The Persian Presence in Victorian Poetry

Reza Taher-Kermani
Contents

Series Editor’s Preface iv
Acknowledgements vi
Introduction 1
1. Persia in the West 13
2. Persia and Nineteenth-Century English Poetry 75
3. ‘Sohrab and Rustum’ 114
4. Rubāiyāt of Omar Khayyám 146
5. Ferishtah’s Fancies 174
Epilogue: The Persian Presence in Victorian Poetry 204

Bibliography 207
Index 221
‘Victorian’ is a term, at once indicative of a strongly determined concept and an often notoriously vague notion, emptied of all meaningful content by the many journalistic misconceptions that persist about the inhabitants and cultures of the British Isles and Victoria’s Empire in the nineteenth century. As such, it has become a by-word for the assumption of various, often contradictory habits of thought, belief, behaviour and perceptions. Victorian studies and studies in nineteenth-century literature and culture have, from their institutional inception, questioned narrowness of presumption, pushed at the limits of the nominal definition, and have sought to question the very grounds on which the unreflective perception of the so-called Victorian has been built; and so they continue to do. Victorian and nineteenth-century studies of literature and culture maintain a breadth and diversity of interest, of focus and inquiry, in an interrogative and intellectually open-minded and challenging manner, which are equal to the exploration and inquisitiveness of its subjects. Many of the questions asked by scholars and researchers of the innumerable productions of nineteenth-century society actively put into suspension the clichés and stereotypes of ‘Victorianism’, whether the approach has been sustained by historical, scientific, philosophical, empirical, ideological or theoretical concerns; indeed, it would be incorrect to assume that each of these approaches to the idea of the Victorian has been, or has remained, in the main exclusive, sealed off from the interests and engagements of other approaches. A vital interdisciplinarity has been pursued and embraced, for the most part, even as there has been contest and debate amongst Victorianists, pursued with as much fervour as the affirmative exploration between different disciplines and differing epistemologies put to work in the service of reading the nineteenth century.

Edinburgh Critical Studies in Victorian Culture aims to take up both the debates and the inventive approaches and departures from convention that studies in the nineteenth century have witnessed for
the last half century at least. Aiming to maintain a ‘Victorian’ (in the most positive sense of that motif) spirit of inquiry, the series’ purpose is to continue and augment the cross-fertilisation of interdisciplinary approaches, and to offer, in addition, a number of timely and untimely revisions of Victorian literature, culture, history and identity. At the same time, the series will ask questions concerning what has been missed or improperly received, misread, or not read at all, in order to present a multi-faceted and heterogeneous kaleidoscope of representations. Drawing on the most provocative, thoughtful and original research, the series will seek to prod at the notion of the ‘Victorian’, and in so doing, principally through theoretically and epistemologically sophisticated close readings of the historicity of literature and culture in the nineteenth century, to offer the reader provocative insights into a world that is at once overly familiar, and irreducibly different, other and strange. Working from original sources, primary documents and recent interdisciplinary theoretical models, Edinburgh Critical Studies in Victorian Culture seeks not simply to push at the boundaries of research in the nineteenth century, but also to inaugurate the persistent erasure and provisional, strategic redrawing of those borders.

Julian Wolfreys
I finished the first draft of this monograph in 2014 at the University of Bristol. But I completed it five years later at Nazarbayev University. The seeds of the study were, however, sown during my MA year which coincided with the bicentenary of the birth of Edward FitzGerald and the commemorative publication of the Oxford University Press edition of Edward FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (2010), edited by Daniel Karlin, who was at the time a Professor in the School of English at the University of Sheffield, and who later became my MA and PhD supervisor and a lifelong mentor and advisor. As someone who had always wanted to incorporate the literary-cultural significance of his Iranian heritage within the scope of his literary studies, this was a good opportunity to make a long-held dream a reality. As such, I wrote my thesis on the hybrid (Anglo-Persian) nature of FitzGerald’s translation and later decided to prepare a longer study on the British cultural and imaginative engagements with Persia in the nineteenth century.

