

## Reza Taher-Kermani. *The Persian Presence in Victorian Poetry*

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## REFERENCES

Reza Taher-Kermani. *The Persian Presence in Victorian Poetry*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020, 240 p.

- 1 Building on the author's PhD thesis on "the British cultural and imaginative engagements with Persia in the nineteenth century" (vi), the volume charts "the diversity of perceptions associated with Persia in Victorian literary culture" (2). It focuses on poetry as the medium through which to survey the Victorian conception of Persia. It consists of an introduction, five chapters, an epilogue, a bibliography, and an index.
- 2 Following a chronological pattern, Chapter One moves forward from the Greek and biblical representations of Persia to the modern period. Through examining Jones's 'A Persian Song of Hafiz' and Morier's 'The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan', it shows the "contradictions that continued to animate the image of Persia in British writing" (14). Providing "the first systematic analysis of the presence of Persia in nineteenth-century English poetry", (8) Chapter Two introduces the "imaginary Persia of myth and fable, which dominates the mass of nineteenth-century poems", (9) including the ones studied in the next chapters.
- 3 The rest of the book "shows in greater depth and detail how conceptions of Persia entered into major works of British literature" (9). It consists of three case-studies, i.e. Matthew Arnold's 'Sohrab and Rustum' (1853), Edward FitzGerald's Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám (1859), and Robert Browning's Ferishtah's Fancies (1884). Chapter Three argues that fidelity to Firdausi's Shahnameh was not Arnold's concern in 'Sohrab and Rustum'. Through a comparative reading of the Persian poem and the English appropriation, this chapter unravels the complexity of literary appropriation. Chapter

Four shows that FitzGerald, “without being literal in his rendition of the quatrains attributed to Khayyám, succeeded in transmitting a Persian spirit in his Rubáiyát” (10). Through a close reading of Browning’s *Ferishtah’s Fancies*, Chapter Five “uncovers its deeper, less visible Persian presence” (11) and shows that every Persian element in the poem is “partly imitative and partly innovative” (200). The Epilogue asserts that “the image of Persia in nineteenth-century English poetry was shaped not just by modern colonial ideology but also by ancient, primitive attitudes represented in the sacred texts of classical and biblical literature” (206). It reminds the reader that “the Persia of Victorian poetry, however diverse in concept and construction it might have been, is imaginary; it is fantastical with little connection with historical reality” (7).

- 4 Persia in nineteenth-century English poetry transcends the more obvious category of translation. Through the concept of ‘presence’, the volume considers “less obvious, more oblique ways in which Persia manifests itself in Victorian poetry” (6). It moves from context to text and from general to specific in order to “explore the complex network of cultural exchange that is behind the construction of the Victorian notion of Persia” (2). This book will appeal to those in the fields of Persian literature, English literature, comparative literature, and translation studies.

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## AUTHORS

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