthetic Papers*. Later, it was reprinted under the title "Civil Disobedience" in 1866 in Thoreau's collection of essays titled *A Yankee in Canada, with Anti-Slavery and Reform Papers*. Both essays are considered seminal works in American literature and have had a significant influence on political and philosophical thought. See in detail (Bhagwanani 2013:59–60).

³ Translation by Jones. The Arabic is as follows:
 { يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَنْتَأَكُمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ }

“This [verse] was revealed about Thabit Ibn Qays Ibn Shammas who said to a man: “You are the son of so-and-so” in reference to his mother. It is also said that it was revealed about Bilal, the muezzin of the Prophet. When Bilal gave the call to prayer in Mecca after its conquest, a group of men from Quraysh, among whom were Sahl Ibn ‘Amr, al-Harth Ibn Hisham and Abu Sufyan Ibn Harb, said: “Did God and His Messenger not find anyone to call to prayer except this raven” (Ibn ‘Abbās, *Tanwīr* 605). This verse highlights the importance of recognizing and appreciating diversity in Islam as a means to foster unity among people.

Islam categorically rejects any form of racial discrimination. The Prophet Muḥammad emphasized the equality of all individuals, regardless of their race or ethnicity. In his final sermon, he stated that all mankind is from Adam and Eve: an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab; similarly, a white has no superiority over a black person, nor does a black person have any superiority over a white person, except by piety and good action.⁴

The following *ḥadīth* also serves as a reminder that people’s worth is determined by their character and actions, not by the nobility of their descent: “Mankind! We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you might come to know each other. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you (Q. 49:13). One man says to another man, ‘I am more noble than you are.’ No one is nobler than another person except by piety.”⁵

It is equally important to note that Islam places great emphasis on social justice and the establishment of a just society. The Quran states, “O you who believe, be steadfast in justice, witnesses for God, even if it is against your selves or your parents or your close relatives. Whether the person be rich or poor, God is closer to both. Do not follow whim lest you turn. If you twist or turn away, you will find that God is informed of what you do.” (Q. 4:135).⁶ This verse highlights the obligation of Muslims to stand up for justice, regardless of the race or background of the individuals (Ibn ‘Abbās, *Tanwīr*). Islam historically has involved and always encouraged the establishment of a society where all individuals are treated fairly and equitably, fostering a sense of brotherhood and unity.

The second social reform that Transcendentalists appealed for was women’s suffrage, as they celebrated the individual’s ability to think independently and make moral choices, regardless of societal expectations. Additionally, the defense

⁴ Muḥammad’s final sermon is mentioned by all the major *ḥadīth* collections

⁵ al-Buḥārī, *Adab* 313, Chapter 400, al-Ḥasab, *ḥadīth* No. 3:

حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنُ الْمُبَارَكِ، قَالَ: حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ سَعِيدٍ، قَالَ: حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ الْمَلِكِ، قَالَ: حَدَّثَنَا عَطَاءٌ، عَنْ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ قَالَ: لَا أَرَى أَحَدًا يَعْمَلُ بِهَذِهِ الْآيَةِ: {يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَى} حَتَّى بَلَغَ: {إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ}، فَيَقُولُ الرَّجُلُ لِلرَّجُلِ: أَنَا أَكْرَمُ مِنْكَ، فَلَيْسَ أَحَدٌ أَكْرَمَ مِنْ أَحَدٍ إِلَّا بِتَقْوَى اللَّهِ.

⁶ Translation by Jones. The Arabic text is as follows:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُونُوا قَوِّمِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ إِن يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَقِيرًا فَاللَّهُ أَوْلَىٰ بِهِمَا فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا الْهَوَىَٰ أَنْ تُعَدِلُوا وَإِنْ تَلَّوْا أَوْ تُعْرَضُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا

for women's suffrage was deduced from the main principle of Transcendentalism, that of Self-Reliance (Gura 2007:285). This idea of equality provided a philosophical basis for women's suffrage, challenging the notion that women were inherently inferior to men.

Ultimately, this individualistic stance encouraged women to question their subordinate roles and assert their rights as equal citizens through the embodiment of the ideals of Transcendentalism. The first Transcendentalist woman was Margaret Fuller (1810–1850), who actively participated in discussions and actions related to suffrage and other women's rights. As she writes:

By Man I mean both man and woman: these are the two halves of one thought. I lay no especial stress on the welfare of either. I believe that the development of the one cannot be effected without that of the other. My highest wish is that this truth should be distinctly and rationally apprehended, and the conditions of life and freedom recognized as the same for the daughters and the sons of time; twin exponents of a divine thought. (Fuller, *Woman* vi).

