World Literature and Hedayat's Poetics of Modernity. Omid Azadibougar (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). Pp. 203. $89.99 hardcover, paper; $69.99 e-book. ISBN: 978-981-15-1690-0.

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The balance between the textual and the biographical in contemporary literary studies is always complex and changes with each scholarly generation. Previous Hedayat scholarship strongly privileged biographical approaches, and Omid Azadibougar engages this reality in *World Literature and Hedayat's Poetics of Modernity* by noting that the majority of the existing literature on Hedayat conforms to a dominant "tragi-romantic image" in which "his literary profile has been read in light of his fatal suicide and his works are interpreted within the narrow confines of the conceived themes of one novel" (69). That novel, of course, is none other than *The Blind Owl*, which has overshadowed discussions of Hedayat's oeuvre both inside Iran and internationally. Azadibougar's insightful intervention reframes the conversation surrounding Hedayat by shifting focus to the author's diverse array of literary products and engaging with the conceptual framework of world literature as a way to examine modernity in Persian literature and in Hedayat's poetics.

The book begins with a preface that details Azadibougar's motivations and goals for this book. Azadibougar notes that his intended audience is composed of two groups: first, those who are active in the field of modern Persian literature and are aware of Hedayat and his work, and second, those who are unfamiliar with Persian literature or Hedayat. This distinction is important because it explains the organization of the book, with roughly the first half dedicated to Hedayat's biography and the second half concerning the aesthetics of his works. Pro forma material (acknowledgments, notes on transliteration, table of contents, and a list of figures) follows the preface, and the book is then divided into seven chapters and a conclusion.

Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter that frames the larger concepts that the following chapters will cover in more detail, and includes an annotated table of contents by chapter. Azadibougar explains that the concepts he will examine include the relationship between world literature and Persian literature; modernity in Persian literature; and Hedayat's complex work and reception. Azadibougar begins by complicating the concepts of both "world literature" and "Persian literature," and the latter's place in the former. Azadibougar must first confront what seems an obvious problem—namely, that it is perverse to read Persian literature through the conceptual lens of world literature when Persian is understood as a peripheral language in that paradigm. He points out that, at the same time, Persian is actually the dominant literary language of Iran, and therefore a locally hegemonic language; it also is a literary or prestige language in what might be called the Persianate world. Therefore, Persian literature is *both* hegemonic and peripheral. Azadibougar attempts to untangle this problem through translation, arguing that the history of modern Persian literature is bound up with histories of world translation, comprising a relationship that demands greater scrutiny. With world literature "already part and parcel of modern Persian literary systems" (8) by virtue of this close relationship with translation, for Azadibougar, "the study of world literature functions as a space for re-conceiving local relations as well as a productive and constructive critique of world literature itself" (6).

The first chapter also offers an overview of Hedayat's reception and legacy, which sets the stage for a deeper exploration of his life in chapter 2. This second chapter includes a detailed

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biography of Hedayat, as well as most of the book's visual material. Some of these figures, such as the drawings done by Hedayat on postcards he sent to his brother, help present a more nuanced picture of Hedayat, one that is not solely about his suicide. After this extensive biography, there is a chronological list of all of Hedayat's work. Chronology is a dominant organizational method used by Azadibougar in presenting Hedayat's texts throughout this book, utilized because he views Hedayat's writing as one that resists traditional categorization by genre or themes.

The third chapter moves away from the content of Hedayat's writing to its reception. This reception was influenced by the "temporal lag" of Persian literature's modernization; Iran modernized and industrialized later than most European countries. According to Azadibougar, this led to complications with Hedayat's integration into the Persian literature as a canonical writer (55). Whereas in Iran, Hedayat is read through nativist, nationalist, and psychoanalytic ideologies, Azadibougar suggests that scholars outside of Iran "approach his work with critical grids that cast him as a secondary [i.e., derivative] writer" by framing him as one who was simply influenced by Poe, Kafka, and other "Western" writers (63). Azadibougar argues that both of these interpretations often disregard Hedayat's aesthetic and linguistic creativity and the diversity of his writing, and fail to address the formal literary significance of the works themselves. Unfortunately, however, Azadibougar has himself disregarded a substantial body of scholarship that develops readings of Hedayat differently oriented to issues of gender, translation, genre, and historicity (e.g., Simidchieva, Motlagh, Adrianova).[1] Azadibougar's book is part of this body of new approaches to Hedayat, yet there is a distinct absence of engagement with this scholarship in *World Literature and Hedayat's Poetics of Modernity*. Instead, the majority of the scholarship Azadibougar engages, both in Persian and in European languages, seems to follow the biographical approach he decries.

