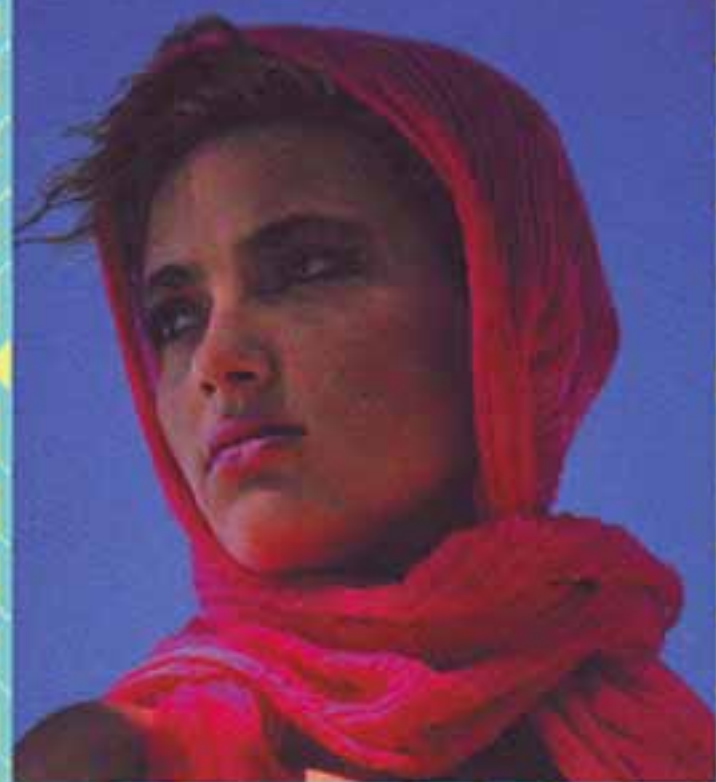


Modern Iranian Poetry



RENDERED INTO ENGLISH
BY SAEED SAEEDPOOR

Introduction

Classical Iranian poetry is known and appreciated in the West. Scholars like FitzGerald, Brown, Arberry and Nickelson have presented the poetry of Ferdowsi, Khayyam, Rumi and Hafiz, with relative success, in English. Why not Modern Iranian Poetry?

Is that because our modern poems lack the appeal of the classical Persian verse? Or because the previous translations of Iranian new poetry have been inadequate? Whatever the reason, the fact remains that contemporary Iranian poetry is alive and well today among the nation, and numerous poetry selections, collections, and anthologies are published and sold out each year. So much so, in fact, that compiling modern poetry selections is an easy way of profiteering in Iran. Besides, works of analysis and criticism of new poetry are in great demand.

Modern Iranian poetry originates with Nima Yushij, who broke the stale conventional forms and meters, introduced variable rhythms and music, and expanded poetic idiom and diction, thus creating new modes of lyrical expression along with a fresh poetic vision.

After him some poets like Akhavan and Azad kept the Nimaic tradition, while others like Shamlu, Sepehri, Forugh gradually moved toward free verse and tonal language. It seems our new poetry is moving increasingly away from rhetorical devices, and closer to colloquial idiom and a lyrical sensibility fused with social, historical and philosophical awareness.

My choices for this book are mostly lyrics, as this mode has the highest degree of universality. Hence Wordsworth's definition of lyrical poetry as the "spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions recollected in tranquility." For the same reason, in my last work *From Shakespeare to Eliot* (Atieh pub. 1998) the selection was mainly lyrical. After the success of that book, which rendered English poetry into Persian, I undertook the same kind of project in reverse—re-creating Iranian poetry in English. Such books may build a bridge of cultural communication and understanding between the two cultures, helping the cause of dialogue among civilizations.

My thesis on poetry-translation as re-creation in another tongue has already appeared in the preface to *From Shakespeare to Eliot*, which expounds

Modern Iranian Poetry

my views on precision and fidelity to form, style and tone. Here, suffice it to say that a poem's translation must ideally be a poem of and by itself, equivalent to the original. Like the original piece it must have verve, spirit, music (albeit avantgarde.) My enterprise was informed by my years of studying English literature in the U.S. and then teaching and researching it in Iran, as well as by my own bit of aptitude for writing poetry. Excerpts of this book have already appeared in the English daily paper Iran News, to the warm reception of readers and the poets available in Iran, and their positive appreciation of these renditions was a beautiful encouragement along the way.

Peace on Earth
S.SP Jan. 2000

Once More Shall I Salute the Sun

Once more shall I salute the sun,
Once more shall I salute the brook
that flowed within me,
the clouds that were my long thoughts,
the painful growth of the garden's poplars
that crossed the dry seasons with me,
the flight of crows
that brought me a gift
of the fragrance of evening farms,
my mother who lived in the mirror
and looked like my old age,
and the earth whose inflamed bowels
filled up with green seeds
by the lust for perpetuating me.
I shall come, come, come
with my hair: the extension of underground odors,
with my eyes: dense sensations of darkness,
with the shrub I picked from the moors across the wall.
I shall come, come, come

Saeed Saeedpoor

Your Sight I am Awaiting

Your sight I am awaiting, at night
When in the branch of the larch
Shadows are turning black,
And you are aggrieved over those bereaved,
Your sight I am awaiting.

At night when the vales
Are asleep like dead snakes,
Whilst the hand of lotus ties
The juniper's foot in a snare,
Whether or not you remember me,
I shall cherish your memory—
Your sight I am awaiting.

Behind the Seas

I shall build a boat.
I shall set it a-float.
Away I shall go from this alien land
Wherein no one in the meadow of love
Cares to wake the heroes.

The boat devoid of nets,
The heart devoid of desire for pearls,
I shall sail on—
Enamored not of the aquatic blues,
Nor of the mermaids raising their heads
To sprinkle charm off their ringlets
In that radiance of the fishermen's solitude.

I shall sail on
I shall sing on:
"Away we must, away.
Man in that town had not myths.
Woman in that town overflowed not like grapes.
No hall's mirror repeated joys,
Not even a puddle reflected a torch.