Over time, the new trend encouraged more women to rely on their own instincts and beliefs rather than conforming to societal norms. Emphasizing self-reliance, female Transcendentalists were empowered to challenge traditional gender roles and assert their agency in the fight for suffrage. The principle of self-reliance was adopted by other Transcendentalist women such as Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888), who is also considered a pioneer Transcendentalist. Alcott inspired suffragettes to organize and mobilize, demonstrating their ability to effect change through their own actions.⁷

In Islam, both the Qur'ānic and the prophetic texts insist on the integration of women's role in the societal matters. Beginning with verses recognizing women's inherent worth and spiritual equality, in the first verse of Sūrat an-Nisā' (Q. 4:1) we read: "O people, fear your Lord, who created you from a single soul and who created from it its fellow and who spread many men and women from the two of them; and fear God, through whom you seek rights from one another and from the ties of relationship. God is a watcher over you".⁸

This verse depicts that there is no superiority for one sex over the other. Both genders are created from the single soul, with the same human and spiritual nature. Ibn 'Abbās (*Tanwīr ad Q.* 4:1) states that God has created mankind out of one living entity, and out of it created its mate, and out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Islam elevates the demeaned status of women and grants them rights equal to those of men. The wording of aforementioned Qur'ānic

⁷ Reisen 2010. See also Zwarg 1995.

⁸ Translation by Jones. The Arabic text is as follows:

{ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا }^٥

verse indicates that the primary Islamic text does not specify one sex over the other, which is proof of gender non-bias and equality.

The Prophet Muḥammad had a profound impact on women's rights as reflected in the *ḥadīth* literature. During his time, women in Arabia were often treated as unequal to men (Keddie 1990:82). However, the Prophet Muḥammad advocated for the fair treatment of women and granted them rights that were revolutionary for his time. He preached the importance of education for women, gave them property rights, and granted them the right to inherit wealth. For example, in the matter of education, Islam makes no distinction between the rights of men and women in seeking knowledge. The Prophet Muhammad said: "The pursuit of knowledge is a duty of every Muslim"⁹ (Ibn Māḡa, *Sunan* 81, No. 224), that is male and female.

Islamic ethics emphasizes the value of women in society and advocates for their protection and respect. The Prophet Muḥammad improved the status of women in the tribal state of Arabia and set a precedent for the rights of women in Islamic culture. For example, Islamic marriage is a contract which a woman has the full right to accept or refuse. Women's consent is a prerequisite for the validity of the marriage contract according to the Prophet's saying: "A woman without a husband (or divorced or a widow) must not be married until she is consulted, and a virgin must not be married until her permission is sought. They asked the Prophet of Allah: How her (virgin's) consent can be solicited? He (the Holy Prophet) said: That she keeps silence."¹⁰

In another *ḥadīth*, Ibn 'Abbās reported that a young woman complained to the Messenger of God that her father had forced her to marry his brother's son without her consent, solely to elevate his social status. The Prophet Muḥammad gave her the choice between accepting the marriage or having the marriage annulled. The girl said: "O Messenger of Allah! I have accepted what my father has done but I wanted to let women know that parents have no right to force a husband on them"¹¹.

Equally important, the principles of Transcendentalism, celebrating individualism and the pursuit of truth, interrelate with Islam's principle regarding the importance of education. Moreover, Transcendentalism aimed to ignite a critical approach to education, inspiring learners to embrace their unique talents and

⁹ طلب العلم فريضة على كل مسلم

¹⁰ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 641, *Kitāb an-Nikāḥ*, Chapter 9, No. 1419. Also mentioned in other sources. The Arabic text is as follows:

حَدَّثَنِي عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ عُمَرَ بْنِ مَيْسَرَةَ الْقَوَارِيرِيُّ، حَدَّثَنَا خَالِدُ بْنُ الْخَارِثِ، حَدَّثَنَا هِشَامٌ، عَنْ يَحْيَى بْنِ أَبِي كَثِيرٍ، حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو سَلَمَةَ، حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو هُرَيْرَةَ، أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ " لَا تَنْكُحُ الْأَيْمَ حَتَّى تُسْتَأْمَرَ وَلَا تُنْكَحُ الْبِكْرُ حَتَّى تُسْتَأْذَنَ ". قَالُوا يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَكَيْفَ إِذْنُهَا قَالَ " أَنْ تُسْكُتَ " .