The cheeriest, and the most challenging, moments of preparing this study have been shared with many people, to whom I am indebted indefinitely. My first and foremost debt of gratitude goes to my teacher and professor, Daniel Karlin. Without his erudition, support and guidance, I would have never been able to complete this monograph. I would also like to thank members, past and present, of the Department of English in Bristol, especially Professor David Hopkins, Dr Jane Wright, Dr John Lyon and Dr Stephen Cheeke. I would like to particularly thank Dr Samantha Matthews for her mentorship and guidance, both in Bristol and Sheffield. Her instruction and supervision helped me begin my graduate studies and academic career on the right foot. I am also indebted to Professor Joe Phelan (De Montfort University) for his support and critical commentary on various sections of this study. Thanks are also due to Dr Andrew Reynolds (Wisconsin-Madison) for his mentorship and critical engagement with my work. I would like to express my gratitude to my friends in Sheffield, Bristol, London, and Tehran for providing the encouragement and friendship I needed. Especial thanks go to Craig Savage, Danny Adams, Mohammad Nassaji, and Dr Gavin Schwartz-Leeper (University of Warwick).

I would also like to thank my parents, Mohammad-Ali (Shahpoor) Taher-Kermani and Shahnaz Saeedvarnia. It was under their watchful eyes that I gained the ability to tackle challenges head on, that I learned about commitment, perseverance, consistency and dedication. My brother Ali with his infinite support and friendship has also been a great source of joy and inspiration. To these people, I owe a lifelong debt, and I can only hope that I can one day show how much I love and appreciate them.

Reza Taher-Kermani
Edinburgh Critical Studies in Victorian Culture
Series Editor: Julian Wolfreys

Recent books in the series:

- Rudyard Kipling's Fiction: Mapping Psychic Spaces
  Lizzy Welby

- The Decadent Image: The Poetry of Wilde, Symons and Douson
  Kostas Boyiopoulos

- British India and Victorian Literary Culture
  Máire ni Fhlathúin

- Anthony Trollope's Late Style: Victorian Liberalism and Literary Form
  Frederik Van Dam

- Dark Paradise: Pacific Islands in the Nineteenth-Century British Imagination
  Jenn Fuller

  Jonathan Cranfield

- The Lyric Poem and Aestheticism: Forms of Modernity
  Marion Thain

- Gender, Technology and the New Woman
  Lena Wånggren

- Self-Harm in New Woman Writing
  Alexandra Gray

- Suffragist Artists in Partnership: Gender, Word and Image
  Lucy Ella Rose

- Victorian Liberalism and Material Culture: Synergies of Thought and Place
  Kevin A. Morrison

- The Victorian Male Body
  Joanne-Ella Parsons and Ruth Heholt

- Nineteenth-Century Settler Emigration in British Literature and Art
  Farzha Shaikh

- The Pre-Raphaelites and Orientalism
  Eleonora Sasso

- The Late-Victorian Little Magazine
  Koenraad Claes

- Coastal Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century
  Matthew Ingleby and Matt P. M. Kerr

- Dickens and Demolition: Literary Afterlives and Mid-Nineteenth-Century Urban Development
  Joanna Hofer-Robinson

- Artful Experiments: Ways of Knowing in Victorian Literature and Science
  Philipp Erchinger

- Victorian Poetry and the Poetics of the Literary Periodical
  Caley Ehnes

- The Victorian Actress in the Novel and on the Stage
  Renata Kobetts Miller

- Dickens’s Clowns: Charles Dickens, Joseph Grimaldi and the Pantomime of Life
  Jonathan Buckmaster

- Italian Politics and Nineteenth-Century British Literature and Culture
  Philippa Moth

- Cultural Encounters with the Arabian Nights in Nineteenth-Century Britain
  Melissa Dickson

- Novels: Anachronism, Irish Novels and Nineteenth-Century Realism
  Mary L. Mullen

- The Fin-de-Siècle Scottish Revival: Romance, Decadence and Celtic Identity
  Michael Shaw

- Contested Liberalisms: Martineau, Dickens and the Victorian Press
  Iain Crawford

- Plotting Disability in the Nineteenth-Century Novel
  Clare Walker Gore

- The Aesthetics of Space in Nineteenth-Century British Literature, 1843–1907
  Giles Whiteley

- The Persian Presence in Victorian Poetry
  Reza Taher-Kermani

Forthcoming volumes:

- Her Father’s Name: Gender, Theatricality and Spiritualism in Florence Marryat’s Fiction
  Tatiana Kontou

- The Sculptural Body in Victorian Literature: Encrypted Sexualities
  Patricia Pulham

- Olive Schreiner and the Politics of Print Culture, 1883–1920
  Clare Gill

- Victorian Auto/Biography: Problems in Genre and Subject
  Amber Regis

- Gissing, Shakespeare and the Life of Writing
  Thomas Utz

- Women’s Mobility in Henry James
  Anna Despotopoulou

- Michael Field’s Revisionary Poetics
  Jill Ehren

- The Americanisation of W. T. Stead
  Helena Goodwyn

- Literary Illusions: Performance Magic and Victorian Literature
  Christopher Pittard

