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REVIEW SECTION

THE ARENA OF LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM

1300-1350 A. H.

قلمرو نظریه و نقد ادبی معاصر ۱۳۵۰ - ۱۳۰۰ ش

By Mostafa Sediqi. Shiraz: Navid-e Shiraz, 2011. 392 pp.

The Arena is an attempt to pin down the history of the dawn of modern literary criticism in Persian. The period covered by the book, which is roughly equivalent to 1920-1970, is the time, as the author believes, when both the theory and the practice of literary criticism diverged from classical Persian traditions and underwent huge changes under foreign, mostly European, influences. Before 1920 no literary criticism existed in Iran except for the pieces known as *tazkarehs*—histories, usually composed by a single author, of poets and mystics which more often than not almost exclusively undertook to record the highlights of their lives—which Sediqi takes to be no more than flawed tries that “without considering the distinctive features of each poet or each era made usually valueless generalizations using clichéd phrases” (17). However, the sociohistorical turbulence at the beginning of the fourteenth century AH along with higher access to overseas thought laid a new path and made it possible for literary criticism in its modern sense to emerge. This latter the book tries to encapsulate.

Sediqi does not provide a diachronically-ordered anthology of the literary criticism produced in the period, but rather writes a synchronic history. As a result, he organizes the influential critical writings of the time according to their origin and analyzes their contribution according to their critical leanings. He detects three main gateways through which modern criticism flourished in Iran: studies of Persian literature by non-Iranians, similar studies by Iranians, and

theoretical books translated into Persian. In similar fashion three trends of literary critical theory and practice are detected: social, psychoanalytical, and linguistic approaches. *The Arena* is thus structured in a manner to efficiently present these: it consists of three main chapters, besides the preface and the introduction: The Context of the Formation of Theory and Criticism, The Approaches, and Criticism in Practice. Each chapter is divided into three sections, and each section into three parts: an introduction, followed by the scrutiny of usually one or two important works of each of the few authors the section covers—this in turn includes (1) introduction of the author, (2) general perspective, and (3) textual analysis—and wrapped up by an afterword.

The first chapter deals mainly with the important sources of modern criticism in Persian and is sub-divided into three sections: Non-Iranian Scholars, Iranian-Scholars, and Translated Works. Non-Iranian Scholars covers the contribution of Indian Shibli Nomani, British Orientalist Edward Granville Browne, and Czech Orientalist Jan Rypka. A study of the fourth volume of Nomani's *She'r al-ajam (Persian Poetry)* is presented along with how it criticizes the classical traditions of criticism and how it focuses more on the aesthetic as well as mimetic aspects of poetry. Browne's *A Literary History of Persia*, as the title is telling, treats literature as, one could say, a mirror held to social and historical events, emphasizing such themes as patriotism. It also captures the growing public audience and its effect on the new poetry. Rypka's *History of Iranian Literature* is highly significant since it is among the first tries at writing a literary history without disregarding the nuances specific to each era as a result of certain social conditions. Rypka also constantly keeps an eye to European literature for comparative purposes. In the end, Sediqi summarizes the main critical trends in the work of these non-Iranian scholars of this significant era in which modern criticism started to emerge in Persian.

The next section, Iranian Scholars, captures the contribution of Lotf'ali Suratgar and Abdolhossein Zarrinkub. These, Sediqi informs us, are mainly important because they are among the first to base their critical views on philosophical ideas. Suratgar's *Sokhansanji* (Rhetoric), employing something of comparative literature, tries to signify the importance of classical Persian literature by means of modern European criticism. However, he believes these ideas are not completely applicable in the case of Persian literature because they are not "smooth" enough. Zarrinkub's *Naqd-e adabi (Literary Criticism)*

can be said to be much more advanced; it introduces into Persian modern criticism and critical approaches, history of criticism in Iran, Greece, and Arabian countries for the first time. Sediqi's critique ends this section.

The last section of the first chapter, Translated Works, analyzes the influence of Tolstoy's *What is Art?*, Aristotle's *Poetics*, Muhammad Mandur's *Al-Naqd al-Minhaji Inda al-Arab* (trans. as *Dar naqd va adab, On Criticism and Literature*), and Sartre's *What is Literature?*. Tolstoy's idea of committed art, which was in line with the social conditions of Iran at that time, Zarrinkub's call for a return to Aristotle, Mandur's comparative work, and Sartre's existential position are all presented. In the end, Sediqi presents a chain of comparisons among all these theorists along with Plato.