Chapters 4 through 7 analyze a wide array of works by Hedayat. These chapters are structured quite similarly, beginning with an introduction to the collection or group of writings that is going to be discussed, followed by historical or biographical contextualization; plot summary of the first text, then textual analysis (often of characters or themes); plot summary of the next text and analysis; and finally, establishment of the connection between the works. Chapter 4 focuses on Hedayat's short stories; chapter 5 addresses longer fictional pieces; chapter 6 covers his humorous and satirical writing; and chapter 7 turns to his scholarly work. The conclusion, then, brings the discussion back to modernity and world literature and looks toward the future of the field.

Although an impressive number of texts are analyzed, there are moments throughout the monograph in which the reader is left wanting less biography and more close reading. Perhaps this is a by-product of the ambitious audience scope of Azadibougar's project, as the biographical information in these chapters is likely necessary for those who are unfamiliar with Hedayat. The first couple of chapters, however, have already offered extensive biographical information, and the additions in the later chapters turn the focus away from the texts, foreclosing the possibility of broader comparative arguments. Having taken seriously in an earlier part of the book Azadibougar's contention that biographical readings of literary texts are not effective and that his work is part of this shift in Persian literature away from that style of criticism, the reader may wonder why the book focuses more on life details than linguistic and literary interpretations.

These matters aside, Azadibougar's book successfully conveys complex concepts and arguments to experts and nonexperts alike. The book takes on a vast array of texts and works to establish meaningful connections among them. Each chapter has section divisions that make the book accessible for specific research on individual topics, as the reader can

[1] Marta Simidchieva, "Rituals of Renewal: Sadeq Hedayat's The Blind Owl and the Wine Myths of Manucehri," *Oriente Moderno* vol. 22 (83), no. 1 (2003): 219–41; Amy Motlagh, *Burying the Beloved: Marriage, Realism, and Reform in Modern Iran*, 1st ed. (Stanford University Press, 2012); Anastassiya Andrianova, "A 'Nilufar' by Any Other Name: The Implications of Reading Sadegh Hedayat in Translation." *Translation and Literature* vol. 22, no. 2 (2013): 215–39.

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quickly find needed information. Similarly, each chapter lists references, rather than offering a combined list of works cited at the end, which allows readers to find sources related to the specific topic of each chapter more easily. Happily, the book also includes an index for ease in locating specific topics. Although one might have hoped for greater engagement with work published on Hedayat in the past twenty years—even if only to refute it—this book presents scholarship on Hedayat in a thorough yet straightforward manner, and adds the author's own interpretations, which are informed by contemporary questions about Iran's modernity and place in the scheme of world literature. *World Literature and Hedayat's Poetics of Modernity* takes a distinguished place among a generation of scholarly work produced by researchers trained in the atmosphere of a dominant world literature paradigm.

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The Persian Prison Poem: Sovereignty and the Political Imagination Rebecca Ruth Gould (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021). 312 pp. Hardcover, $95.33. ISBN 9781474484015

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Spanning nine hundred years and examining an unprecedented depth and range of sources across the Persianate domain, Gould's groundbreaking exploration of the evolution of Persian prison poetry offers readers a fresh new perspective on the canon, justifying its establishment as a literary genre in its own right. With eloquent translations of key medieval Persian poets into English for the first time, the book is an important addition to the field of not just Middle Eastern literature, but medieval and comparative literature as a whole.

Perhaps Gould's most important contribution to the understanding of prison poetry is her bold subversion of the power hierarchies involved. Whereas existing analysis tends to place the prison-poet as a passive victim of the sovereign forces of the time, Gould shifts the focus onto the writers themselves, honoring their agency and activism in challenging and changing the power structures around them through their work.

Through this framework, prison poetry can be viewed as a transgressive force, ever-evolving and changing, refusing to stay fixed. Her rigorous interrogation of examples across different countries, eras, and regimes provides the most thorough genealogy of Persian prison poetry to date, demonstrating its transhistorical and transnational significance as the precedent for canonical works of medieval European literature such as Dante's *Inferno.*

Gould's starting point for reframing the genre is the German historian Ernst Kantorowicz's classic study of medieval kingship, *The King's Two Bodies* (1957)—particularly his distinction between the "body natural" (the mortal, physical body) and "body politic" (immortal, symbolic body). A ruler is both a living individual, and an archetypal role. This dichotomy has long underpinned our understanding of sovereign power, shaping theological, political, and literary thought. Kantorowicz's study shows the development of this in European hierarchies, as early Christian connotations of King-as-God shifted into a secular understanding of King-as-Head-of-State and, later, a realization of a monarch being a "normal" mortal and fallible human being.