¹¹ Ibn Māḡa, *Sunan* 602–603, No. 1874. The Arabic text is as follows:

حَدَّثَنَا هُنَّادُ بْنُ السَّرِيِّ، حَدَّثَنَا وَكَيْعٌ، عَنْ كَثْمَسِ بْنِ الْحَسَنِ، عَنْ ابْنِ بَرِيْدَةَ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، قَالَ جَاءَتْ فَتَاةٌ إِلَى النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - فَقَالَتْ إِنَّ أَبِي زَوَّجَنِي ابْنَ أُخِيهِ لِيَرْفَعَ بِي حَسْبِسْتَهُ. قَالَ فَجَعَلَ الْأَمْرَ إِلَيْهَا. فَقَالَتْ قَدْ أَجَزْتُ مَا صَنَعَ أَبِي وَلَكِنْ أَرَدْتُ أَنْ تَعْلَمَ النِّسَاءُ أَنْ لَيْسَ إِلَى الْأَبَاءِ مِنَ الْأَمْرِ شَيْءٌ.

perspectives, and encouraging independent thinking (Buell, Cramer, & Marshall, 2016:142). The belief in the inherent goodness of individuals led to a focus on character development, promoting empathy, and fostering a sense of social responsibility.

As Islam emphasizes, critical education extends beyond the mere transmission of information; it encourages individuals to think critically, question assumptions, and engage in meaningful dialogue about one's religion. Islam, by promoting self-reflection and introspection, enabled Muslims to rely on their own instincts and develop a sense of agency. The Qur'ān underscores the importance of critically seeking knowledge in several verses, including Q. 4:162: "But those of them who are firm in knowledge and the believers believe in what has been sent down to you and what was sent down before you, and those performing prayer and paying *zakāt* and believing in God and the Last Day. These – We shall give them a mighty wage."¹²

According to the commentators, this verse prompts readers to contemplate those who are deeply familiar with the genuine teachings of the Scriptures and whose minds are devoid of prejudice, stubbornness, blind adherence to ancestral customs, and enslavement to base desires. Such individuals are inclined to follow those teachings. Such discerning individuals readily recognize, even upon initial examination, that the teachings of the Qur'ān fundamentally align with those of the previous Prophets. Consequently, they encounter no difficulty in affirming it.¹³

2.2 Islam and Transcendentalism: The Divinity of Nature

Transcendentalists view nature as a boundless source of spiritual inspiration and a reflection of the divine, a perspective also shared by Islam. Ralph Waldo Emerson believed that nature holds the key to unlocking our inner wisdom and connecting with the universal spirit. He emphasized the importance of nature in his essay *Nature*, asserting that it provides solace, stimulates creativity, and offers profound insights into the mysteries of existence. By immersing themselves in nature, people can gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world. Nearly twenty years later, Henry David Thoreau further explored this connection in his masterpiece *Walden*, where he documented his experiences living in harmony with nature (Buell 1995:155).

For both aforementioned Transcendentalists, nature was not merely a physical entity but a spiritual force that could guide individuals towards self-discovery and enlightenment. They believed that by immersing oneself in the beauty of nature,

¹² Translation by Jones. The Arabic text is as follows:

{ لَكِنَّ الرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ مِنْهُمْ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ ۗ وَالْمُقِيمِينَ الصَّلَاةَ ۗ وَالْمُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ أُولَئِكَ سَنُؤْتِيهِمْ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا }

¹³ See, e.g. Maududi 1967–1988:402.

one could transcend the limitations of the material world and connect with a higher power (Buell 1995:156). In his essay, Emerson describes how nature can be a source of knowing God's power, and inspiration:

Nature always wears the colors of the spirit. To a man laboring under calamity, the heat of his own fire hath sadness in it. Then, there is a kind contempt of the landscape felt by him who has just lost by death a dear friend. The sky is less grand as it shuts down over less worth in the population. (Emerson, *Nature* 14).

This spiritual connection fostered a sense of unity with the universe, enabling individuals to access their inner wisdom and intuition. This explanation can be best introduced in Emerson's following lines:

If a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds, will separate between him and vulgar things. One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime. ... The stars awaken a certain reverence, because, though always present, they are always inaccessible; but all natural objects make a kindred impression, when the mind is open to their influence" (Emerson, *Nature* 9–10).

The reverence of nature inherent in Transcendentalist philosophy laid the groundwork for the modern environmental movement. Transcendentalists' belief in the interconnectedness of all living beings and the importance of preserving the natural world resonates with contemporary environmentalist ideals (Buell, Cramer, & Marshall, 2016:145).

