URES 197 – Project description

Name of faculty mentor Mehdi Aminrazavi

Department and Discipline Philosophy/Religion

Brief Description of the Project: ***Sufism and American Literary Masters***

The original idea for this volume arose from a discussion with colleagues on the lack of a single volume highlighting the reception of Islamic mysticism (Sufism) by the academia and how to account for the enormous interest in Islamic mysticism by some of the notable American literary figures of the 19th and early 20th centuries. While there are many books dealing with the current interest in Sufi literature, and in particular with such figures as Rumi, there is no notable work on the historical background of how Sufism was embraced by eminent masters of classical American literature. Such a study is imperative not only from a historical perspective, but also to show the distinction between the popular Sufism and the more serious treatment of it by some American scholars.

The influence of Asian and other Eastern spiritual traditions on the New England Transcendentalists and on other early American literary figures has to some extent been previously investigated. However, a more focused study on the influence of some of the traditional masters of Sufism (figures such as Hafiz, Sa`di, and Omar Khayyam, among others) upon such figures as Walt Whitman, Thomas Lake Harris, Lawrence Oliphant, Paschal Beverly Randolph, and the towering figure of Ralph Waldo Emerson, has not been sufficiently studied. The American literary figures of the 19th and early 20th century not only studied the masters of Islamic mysticism, but were also personally and intellectually influenced by them. This volume proposes, for the first time, to demonstrate the spectrum of this influence through a study of their works.

Requirements & Qualifications:

For three URES credits, the student is expected to work nine hours a week. We will have one meeting a week. At the beginning of the semester, we may spend more time working together, but as we progress, you will be working more and more independently on the project. Among the tasks expected are proofreading, research, making of an index, etc.

I am looking for students with knowledge and interest in the 19th century American literature, attention to detail and excellent writing skills.