- The Ideas in Stories: Intellectual Content as Aesthetic Experience in Victorian Literature
  Patrick Fessenbecker

- Pastoral in Early-Victorian Fiction: Environment and Modernity
  Mark Frost

- Edmund Yates and Victorian Periodicals: Gossip, Celebrity, and Gendered Spaces
  Kathryn Ledbetter

- Literature, Architecture and Perversion: Building Sexual Culture in Europe, 1850–1930
  Aina Martin

- Oscar Wilde and the Radical Politics of the Fin de Siècle
  Deaglán Ó Donghaile

- Home and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Literary London
  Lisa Robertson

- Rereading Orphanhood: Texts, Inheritance, and the Victorian Novel
  Jessica Valdez

- Manufacturing Female Beauty in British Literature and Periodicals, 1850–1914
  Michelle Smith

For a complete list of titles published visit the Edinburgh Critical Studies in Victorian Culture web page at www.edinburghuniversitypress.com/series/ECVC

Also Available: Victoriographies – A Journal of Nineteenth-Century Writing, 1790–1914, edited by Diane Piccitto and Patricia Pulham
ISSN: 2044-2416
www.eupjournals.com/vic
To Mum and Dad
Introduction

This book sprang from my desire to study Victorian poetry alongside classical Persian poetry. My initial plan was to examine nineteenth-century English translations of medieval Persian poetry, to explore the ways in which some of the more ‘exotic’ ideological and aesthetic elements of classical Persian poetry (that is, the poetry written in Persia from the tenth to the sixteenth century) were introduced and assimilated into the poetry of nineteenth-century Britain. But during the course of my preliminary research, I came to realise that the presence of Persia in nineteenth-century English poetry transcends the mere category of translation, that Persia to the Victorians stood not just as the poetry of Hafiz or Omar Khayyám (though this formed a substantial part of their conception of the country), but as a complex and paradoxical embodiment of different notions, created and crafted by a range of oral and written stories, themes, and tropes. Knowledge of Persia had reached the discursive realms of the British imagination through many centuries and from a variety of sources, including classical and biblical texts, histories, and travel-writings. This effectively transformed the word ‘Persia’ into something more than the name of a territorial entity. Persia became a cultural imaginary, a mental landscape formed over time and subject to change. The Victorians responded to this landscape from different perspectives, marked by every shade of social class, religious affiliation, and political allegiance.

The manifold nature of the Victorians’ conception of, and response to, Persia is most clearly shown in their depiction of it in their imaginative writings. Persia appears in a variety of roles in nineteenth-century English poetry. It may appear as a land of charming rose gardens, filled with poets, nightingales, and young lovers, as in Henry Alford’s ‘Henry Martyn at Shiraz’ (1851); or as a despotic monarchy in Augustine Hickey’s ‘On to Freedom’ (1865); or as the enemy of the Greeks in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s ‘The Battle of Marathon’ (1820); or, further still, as a fallen empire whose former greatness is the subject
of elegy in Edward Henry Bickersteth’s ‘A Lament for Persia’ (1848). Persia also appears in different measures in English poetry of the nineteenth century. It may dominate a poem, determining subject matter, form, or tone, or it may make only a fleeting, casual appearance; although the scale itself can be deceptive, because a poem that seems to be devoted in its entirety to Persia, as with Henry Kendall’s ‘Persia’ (1888), may contain very little that directly involves Persia or is related to it; whereas, a single, succinct image in another poem may convey a moment of far greater knowledge, such as the ‘rose of Iran on an English stock’ in Grant Allen’s ‘A Special Occasion’ (1894), written to commemorate the planting of a rose from Omar Khayyám’s tomb on the grave of Edward FitzGerald.

To chart the diversity of perceptions associated with Persia in Victorian literary culture is my primary purpose in this book. Poetry is clearly the medium through which I have surveyed the Victorian conception of Persia; but in examining the ways in which Persia figures in Victorian poetry, I have not confined myself to a corpus of works that were written specifically on or about Persia; instead, I have taken account of a broader selection of poems incorporating literary, historical, and cultural material. Such material may shape the structure of a poem, or its verbal texture, and may do so at different levels of intensity and significance. I also do not aim at complete bibliographical coverage; instead, I intend to explore the complex network of cultural exchange that is behind the construction of the Victorian notion of Persia. To do so, I move from context to text, and from general to specific: I begin with the provision of necessary contextual information on the presence of Persia in English literary-historical culture before the nineteenth century, move on to consider some of the ways in which Persia was mediated in nineteenth-century poetry, and then offer case-studies of three major Victorian works: Matthew Arnold’s ‘Sohrab and Rustum’ (1853), Edward FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (1859), and Robert Browning’s *Ferishtah’s Fancies* (1884).

