Iranians’ rich and storied culture comprises an expansive inventory of art, religion, and history that dates back millennia. While there is not one event or period that symbolises Iran or the Iranian people as a whole, there is an artist who garners respect from all: the distinguished Iranian poet of the 14th century, Hafiz. In some circles, Hafiz’s writings are quoted as much as the Qur’an. It is within this vein that Leonard Lewisohn, Lecturer in Persian and Iranian Heritage Foundation Fellow in Classic Persian and Sufi Literature at the University of Exeter, U.K., edits *Hafiz and the Religion of Love*, a work that seeks to provide insight into one of the greatest poets of Iran.

Divided into four parts and twelve chapters, the book under review incorporates works of Hafiz scholars from across the globe. One theme seen throughout is the influence of Sufism on Hafiz. The Sufi understanding of love that Hafiz is noted most for is the erotic. A writer states: “Hafiz is Persia’s greatest erotic lyricist who remains the supreme—and in some senses the last—prophet of the Religion of Love in Persian literature” (p. 83). His Epicurean-like erotic theology is noticed not only in the obvious (sex, alcohol), but also in the metaphysical where he believes that the divine *agape* and the human *eros* are not two but one (p. 48), which maybe why he simultaneously respects and criticizes religions.

Hafiz’s understanding of Sufism allows him to connect Christianity into the common thread of love. One of the more distinctive poems Hafiz writes is one where a Muslim man falls in love with a Christian girl and converts to Christianity, something considered apostasy in his day, to express undying love for his dearest (pp. 53, 90-96). Hafiz’s citation of the Christian scriptures helps clarify his thoughts regarding “pharisaical” and hypocritical religions (pp. 160, 170). Writers cite Christian

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1 Part 1: Hafiz and the School of Socio-historical, Literary and Mystical Milieu and Medieval Persia; Part 2: Hafiz and the School of Love in Classical Persian Poetry; Part 3: Hafiz and the Persian Sufi Tradition; and Part 4: Hafiz’s Romantic Imagery and the Language of Love.

2 The man does return to Islam with the girl converting to his religion, but the point is to show true love and not loyalty to one’s faith. As one of the writer’s states: “Ultimately, the shaykh did “repent” of his love passion, but his repentance was not so much a formal “turning back” as a passage out of esoteric into exoteric Islam ... He experienced a fresh conversion to religion based on the principles of love” (p. 96).
authors, such as John Bunyan and John Milton to further this claim. In each case, they quote a character or a part of a poem that despises these non-loving qualities to support Hafiz’s distaste for these traits (pp. 39, 160-61, 174).

Interestingly and not always related, Hafiz’s Sufism also allows interface with Western poets on the themes of religion and love. Some, like Milton, were Christians who extolled biblical virtues, but others, like Lord Byron and Ralph Waldo Emerson, were freer in their thought and were influenced by Hafiz. Their openness is captured in the writers’ notation of some of the more liberated and uninhibited ideas of love and religion. Byron is known to have connected with Sufis and used “Hafizian” metaphors of love (pp. 284-285). Emerson admired Hafiz and stated that Hafiz’s works were prominent in his thought (pp. 28, 281). He admired that Hafiz was not scared of religion, wishing to be like him: “[Hafiz] fears nothing. He sees too far; he sees ... throughout; such is the man I wish to see and to be” (p. 288).

Not surprisingly, Islam and Iranian poets also are discussed in relation to Hafiz’s Sufism. Writers document Hafiz’s admiration for Iranian Sufi poets, such as Rumi (for example, pp. 3-7, 10-16, 33-36, 58-61, 143-147). Hafiz recognises their contribution to his thought, especially that of Khwaju Kirmani, a close friend and Sufi poet in Shiraz, whose style and thought he followed attentively (p. 6). What is peculiar is that some argue that Hafiz’s distain for the “pharisaical” and hypocritical is unleashed most on Muslims who promote a cold, strict, clerical adherence to Islam. According to one author, Hafiz contested “self-aggrandising Shari’a-orientated Islam” (p. 85) and wanted little to do with those who promoted fundamentalism that banned basic enjoyments.3 Apparently, the Islam of the time possessed “antinomian” qualities that allowed for a renunciation of this strict interpretation (p. 90). Lewisohn makes the observation that Hafiz developed something unique in his condemnation of the establishment while maintaining his Muslim faith, “a hypersophisticated psychological re-evaluation of religious ideas and values...of which are directly derived from Sufi ethical and metaphysical doctrines, as well as teachings taken from the Qur’an and hadith, not to mention several other sources” (p. 159).

_Hafiz and the Religion of Love_ is a work written primarily for Western English readers versed in poetry. The authors’ expertise on Hafiz shines as they provide the reader an intellectually invigorating jaunt through

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3 For example, a verse penned by Hafiz states: “Beware: don’t drink [wine] To the tune of the harp—for sharp is the Policemen’s ear” (p. 23).