In a similar way, many Qur'ānic verses emphasize the beauty and balance of the natural world as evidence of God's power and benevolence. This perspective motivates followers to appreciate and protect the environment while recognizing its sacredness in Islamic beliefs. Such example is Q. 39:5, explained by Ibn 'Abbās (*Tanwīr*) as follows:

*(He has created the heavens and the earth with truth) not in vain (wrapping night around day) He reduces the night such that the day is longer than the night, (and day around night) and prolongs the night such that the night is longer than the day, (and He has subjected the sun and the moon to service) and He makes the sun and moon subservient to the Children of Adam, (each one) i.e. the sun and the moon, the day and night (running for a stated term) for an appointed time. (Is not He the Mighty) He Who does this is the Mighty in retribution against those who disbelieve in Him, (the Forgiving) of those who believe in Him?*¹⁴

¹⁴ Translated by Jones. The Arabic text of the verse is as follows:
 { خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِالْحَقِّ يُكَوِّرُ اللَّيْلَ عَلَى النَّهَارِ وَيُكَوِّرُ النَّهَارَ عَلَى اللَّيْلِ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ كُلٌّ يَجْرِي لِأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى أَلَا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْغَفَّارُ }

The origin of the universe is described in the Qur'ānic verse 6:101:¹⁵

(The originator) the Creator (of the heavens and the earth). He created them when they were nothing before such creation. (How can He have a child when He has no consort) no wife, (when He created everything and is Aware of everything) of all created beings?" (Q. 6:101).

The Qur'ān also speaks of creating everything in balance (Q. 87:2) and warns that the transgression of this balance shall have disastrous consequences (Q. 101). An example of this is provided by two readings of Q. 36:38. The generally accepted meaning of this verse – “And the sun: it moves to a resting-place fixed for it – that is the decree of the Mighty and Knowing” – is based on the reading “*li-mustaqarrin lahā*”. However, some readers, primarily ‘Abdallāh ibn Mas‘ūd and Ibn ‘Abbās, read “*lā mustaqarra lahā*,” which would implicate that the sun runs day and night without any resting place, generally explained as a retribution against those who disbelieve in God.¹⁶

2.3 Self-Reliance

At the heart of Transcendentalism lies the principle of self-reliance. (Packer 2007: 83). To comprehend the importance of self-reliance in Transcendentalism, it is crucial to grasp the broader context of this philosophical movement as it sought to establish a deeper connection with the divine through self-exploration and self-reliance. Thus, Transcendentalists emphasize the importance of trusting one’s own instincts and intuition, rather than conforming to societal expectations. Accordingly, they encourage individuals to have the courage to follow their own paths, make their own decisions, and take responsibility for their own lives.

In Transcendentalist thought, the benefits of self-reliance foster personal growth by encouraging individuals to explore their own thoughts, ideas, and values. It allows for the development of a unique identity and the pursuit of individual passions and aspirations. Therefore, by embracing self-reliance, individuals liberate themselves from the pressures of societal norms and expectations (Bhagwanani 2013:9–10).

As such, Transcendentalists are free to think independently, make their own choices, and live according to their own principles. By trusting their own intuition and experiences, they can uncover profound insights and develop a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them. Emerson claims: “To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true

¹⁵ Translation by Jones with additional explanation taken from Ibn ‘Abbās, *Tanwīr*. The Arabic text is as follows:

{ بَدِيعَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَنَّى يَكُونُ لَهُ وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ تَكُنْ لَهُ صُجْبَةً وَخَلَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ }

¹⁶ Translation by Jones with additional explanation taken from Ibn ‘Abbās, *Tanwīr*. The Arabic text is as follows: { وَالشَّمْسُ تَجْرِي لِمُسْتَقَرٍّ لَهَا ذَلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ }

for all men; that is genius” (Emerson, *Self-Reliance* 37). He also stressed the importance of self-reliance in making decisions and creating uniqueness, claiming:

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till ... God has armed youth and puberty and manhood no less with its own piquancy and charm, and made it enviable and gracious in its claims not to be put by, if it will stand by itself’ (Emerson, *Self-Reliance* 38, 40).