Although my primary focus is on the manifestations of Persia in writings from the Victorian period, I engage, where necessary, with significant texts from outside this period, such as Sir William Jones’s ‘A Persian Song of Hafiz’ (1772). Such critical engagements are necessary and inevitable given the significance of certain non-Victorian texts in carving the Victorian image of Persia. A large part of the study is, nevertheless, dedicated to the examination of the contours of the Victorian literary image of Persia. But within that framework, I am primarily interested in poems in which Persia emerges indirectly
or obliquely, as opposed to translation or more explicit forms of ‘influence’. My goal in the Persian Presence is not to study what is visibly Persian but to disclose the unnoticed, the unobserved, and, so to speak, the hazy Persian particles of Victorian poetry. This is, of course, not to deny the importance of translation as such; Edward FitzGerald, after all, presented his Rubáiyát as a translation, and the poem had a major role in shaping British perceptions of Persia (it took several decades before the accuracy of FitzGerald’s rendition was challenged). Arnold’s ‘Sohrab and Rustum’ was also an indirect translation, though Arnold himself might not have wanted his poem to be identified as such. Nevertheless, my examination of these poems, and the lesser-known poems that are discussed in the earlier part of the book, is to uncover the unheeded Persian dimension of Victorian poetry, to unveil the ways by which Persia became not a travesty or a misreading in the nineteenth century, but a discourse, a language that was shared, whether knowingly or unknowingly, amongst Victorian authors. My dual (Anglo-Persian) readings in this book are to illuminate this process of influence and exchange. This is a process full of misperception, but misperception can itself be a source of creative possibility, and can develop in unexpected ways as in Browning’s Ferishtah’s Fancies.

My readings in the Persian Presence also provide historical, cultural, and linguistic depth to a growing body of scholarship on the processes of cultural exchange between Persia and the West. A number of significant works have been published in recent years on this topic: Laetitia Nanquette’s Orientalism Versus Occidentalism: Literary and Cultural Imaging Between France and Iran Since the Islamic Revolution (2013), Jane Grogan’s The Persian Empire in English Renaissance Writing, 1549–1622 (2014), and Hamid Dabashi’s Persophilia: Persian Culture on the Global Scene (2015) have focused exclusively on the perennial theme of Persia’s cultural relevance and longevity within the discursive realms of the Western imagination. The aim of the Persian Presence is of the same nature: its exploration of the Victorian conception of Persia is to explain how and why Persia has remained a constant, yet mobile, facet of Western cultural memory.

A word also needs to be said about my choice of the word ‘presence’ over the more common designation, ‘influence’. As noted at the start, the manifestation of Persia in Victorian poetry is prolific, and not uniform. Some poems are, for example, direct translations, such as Edward Robert Lytton’s ‘The Roses of Saadi’ (1865). Others, such as James Clarence Mangan’s ‘An Ode by Hafiz’ (1848), claim
to be translations but have no direct counterpart in Persian. There are also adaptations that are rendered indirectly or through a third intermediary language, such as ‘Sohrab and Rustum’, whose source in Firdausi’s *Shahnameh* reached Arnold via a French translation. There are poems that make direct and specific reference to Persia such as Tennyson’s ‘Persia’ (1827), and poems in which Persia appears in the background or the margins, though this less obvious presence may still be richly significant, as in the opening lines of the pope’s monologue in Robert Browning’s *The Ring and the Book* (1868–9), and in sonnet 8 of Christina Rossetti’s ‘Monna Innominata’ (1881), both of which allude to the biblical story of Esther and Ahasuerus. The term ‘presence’ is, therefore, more suited to my purpose, as it encompasses a wider spectrum of literary engagements including translation, imitation, interpretation, representation, conscious allusion, and indirect borrowing. No study of the representation of Persia in nineteenth-century English poetry can, nevertheless, pretend to be comprehensive. The word Persia with its multi-layered construction is too diverse for that to be feasible. The range of its connotations may, however, be suggested so that the reader gains some perspective on this vast, complex landscape. This has been my aim in the more general chapters that discuss broad thematic tendencies in the representation of Persia; my case-studies offer more intensive, detailed discussion of aspects of the Victorian engagement with Persia that are of particular interest.

