

Sa'di in Love: The Lyrical Verses of Persia's Master Poet, Homa Katouzian (tr.), London: I. B. Tauris, International Library of Iranian Studies (65), 2016, £59.00 ISBN 978-1-7845-3224-6 (hbk), 200 pp.

"Translation of poetry from one language into another is notoriously difficult," writes Homa Katouzian, who has nevertheless masterfully undertaken the arduous task of translating a selection of the thirteenth-century Persian poet Sa'di's love lyrics, long overshadowed by his better-known prose *Golestān* and his long poem, *Bustān*, on morals and manners. Having selected seventy-eight poems from the vast array of Sa'di's *ghazals*, Katouzian presents them alongside the Persian originals, opening up an inviting space in which readers can appreciate the Persian and/or the English. This bilingual edition also serves as an excellent foundation for future work for scholars and students of translation studies.

In general, translations tend towards either fidelity to the original or adherence to the idiom of the target language. Neither model has helped to settle the debates among translators and scholars about the ideal approach to a translation. Katouzian's own practice appears to come closer to what Walter Benjamin describes in his essay, "The Task of the Translator": "It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work."¹ Katouzian's task is thus to contend with "the virtual loss of meter and rhyme, and many of the literary devices—imagery, metaphor, punning" to tap into the "pure language" that can help convey "the poet's original verse in a complementary and accessible version" (p. 27). As a counter example, Katouzian points to Lucas White King's English translations of some six hundred Sa'di *ghazals* in the 1920s which draw on the language of an older English poetic tradition and/or rely on literal translations. In contrast, Katouzian's aim is to make Sa'di resonate as poetry in English.

His translations are clustered into four groupings: "Expressions of Love," "Descriptions of the Beloved," "Union," and "Ethical/Mystical." And although in the original the poems do not have titles, the translations are given apt headings, which capture the spirit of each poem. The collection is enhanced with images from the work of the artist Mahbobe Ghods in which are echoed the tropes and figures of the Persian miniature paintings. The images reflect an artistic tradition in which poetry co-exists and is enhanced by the visual, the oral, and the musical. Nowhere is this more evident than in the way Sa'di's love poems have been integrated into traditional Persian music.

The translated poems are accompanied with a comprehensive introduction in which Katouzian situates Sa'di's poems in their historical, literary, and cultural setting as well as existing scholarship on Sa'di's oeuvre. Katouzian is by no means a newcomer to the study of Sa'di. In addition to a series of articles he published in Persian in the journal *Iranshenasi*, which were subsequently published under the

title *Sa'di Shā'er-e 'Eshq va Zendegi*, Katouzian has published an anthology of his works in Persian, *Golchin-e Sa'di*, as well as a monograph entitled *Sa'di: The Poet of Life, Love and Compassion*.

Katouzian's command of his subject is apparent in the Introduction, which provides a deft and succinct historical overview of Persian poetry, Sa'di's unique contributions to the genre of the lyric, and a comparative appreciation of his works in relation to other renowned Persian classical poets such as Rumi and Hafiz. He also introduces central debates as to the object of love addressed in the classical poetic tradition. He writes about the rise of mysticism in the twelfth century that "opens the gate to speculation on whether lyrical songs are addressed to a worldly and corporeal or to an other-worldly and mystical beloved" (p. 2) and the challenges raised by the trends among "nineteenth-and early-twentieth-century Iranian scholars [who] tended to believe that the great Persian masters were all chaste, sexless and entirely ascetic, and that any worldly interest or passion was beneath their status" (p. 2). Opposing these conjectures, Katouzian declares: "No classical Persian poet was a greater and more passionate lover than Sa'di. One might even claim that he was the greatest lover; he certainly stands as the greatest composer of lyrics about human love in classical Persian poetry" (p. 4). This passion for Sa'di, which risks conflating the poet with the speaker of the poems, does not prevent Katouzian from engaging with the concept of love and the complex web of meanings, which place Persian poetry between the earthly and the ethereal.

The poetic form of the *ghazal* itself comes in for close scrutiny in the Introduction. Acknowledging prior classifications of Sa'di's *ghazals*, Katouzian works with the two categories of *majāzi* (virtual) and *haqiqi* (real) love. Under the first heading, he places the four categories of love: "those which express his love for the beloved; those which describe the beloved; those which express the joy of union; and those which reflect the sadness of separation" (p. 11). Katouzian is equally adept at tackling the ambiguities created in Persian by the absence of gendered pronouns and the homoerotic elements in classical Persian poetry. As he indicates, expressions of love for a youthful male beloved are not limited to Sa'di's poetry and are part and parcel of the entire Persian classical tradition. Katouzian makes an interesting distinction, however, between this tradition of homoeroticism and male homosexuality in the West. Be it in the love of a mystic for a youth or the relationship between a teacher and his discipline, Katouzian does not find "quite the same personal, social and cultural implications that male homosexuality has in the west" (p. 21). As for the poems included in this volume, none is expressive of love for a youth, which affects his decision to render the object of love as female.

This bilingual edition of Sa'di's *ghazals* is a welcome addition both for teachers and scholars and it provides the English-speaking world with translations that succeed in communicating the poetic in Sa'di's love poems.

Note

1. Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator." In *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn, edited by Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken, 1968, p. 80.

Nasrin Rahimieh
 University of California, Irvine
 © 2017, Nasrin Rahimieh
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2017.1392200>

Tahavvol-e Nām-gozāri-ye Kudakān-e Tehrani, 1375-1394 [The Transformation of Baby Names in Tehran, 1996-2015], ‘Abbās ‘Abdi, Tehran: Pazhuheshgāh-e Farhang, Honar va Ertebātāt, 2017, ISBN 978-600-452-076-8 (pbk), 148 pp.

There has been a considerable volume of discussion about Iranian society’s shifting relationship with Islam and the West, and the role of the Islamic Republic therein. Perhaps one of the most individual, private and intimate interactions that can contain clues about these changes is the decision of how to name a new-born child. Amir-Hossein, Ruhollah or Pārsā for him? Ma‘sumeh, Delārām or Roksānā for her?

Despite government restrictions on the use of non-acknowledged western names, Iranians can access a plethora of baby names to pick from, including the Imams, the Quran, revolutionary figures, pop stars, ancient Shahnameh and pre-Islamic heroes, as well as Christian, Hebrew or Armenian names. How, at the macro-level, have naming patterns developed over time? Are Islamic names as popular as they were in the heyday of the 1979 Revolution?

In his latest book ‘Abbās ‘Abdi hopes to provide much-needed perspective on these pressing questions. ‘Abdi’s main finding is a strong, secular decline in the share of Arabic and Islamic names in Tehran between 1996 and 2015, and, vice versa, a growth in the prevalence of western names for girls and non-Islamic Iranian names for both sexes.

Supported financially and logistically by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, the research builds on and broadens an earlier study on trends in child naming in Tehran, co-authored with Samira Kalhor and published in a collected work several years ago¹. This earlier essay investigates the period from 1966 to 1995—a period which is added and compared to ‘Abdi’s new dataset ranging from 1996 to 2015. In other words, the title of ‘Abdi’s new work is too modest: the book sheds light on social developments in Tehran spanning half a century, including seminal episodes such as the Shah’s modernization plan, the 1979 Revolution, the Iran-Iraq War and the post-9/11 period. For both studies he uses a large sample of the data processed by the National Organization for Civil Registration, where all new-born babies are registered.

Several Iranian sociologists have looked at naming trends before.² ‘Abdi explains that most have done so with a much smaller sample, among ethnic minorities and per-