In a parallel way, Islam intersects with Transcendentalism over the value of self-sufficiency, encouraging individuals to meet their needs through personal endeavours and to refrain from begging or idleness. Economically speaking, self-reliance, *i.e.*, economic independence, is expressed by Arab economists in Arabic, the language of Islamic normative teaching, by the term *al-iktifā’ al-dātī al-iqtisādī*, an equivalent of autarchy in English (Rozikan, Rahmanto, and Satyarini 2021: 58). Therefore, Islam encourages avoiding lamenting one’s economic shortages and poverty, emphasizing the importance of cultivating self-reliance by fully harnessing one’s skills

Another aspect of self-sufficiency in Islamic principles is cultivating contentment (*qanā’a*). These principles serve as the foundation for the approach to contentment. *Qanā’a* leads to a “good wholesome life (*ḥayāt ṭayyiba*)” mentioned in Q. 16:97, in other words ‘self-contentment’. The relationship between contentment and self-reliance is built on the concept that God is the only one who owns the power to manipulate the whole. Therefore, the first requirement of self-sufficiency is to have reliance upon God (*tawakkul*) (Ali 2014: 433).

From among the many examples of self-reliance given in the Qur’ān, suffice us to mention the account of the Prophet Yūsuf, which teaches us that he did not fall prey to anxiety during the seven years of drought, but employed his understanding, insight, and self-sufficiency to strategize a workable solution. No matter the place, in jail or out, the Prophet Yūsuf always kept in his mind trustworthiness and integrity as he never fell into treachery and deceit upon seeing wealth. “He said, ‘My Lord, I prefer prison rather than that to which these women call me; but if You do not turn their tricks from me, I shall incline to them in youthful folly and I shall become one of the heedless.’ (Q 12:33).¹⁷

In fact, that was the most important and critical period of the Prophet Joseph’s training, and this hard ordeal helped to bring forth all his latent virtues of which he himself was unaware up to that time. Then he himself realized that God had

¹⁷ Translated by Jones. The Arabic text is as follows:

{ قَالَ رَبِّ السِّجْنُ أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا يَدْعُونَنِي إِلَيْهِ وَإِلَّا نَصْرَفْتَعَنِّي كَيْدَهُنَّ أَصْحَابُ الْيَمِينِ وَأَكُن مِّنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ }

endowed him with the high and extraordinary qualities of honesty, fidelity, piety, charity, righteousness, self-control, balance of mind, and he made full use of these when he gained power in Egypt.¹⁸

3 Transcendentalists' veracity on Islam: Insights from Carlyle's *On Heroes*

In the final section, the article delves into a chapter entitled "The Hero as Prophet. Mahomet: Islam" from Carlyle's work *On Heroes*, written by Thomas Carlyle, one of the most famous Transcendentalists. The aim is to explore Carlyle perspectives on Islam through his portrayal of the Prophet Muḥammad.

It is imperative to address the work by emphasizing Carlyle's views on spirituality, universalism, the potential for mutual understanding between different faiths, and, most importantly, examining the accuracy of his portrayal of the *Sīra* through his simplest and well-chosen words.

In Carlyle's framework of heroes, individuals who shape history through extraordinary actions, the Prophet Muḥammad stands as no exception. He claims: "The Hero is not now regarded as a God among his fellowmen; but as one God-inspired, as a Prophet. ... The Great Man is not recognized henceforth as a god any more" (Carlyle, *Mahomet* 51).

Carlyle emphasized the importance of personal responsibility and the need for individuals to rise above their circumstances to achieve greatness. Just as heroes in other cultures leave a lasting impact, the Prophet Muḥammad has played a significant role in shaping the religion's development and spreading its message. Carlyle ensures: "The word this man spoke has been the life-guidance now of a hundred-and-eighty millions of men these twelve-hundred years. These hundred-and-eighty millions were made by God as well as we" (Carlyle, *Mahomet* 52).

Carlyle's concept of heroes joins characters who share courage and leadership in shaping society and leaving a lasting impact on future generations. For him, the Prophet Muḥammad and the heroic characters mentioned by him are rooted in the same source, God. This invites us to reflect on the qualities that define a true hero and how their actions can influence the world around them. "For at bottom the Great Man, as he comes from the hand of Nature, is ever the same kind of thing: Odin, Luther, Johnson, Burns; I hope to make it appear that these are all originally of one stuff; that only by the world's reception of them, and the shapes they assume, are they so immeasurably diverse" (Carlyle, *Mahomet* 51).

In Carlyle's work *Mahomet*, the concept of veracity plays a crucial role when examining the portrayal of the Prophet Muḥammad. Veracity refers to the truthfulness or accuracy of a statement, and in this context, it pertains to the representation of the Prophet's *Sīra*.