Although I am mostly concerned with poetry, in my study of the meanings of Persia in the Victorian imagination I have found it helpful to refer, at various points in this study, to a number of prose works including Sir John Malcolm’s *History of Persia* (1815), James Morier’s *The Adventures of Hajjî Baba of Ispahan* (1824), and Arnold’s ‘Persian Passion Play’ (1871). My choice of such works refers both to their general significance and to the ways in which they influence the perception of Persia in the period. However fictional and satirical, Morier’s *Hajjî Baba* is, for instance, one of the first attempts in the nineteenth century to offer an account of the life and the habits of the Persians, opening up a channel of communication between romance and modernity which FitzGerald, though with very different aims, was later to exploit in the *Rubáiyát*. Similarly, Malcolm’s *History* not only enhances the British knowledge of Persian history but also initiates the narrative of Persia’s decline and decay, which, however true, remains popular amongst British writers throughout the nineteenth century.

One other defining choice here concerns my exclusion of translation proper. The closing decades of the nineteenth century saw the
advent of a more learned type of engagement with Persia and Persian literature than had been the case in previous decades. Scholarly writings and translations by specialists and enthusiasts such as Edward Cowell, Edward H. Palmer, Edwin Arnold, H. Wilberforce-Clarke, Jesse Cadell, and Gertrude Bell expanded the British understanding of authentic Persian literature. These writers were conversant with the Persian language, and their first-hand knowledge enabled them to give a more accurate representation not just of the texts they translated, but of the historical and cultural contexts in which those texts had been produced. Jesse Cadell’s stringent critique of FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát* in 1879, which was the first by a Persian-speaking critic, is emblematic of this new approach. A more erudite understanding of Persian literature, history, and culture led to a more discerning identification of certain tenets such as Islamic mysticism (Sufism) and its idiosyncratic place in Persian poetry. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a continuing interest in Persian poetry and particularly in the work of certain figures such as Hafiz and Rumi appeared in Britain that has continued to this day. The study of this great field of cultural production, however, lies beyond the boundaries of this book. Most writings on Persia or translations of Persian from the latter half of the nineteenth century claimed to be, and in most cases were, authentic; they were faithful to their Persian originals in their conception, structure, and diction. Works such as Herman Bicknell’s *Háfiz of Shíráz* (1875), Gertrude Bell’s *Poems from the Divan of Háfiz* (1897), Walter Leaf’s *Versions from Háfiz: an essay in Persian meter* (1898) or Edwin Arnold’s *The Gulistán: being the Rose-garden of Shaikh Sà’di; the first four Babs, or “Gateways”* (1899) were grounded in authentic Persian texts, or at least in texts which were thought to be authentic; their analysis would, therefore, require a different mode of critical engagement in which translation studies would have a more central role.

This book is not the first work of scholarship to recognise the influence of Persia and Persian poetry in English literature. As well as two essays, Laurence Lockhart’s ‘Persia as Seen by the West’ in A. J. Arberry’s *The Legacy of Persia* (1953) and Farhang Jahanpour’s ‘Western Encounters with Persian Sufi Literature’ in Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan’s *The Heritage of Sufism* (1999), there have been three books in recent decades that have focused exclusively on this topic: Marzieh Gail’s *Persia and the Victorians* (1951), John D. Yohannan’s *Persian Poetry in England and America: A Two Hundred Year History* (1977), and Hasan Javadi’s valuable work, *Persian Literary Influence on English Literature, with special reference to the
Nineteenth Century (2005). There also exists Cyrus Ghani’s Shakespeare, Persia, and the East (2007) which looks exclusively at the manifestations of Persia in the work of Shakespeare and other Elizabethan writers. I have benefited from critical engagement with all of the above works, especially those of Gail, Yohannan, and Javadi, whose methods in situating the influence of Persia and Persian cultural materials in English literature are more literary than the others and, therefore, closer to mine. Nevertheless, there are differences of emphasis: both Yohannan and Javadi, for example, allocate a chapter to the study of the influence of Persian themes in Romantic literature, whereas my focus is more on mid-Victorian poetics. Romantic notions of Persia, transmitted by works that purported to be Persian, such as Thomas Moore’s Lalla Rookh (1817), do, of course, form part of the conceptual background of this monograph, although arguably they had less importance for the major writers I study than, for instance, the deeper-rooted conceptions of Persia transmitted by classical and biblical texts.

