Roger Sedarat. *Emerson in Iran: The American Appropriation of Persian Poetry*

Behnam Fomeshi

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REFERENCES

Roger Sedarat. *Emerson in Iran: The American Appropriation of Persian Poetry*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2019, 230 p.

- 1 It might seem paradoxical that Emerson, the writer of the essay “Self-Reliance”, adopted the name of another poet, the Persian-speaking Sa’di. As an attempt at resolving this paradox, this volume elaborates on the relation between Emerson’s claim of originality in the formation of American literature and his appropriation of Persian poetry. It consists of an introduction, six chapters, notes, a bibliography, and an index.
- 2 Chapter One elaborates on the similarity between Emerson’s Platonic view and sufism. It ends with an analysis of his creative strategies in the poem “The Phoenix”, which depicts his “attempt to reconcile difference through the practice of transnational, translingual, and transliterary union” (50). Focusing on the trope of the mirror in sufi mysticism and the transparent eyeball, and using the theories of Bloom, Bhabha, and Barnstone, the next chapter discusses Emerson’s appropriative attempts. Chapter Three examines his simultaneous imitation of Persian poetry and effort to repress its “influence”. It shows how Emerson attempts to prevent the “influence” of Sa’di by turning the Persian poet into a mere symbol to recreate his own voice.
- 3 Reading Emerson’s essays, including “Language”, “The Poet”, and “Persian Poetry”, Chapter Four is an attempt to delineate the theory of translation which emerged out of his texts and its application in his practice of appropriating Persian poetry. It shows how Emerson’s attempt to move away from Persian poetry brings him even closer to the foreign source text. The next chapter shows the influence of Emerson’s theory and

practice of translation on later generations of American translators of classical Persian poetry. It introduces Emerson as the forerunner of an American approach to translating foreign poetry into English. It also examines how Ladinsky, Barks, and Rohrer follow Emerson's model of free appropriation of Persian poetry and how such a practice creates a distorted image of the source text. To show that not all the translators and literary practitioners following Emerson's model are producing such distorted images, the final chapter analyzes Persian *ghazals* by Agha Shahid Ali and critical writings of poet-scholar-translator Davis.

- 4 Chapter Five, titled "Americanizing Rumi and Hafez", as well as the final chapter offer many interesting points concerning the translation and reception of Persian poetry in the contemporary US. Persian-speaking literary scholars based in Iran would find such arguments useful in appreciating intercultural exchanges between Persian and foreign literatures. I hope a version of this volume containing more lines from primary sources of Persian poetry (not limited to Sa'di and Hafez) gets translated into Persian.
- 5 Through the case of Emerson's appropriation of Persian poetry this volume provides a thought-provoking example of how the literary founding father of a nation is cosmopolitan and receptive of foreign cultures in what might seem a purely "nationalistic" agenda. It will appeal to those in the field of Persian literature, comparative literature, translation studies, World Literature, American literature and, more particularly, those interested in the relation between Persian poetry and American poetry.

AUTHORS

BEHNAM FOMESHI

Monash University, Australia