¹⁸ See Q. 12:54–56.

It was among this Arab people, so circumstanced, in the year 570 of our Era, that the man Mahomet was born. He was of the family of Hashem, of the Koreish tribe as we said; though poor, connected with the chief persons of his country. Almost at his birth he lost his Father; at the age of six years his Mother too, a woman noted for her beauty, her worth and sense: he fell to the charge of his Grandfather, an old man, a hundred years old. A good old man: Mahomet's Father, Abdallah, had been his youngest favourite son (Carlyle, *Mahomet* 57–58).

Carlyle's veracity is manifested when he described the faithfulness of the Prophet Muḥammad in his early age:

But, from an early age, he had been remarked as a thoughtful man. His companions named him 'Al Amin, The Faithful.' A man of truth and fidelity; true in what he did, in what he spake and thought. They noted that *he* always meant something. A man rather taciturn in speech; silent when there was nothing to be said; but pertinent, wise, sincere, when he did speak; always throwing light on the matter (Carlyle, *Mahomet* 59).

Readers of Carlyle's *Mahomet* can feel veracity exhibited in the description of the story of revelation. He describes:

Mahomet had been wont to retire yearly, during the month Ramadhan, into solitude and silence ... Communing with his own heart, in the silence of the mountains ... Such light had come, as it could, to illuminate the darkness of this wild Arab soul. A confused dazzling splendour as of life and Heaven, in the great darkness which threatened to be death: he called it revelation and the angel Gabriel; — who of us yet can know what to call it? It is the 'inspiration of the Almighty' that giveth us understanding. To *know*; to get into the truth of anything, is ever a mystic act, — of which the best Logics can but babble on the surface. 'Is not Belief the true god-announcing Miracle?' (*Mahomet*, 61, 62).

Carlyle continues telling the story of his hero, Muḥammad. Through his writing, Carlyle challenges the readers to consider the genuine nature of the Prophet Muḥammad's heroic attributes and the accuracy of the accounts surrounding his life and deeds. In the following lines, Carlyle describes the *hiḡra* where the dates and the sequence of events are carefully detailed:

In the thirteenth year of his mission, finding his enemies all banded against him, forty sworn men, one out of every tribe waiting to take his life, and no continuance possible at Mecca for him any longer, Mahomet fled to the place then called Yathreb, where he had gained some adherents; the place they now call Medina, or '*Medinat al Nabi*, the City of the Prophet,' from that circumstance. It lay some 200 miles off, through rocks and deserts; not without great difficulty, in such mood as we may fancy, he escaped thither,

and found welcome. The whole East dates its era from this Flight, *Hegira* as they name it: the Year 1 of this Hegira is 622 of our Era, the fifty-third of Mahomet's life (Carlyle, *Mahomet*, 64).

Carlyle delves into the notion of authenticity when depicting heroism, particularly concerning the Prophet Muḥammad:

The body of the Book is made-up of mere tradition ... He returns forever to the old stories of the Prophets as they went current in the Arab memory: how Prophet after Prophet, the Prophet Abraham, the Prophet Hud, the Prophet Moses, Christian and other real and fabulous Prophets, had come to this Tribe and to that, warning men of their sin; and been received by them even as he Mahomet was, — which is a great solace to him (Carlyle, *Mahomet*, 69).

Conclusion

Despite their apparent differences, Transcendentalism and Islam share common ground in their humanitarian values, as both ideologies advocate for compassion, social justice, and the pursuit of a higher moral purpose. Transcendentalism, a philosophical movement rooted in theological principles and expressed through literary works, emerged in the 19th century. It emphasized the importance of individualism, self-reliance, and the inherent goodness of both nature and humanity. Islam, one of the world's major religions, promotes compassion, justice, and the welfare of all individuals. While these two ideologies may seem distinct, a closer examination reveals intriguing parallels in their shared humanitarian views.

Both Transcendentalism and Islam encourage individuals to seek a higher moral purpose in their lives. Transcendentalists believed in the importance of self-reflection, introspection, and the pursuit of personal growth. They encouraged individuals to connect with nature and find spiritual fulfilment. Islam also emphasizes the need for self-reflection and the pursuit of righteousness. Muslims are encouraged to engage in worship, charity, and self-discipline to attain spiritual enlightenment and a closer connection with God. Ultimately, the interconnectedness of Islam and Transcendentalism is well recognized in Thomas Carlyle's work *Mahomet*, which not only showcases veracity but also presents a positive and appreciative view of Islam, exemplified by the Prophet Muḥammad.

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