There are methodological distinctions between the current work and its critical precursors too. As I have indicated, the concept of ‘presence’ has led me to consider less obvious, more oblique ways in which Persia manifests itself in Victorian poetry. A further distinctive feature of this book is the bilateral, Anglo-Persian nature of its critical enquiry. The close readings in this book seek to make Persia visible to anglophone readers, but they are mindful of British literary traditions, too. It is, for example, because the vocabulary and idiom of FitzGerald’s Rubáiyát, and its literary affiliations, are so recognisably English that its engagement with Persia is so powerful and prominent. Ferishtah’s Fancies, similarly, has the recognisable characteristics of Browning’s poetry: it is formally complex, verbally dense and intricate, polemical, and provocative; and it is this quintessentially ‘Browningesque’ design of the poem that makes its oblique historical and cultural Persian presence more intriguing. The ‘Englishness’ of the poetry I explore is thus crucial to an understanding of its ‘Persian’ construction and connotations, and, accordingly, a hybrid, Anglo-Persian criticism that is attentive to Persia (Iran) and Britain’s history, literature, and language is required for what this study aims to accomplish.

My methodology is neither that of conventional literary history, in which questions of direct influence are of primary concern, nor of cultural history, in which literature is seen as part of a broader analysis of the history of ideas. The poems themselves, whether considered in categories or as individual works, are the object of attention. Particular emphasis is placed on elements that might be less visible
to readers who lack knowledge of Persian literature and culture in its original forms. The aim is to examine the ways in which Persia was received, circulated, and represented in Victorian poetry. The term ‘Persia’ itself has multiple and shifting associations, but one strong connecting thread may be discerned in the poems that are discussed in this study: the persistence, through a period in which British encounters with modern Persia were increasing in the areas of diplomacy and trade, and in which knowledge of the country’s language, history, and culture was becoming more exact and more detailed, of a fantasised Persia, or Persian imaginary, compounded of ancient and in some cases mythic elements. This is my underlying argument in this study: the Persia of Victorian poetry, however diverse in concept and construction it might have been, is imaginary; it is fantastical with little connection with historical reality.

In my analysis of the poetic adaptation of Persian themes and tropes, I do not engage with any single theoretical model, though I recognise the significance of recent works on cross-cultural appropriations, including Patrick Brantlinger’s *Rule of Darkness* (1988), Chris Bongie’s *Exotic Memories* (1991), Robert J. C. Young’s *Colonial Desire* (1995), and the primary work in this field, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). A few more words, however, may need to be said about my approach to Said, particularly in light of the ideological alignment that one may draw between my exploration of the Victorian reception and representation of Persia and the theoretical frameworks that were first described in *Orientalism*. Part of Said’s overall argument is that positive, sympathetic articulations, as manifest expressions of Orientalism, are still discursively placed within its broader, latent structures. With that in mind, one may argue that the underlying idea in the *Persian Presence* is in accordance with, and indebted to, Said’s way of thinking. But it would be surprising if this were not the case, considering the pervasiveness, and the earliness, of Said’s critical framework. *Orientalism* laid the foundations of an intellectual debate which is still current in our day. Since its appearance, there has been almost no work of scholarly merit on Orientalism that has not engaged, either favourably or adversely, with Said’s frame of reference. The *Persian Presence* is no exception; it adheres to Said’s employment of the key terms ‘Orient’ and ‘Orientalism’, but does not wholly support his polemic, nor does it intend to provide an Orientalist analysis of its chosen texts. There are two main reasons for this divergence. The first concerns the scope of Said’s argument, which, as Robert Irwin’s states, is limited to ‘the Arab heart-land’ and offers ‘no substantial discussion of Persian or Turkish studies’. The second concerns the somewhat reductive nature of Said’s framework in its own terms. The summing up of a complex network of
cultural, social, and literary interactions under one heading is inimical to the method I have adopted in this monograph, even allowing for the fact that Said’s actual critical practice was often less intransigent than what his master-narrative would dictate or his detractors claim. In the work of many authors who incorporated the Orient into their writing (Morier, Tennyson, Arnold, FitzGerald, Browning, among many other examples) there is a manifold set of responses to the Orient, some of them arrogant and stupid, colonial in the most hidebound sense of that term, but others sympathetic, generous, hospitable, self-questioning; the fixities of identity and class are destabilised in these works as often as they are reinforced, and in ways that ask Orientalism to be set aside, and for the texts themselves to be reconsidered.