The second chapter, The Approaches, following the overall structure of the book, is likewise divided into three sections; each section tries to analyze the contribution of one or more authors through whose translated works one approach of literary criticism was introduced into Persian. The first section is devoted to the social approach which was appeared under the influence of Ernst Fischer's *The Necessity of Art*. A Marxist himself, Fischer provides Iranian literary and critical society of the time with exactly what it needed: a Socialistic approach to art. The work of Amirhossein Ariyanpur with its emphasis on the interaction between society and art is also of importance.

The next section deals with the psychoanalytic approach. First, of course, comes Freud. Bergson, Jung, Adler, and I. A. Richards are also discussed. Sediqi does acknowledge the theoretical differences of these theorists in his discussion. He also provides criss-cross discussions of "Freudism," Marxism, Feminism, and Sartre.

The last section of the second chapter in completely similar fashion deals with the linguistic approach. A short survey is given of the books in Persian which for the first time presented a methodological framework of language-oriented literary criticism; these started from classical philology through Saussurean linguistics to Jakobson and Martinet. The emphasis on form, the self-containment of a work of art, and other aspects of this approach is discussed in detail.

The last chapter, Criticism in Practice, completes the previous chapter in that it brings together a pile of critical instances which follow the theoretical frameworks summarized in the previous chapter. The first section presents

social criticism of mostly *she'r-e no* (new poetry) which Nima Yushij founded in Persian. The gist of criticisms of this kind on the poetries of Nima Yushij, Akhavan, Shamlu, Sepehri, Kasrai, and others are given as examples. The second section, focused on the linguistic approach in practice, deals mostly with criticism on Ahmadreza Ahmadi, Yadollah Royai, and Manuchehr Atashi whose poetry best correspond to form-oriented theories. The last section both of this chapter and the book presents psychoanalytical criticism on, mainly, Nima Yushij, Forugh Farrokhzad, and Sepehri.

What Sediqi provides readers with is a history which was lacking before. As is mentioned several times in the book, he did not first evaluate the criticisms to see whether he should include them in the book; he has included all that which made a difference in modern criticism in Persian, even those which could be deemed as theoretically flawed. As such, *The Arena* is a reliable source to *historicize* and *contextualize* later studies. However, it does not need to be mentioned that for this last purpose more similar studies and sources are needed to provide a plurality of perspectives into this critical moment in Persian literary theory and criticism.

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A DICTIONARY OF ANIMALS IN PERSIAN LITERATURE

فرهنگ نامه جانوران در ادب پارسی

By Manizheh Abdolahi Shiraz: Pazhuhandeh, 2002. 2 Vols. 1205 pp.

This two volume book with twenty six pages of introduction on dictionaries, encyclopaedias and animal glossaries in Persian is an invaluable help to scholars of Persian language and literature. The book includes 74 animals which have appeared in Persian language and literature. The animals presented here are taken directly from lines of poetry or prose. The book covers important texts ranging from Avesta to books at the end of seventh century A. H. Imaginary or mythological animals are missing in this book. The entries start with āhū [deer] and end with yūz [panther].

Each entry consists of five sections; the first section is devoted to pre-Islamic texts in which the roots of the entry in ancient Persian texts are discussed. The second section is on theological and Islamic texts. The third section is devoted to tales and stories; the fourth section to aesthetics and figures of speech in which each animal appears; the fifth section is on aspects not mentioned in the previous four sections. Each section is subdivided into different parts, for example section one consists of origins and Avestan and Pahlavi texts. Section two comprises the Qur'an and commentaries, Hadith and tradition, and legal traditions which are presented in each entry.

The richness of material in this book is outstanding and supported by lines of poetry and prose from varied texts. Some entries cover many pages as they are mentioned in different texts: āhū consists of 67 pages and is obviously the favourite with poets. There are many references in religious texts as well as medical books to āhū. Šotor [camel] with 62 pages comes next.

One interesting aspect the book points to is the ups and downs of the significance of some animals throughout the literary history of Iran. Animals such as *khūk* [pig], *sag* [dog] and *karkas* [vulture] lose their importance after the Arab invasion for the obvious religious reasons while *šir* [lion], *babr* [tiger] and *palang* [panther] gain prominence in the texts.

Under the entry *asb* [horse] it is mentioned that this word has not changed that much since ancient times. In Avesta this word is mentioned as *aspa* and in Sanskrit it is *asva*. Some scholars consider the root *as* ak or *as* meaning swift-footed pace.

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