

BOOK REVIEWS

Hafiz and His Contemporaries: Poetry, Performance and Patronage in Fourteenth-Century Iran. Dominic Parviz Brookshaw, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019). Pp. 386. \$120.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781848851443

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In reading this particularly historicist study of the major Persian poet Shams al-Din Muhammad Hafiz Shirazi, I was reminded of Boris Pasternak's description of the writer of genius as "akin to the ordinary person [...] the greatest and rarest representative of this type, its immortal expression." This is the first English monograph on Hafiz's verse that approaches him as one might any other poet, rather than with the sense of incomparability, perhaps even inexplicability, appropriate to the "tongue of the unseen realm" (*lisān al-ghayb*), as he came to be seen over the following centuries of canonization. The effect is achieved by moving back and forth constantly between his *bayts* and those of the other Persian poets with whom he shared patrons and listeners in Shiraz, who experienced the same cityscape and historical events in the chaotic 14th century CE. The book's central constellation consists of Hafiz, the Injuid princess Jahan Malik Khatun, and Nizam al-Din 'Ubaydullah Zakani, who is most (in)famous for his satires and profane verse, but whose more conventional ghazals are more relevant to Brookshaw's project. A host of other contemporary poets surround this triad, some of them relatively famous, such as Khvaju Kirmani and Salman Savaji, and others obscure. By losing the aura of incomparability, we gain a humane sense of Hafiz as a poet whose particular brilliance drew on and was spurred by a literary scene teeming with poets who were brilliant in many different ways.

This leveling effect is further enhanced by the book's organization, which addresses one chapter each to six thematically organized catalogs of conventional elements. The first three chapters outline the conventions that poets deploy to gesture towards the place and time in which they compose, from the city of Shiraz as a literary topos (Chapter 1) to the contexts in which verse was recited and otherwise received (Chapter 2) to the beloveds who make up its primary topic (Chapter 3). These chapters emphasize the responsiveness of this poetic tradition to the world in which poets composed, as I will discuss below. In the second half of the book, focused on allusion (*talmih*), the poets' worldliness recedes somewhat as intertextuality comes to the fore, particularly the allusions that the poets make to tales of kings (Chapter 4), lovers (Chapter 5), and prophets (Chapter 6). These chapters are less exhaustive, dealing with Solomon but not David, Abraham's breaking of the idols but not his near-sacrifice of Ishmael. Sometimes, as Brookshaw points out, the stories perform such similar functions that they blur together. This increased selectivity produces chapters that cohere better and have more fully articulated arguments. This is especially true of the chapter on lovers, which shows how allusion mediated the intergeneric cross-pollination of romance *masnavi* and ghazal. It also contains the most sustained and rewarding close readings in the book, focused on the ways that Jahan deploys the scenarios and personae of heteroerotic romance in her ghazals (pp. 228–31). In such an intertextual and thematic framework, it is the worldliness of Hafiz's verse that is most noticeable, although Brookshaw recuses himself from the extensive (not to say exhausting) debate between the poet's mystical and worldly interpretations (p. 146).

In style, the book is dense and encyclopedic, often proceeding with recurring terms, images, and conceits one after another. A few of these per page are illustrated by a *bayt*, though very rarely with any further explanation of the *bayts* themselves, even when they would be difficult for a neophyte to understand otherwise. The cumulative effect can feel oddly old-fashioned, harking back to the use of *bayts* in early modern dictionaries and rhetorical manuals. Furthermore, because the introduction and conclusion frame the project as a new way of reading Hafiz, neither does justice to the methodological contribution. For this reason, the book's broader argument must be sought in occasional, more programmatic remarks.

The organizational principle of the work would seem to emphasize the determining power of genre and canon. But Brookshaw finds in the innumerable repetitions of ghazal clichés not mere self-replicating convention, but the subtle differences that would have been legible signals for ordinary listeners in 14th-century Shiraz. Thus, the social and mimetic functions of classical verse come to the fore. Literary convention and intertextuality become the mediating factors for the relationship between the poem and the world that it represents, and in which it intervenes. This is not a new framework: it is familiar from the vast scholarly discussion on the space between ideal and reality in the depiction of rulers, and the related space of negotiation between court poets and their patrons. But Brookshaw extends the same approach to all of Persian poetry's conventional figures. In doing so, he usefully integrates two traditions of Hafiz scholarship, harmonizing the historicist search for the poet's real occasions and referents with formalist emphasis on his masterful reworkings of conventional topoi, images, and personae. In the process, the apparent homogeneity of literary convention gives way to historical or geographic variations of expression or reception. So, for example, the conflation of the prophet-king Solomon with the mythical Persian king Jamshid may mark political claims local to Fars, a region that contains many significant pre-Islamic ruins adopted by Islamic rulers for purposes of legitimation (p. 159), or it may reflect the poet's alignment with local folkways against scholarly pedantry (p. 185).

To deal with such negotiations between individual ghazals and the classical Persian ghazal architext requires a balanced sense of the system that connects representation, convention, and referent. Brookshaw draws on the previous major analyses of classical description (*vasf*) by Muhammad-Riza Shafi'i-Kadkani, Ali-Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, and others, but to a greater degree than most critics, he emphasizes the ongoing importance of mimesis for Persian poetics through the post-Mongol period: "Descriptions of the beloved provide imitative representations of the sensory world surrounding poet, audience, and patron [...] the poet uses description to represent this world—a project in part aimed at producing verisimilitude, albeit in a vision of an ideal rather than the strictly real" (p. 115). The second half of the book, though more concerned with intertextuality than with *vasf* per se, shows how poetry that alludes to stories of the past mediates between the political reality of the present and a political ideal situated in a mythic past. This reinscription is sometimes notional, but sometimes quite material, as when verses comparing contemporary kings to pre-Islamic ones were carved onto the ruins at Persepolis (p. 160). The book's allusions to literary theory and comparisons beyond the Islamicate literary space are infrequent and worn lightly, but there are clear affinities to new historicism, with its attention to the determining power of the culture in which literature is composed, and historical poetics, with its sense of the asynchronic possibilities stored in canonic texts for writers to revive and repurpose.

The book's other major contribution is as a formidable collation of the scholarly corpus on Persian poetic convention. Most of the recurring poetic elements catalogued in the book have been noted and interpreted elsewhere, and even the specific allusions to the volatile politics of post-Mongol Iran that Brookshaw notes in these poets' works are for the most part cited from secondary works, not newly discovered. However, when these conventions are assembled and organized in such a comprehensive framework, together with a glossary, map, chronological list of poets, and table listing which rulers patronized which poets, the result is a veritable codebook for Hafizian verse that would otherwise intimidate readers not yet steeped in the Persian canon. This reviewer assigned the chapters on performance and the beloved in a survey course of Persian classics in English translation, and students indicated that they found the chapters useful as a demystification and historical grounding for the verse that they were reading.

A fuller index and a concordance, or better yet a hypertext edition with indexed terms in Persian and English, would instantly make the book one of the best available tools for students learning how to read the classics in the original Persian. This would be particularly helpful because the book is not especially linear, but rather spirals back to the same ghazals and sometimes the same *bayts* in the context of the various images and characters that occur in them. The author's labor of love can thus only be appreciated fully by the reader who goes searching for a single ghazal's appearances scattered in parenthetical references and footnotes throughout the book. For the present, though, such a search will be well rewarded.