This book begins by surveying a range of sources from which the British derived their knowledge of Persia, and emphasises the persistent, and, at times, concurrent, influence of two main currents of thoughts, that is, ‘mythic’ and ‘modern’, in shaping the British perception of Persia in the nineteenth century. The opening chapter follows a chronological pattern and its historical contextualisation is key to the close readings it makes. Moving forward from the Greek and biblical representations of Persia, it then explores the reasons behind the persistence of this ancient understanding in the early modern period, particularly as against the gradual emergence of direct contacts with the country. The main corrective to these ingrained structures of thought and feeling about Persia in this period comes from trade and diplomacy, empirical narratives of travel, and the literary by-products of these encounters with the Orient such as those that were written on and about the Sherley brothers in England. An analysis of the growing British interest in Persian studies in the final quarter of the eighteenth century also forms part of the design of this chapter. The chief figure here is Sir William Jones, the founder of the academic study of Oriental literatures; the chapter examines Jones’s ‘A Persian Song of Hafiz’ as one of the earliest examples of the scholarly treatment of Persian poetry in English, before moving on to look at the dynamic between the nineteenth-century politicised vision of Persia and the narrative of its decline and decay through studying James Morier’s popular fiction, The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan (1824).

The second chapter provides the first systematic analysis of the presence of Persia in nineteenth-century English poetry. In doing so, the chapter relies on the categories of texts and typologies that are outlined in Chapter 1 as a conceptual basis to describe the environments of knowledge within which the image of Persia was defined
and disseminated in the nineteenth century. In discerning the image of Persia, the chapter employs keyword searches of literary databases, principally Literature Online (LION), with additional data from the British Library Catalogue. Although LION is admittedly not comprehensive (it does not, for example, include newspaper and magazine verse), it is still large enough to serve as a representative corpus. Methodologically, using LION also allows for the significant contours of the book’s subject to be mapped out. A preoccupation with certain classical or biblical texts, for example, will show up even in the broad, undifferentiated findings of a keyword search, and will suggest the compelling force of such texts in shaping people’s perception of Persia in nineteenth-century Britain. The range of designs and discourses that Persia embodies can then be distinguished using the data that LION provides. The poems explored in this chapter are also both the result of, and in direct communication with, the discussions in Chapter 1. It is, in fact, through the historical contextualisation of the opening chapter that we are able to propose a taxonomy, however partial and provisional, of nineteenth-century English poetic portrayal of Persia. But the poems I cite here also look forward to the case-studies of the following chapters. The imaginary Persia of myth and fable, which dominates the mass of nineteenth-century poems I have found in my study, is present in the ‘modern’ poems of Arnold, FitzGerald, and Browning. ‘Sohrab and Rustum’ draws Persia in the light of the past as an ancient place of legends and heroes. FitzGerald envisions Persia in his Rubáiyát as an imaginary ‘garden’. Browning in Ferishtah’s Fancies relies, as the title intimates, on his own ‘fancy’, and on his polemical reading of the Rubáiyát, to create a mythical medieval Persia. Of course, a poem such as the Rubáiyát does more than recycle familiar tropes and conventions, but it is still working within their domain; FitzGerald’s historical scholarship, not negligible in itself and certainly well in advance of that of many of his contemporaries, is, in the end, subject to an idea of Persia shaped by the past.

The second part of the book, consisting of three case-studies, shows in greater depth and detail how conceptions of Persia entered into major works of British literature. The case-studies follow a chronological order of publication, beginning with ‘Sohrab and Rustum’. Arnold’s long narrative poem comprises of a variety of components, many of which he had borrowed from secondary sources. Accordingly, the chapter approaches Arnold’s epic narrative from various angles: it first considers the poem’s Persian origin, looking at Firdausi’s background, his Shahnameh, the history of its composition,
and the political context in which it was created. The chapter then focuses on the episode of ‘Sohrab’. Knowledge of Firdausi’s original is crucial here not because Arnold knew it but because he did not. Arnold never read Firdausi. He wrote his version of ‘Sohrab’ after he read, in French, Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve’s ‘Le Livre des Rois’ (1850), a review of Julius von Mohl’s translation of Firdausi’s Shahnāme. In the chain of interpretation from Mohl to Sainte-Beuve to Arnold, only Mohl had read the Persian text. This complex process of transmission, in which Mohl’s poetics, and Sainte-Beuve’s cultural politics, play a significant role, has shaped Arnold’s appropriation of Firdausi’s characters, setting, and mythical substance. My aim in this chapter is to unravel the complexity of this process of literary appropriation, exposing the paradoxical nature of Sainte-Beuve’s role, since he both enabled Arnold to write the poem and implicitly challenged the authority of any modern poet to rival a ‘primary’ epic poet such as Firdausi.

The claim of the penultimate chapter in the book is that FitzGerald, without being literal in his rendition of the quatrains attributed to Khayyām, succeeded in transmitting a Persian spirit in his Rubáiyát. One might suppose that this has always been received wisdom: FitzGerald himself speaks of it in his letters and in his preface of 1859. Charles Eliot Norton also confidently repeated the claim in his ‘Review of Rubáiyát’ in 1869 (and Norton did not know Persian). The same claim was put forward, on a more informed basis, by Edward Heron-Allen in 1898, and then again by the prominent Persian scholar Arberry in 1959. And it has been the working assumption of most critics of the poem. But there exists no single study of FitzGerald’s Rubáiyát that reinforces this long-standing notion by providing evidence of FitzGerald’s attunement to idiomatic nuance in the original quatrains. English-speaking critics have provided extensive and commendable literary and historical scholarship on the poem, and credited FitzGerald for matching a work of Oriental literature to Western tastes; but their unfamiliarity with the Persian language has inevitably hindered them from fully appreciating the Persian dimension of the poem. Those who know Persian, on the other hand, have given FitzGerald the credit he deserves for the profundity and peculiarity of his translation but have not provided direct evidence of his remarkable importation of Persian linguistic, literary, and cultural elements in his poem. In its detailed comparison of FitzGerald’s Rubáiyát to his Persian original(s), this chapter offers new insights into FitzGerald’s translation practice and the poetics. The emphasis is almost wholly on
these specific comparisons, which supplement the work done on the poem by previous critiques such as Arberry’s *The Romance of the Rubáiyát*. Yet my argument here goes beyond a comparative literary analysis. FitzGerald succeeded in transfusing a Persian soul into his re-writing of the Rubáiyát by importing matter of peculiar Persian significance, elements that may look foreign to English readers of the poem, but familiar to those who are acquainted with the particulars of Persian literary and cultural traditions. In order to unearth these hidden peculiarities, the *Rubáiyát* ought to be read with, so to speak, a Persian eye; it has to be read as a native critic would, for instance, study the poetry of Hafiz.

The final chapter in the book is, at first sight, a peculiar one. One might wonder why Ferishtah’s *Fancies* has been chosen over the other, and more notable, Persian poems of the second half of the nineteenth-century which have a greater claim to authenticity. True, *Ferishtah’s Fancies* has no counterpart or original Persian source, nor is it a translation or adaptation of any kind. It is a work of English literature with, in Browning’s language, a ‘thin’ layer of Persian disguise. But this seemingly thin layer of Persian-ness is the main reason behind my choice of the poem: the implicit nature of the presence of Persia in *Ferishtah’s Fancies* makes it an apt choice for the kind of Persian presence that I seek to unveil in this monograph. The poem’s Persian surface, apparently decorative and making no claim to historical or literary authenticity, conceals another, less demonstrative layer of allusion, some of which may be the result of an unconscious, or unintended infusion of knowledge about Persian culture picked up from many sources, among them FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát*, to whose hero Browning’s Ferishtah is polemically opposed. Close reading of the poems – of a kind rarely accorded to this work, which has mainly been seen as a repository of Browning’s religious and philosophical ideas – uncovers its deeper, less visible Persian presence.

A few points need to be clarified with regard to the Persian side of this study. The first one relates to the age-old question of Persian versus Farsi. In this book, I use ‘Persia’ and ‘Persian’ when I refer to texts from the period under study, since these were the terms in common use in the nineteenth century. I use ‘Iran’ and ‘Iranian’ when I refer to modern scholarship. An exception with regard to ‘Iran’ and ‘Iranian’ concerns Firdausi’s use of these terms to designate the ancient Persia of the *Shahnameh*. I make a similar distinction with regard to ‘Persian’ as against ‘Farsi’ for the name of the language. While acknowledging that no system of reference is perfect, this seems the best way of respecting both historical context and
modern developments. The second point relates to my transliterations of Persian. I hope I may be forgiven for adopting a simple method of transliteration. Almost all Persian words in this work are transliterated without diacritics. The only exception is when I use Victorian transliterations of certain Persian words such as Khayyám, rubáiy, or Rubáiyát. With the translation of Persian poetry, instead of attempting a literal but unembellished translation myself, I have decided to rely, where possible, on professional translators. For the *Shahnameh*, I have relied on Dick Davis’s *nameh: the Persian Book of Kings* (2007). For the translation of the Rubáiyát, I have used Peter Avery and John Heath-Stubbs’s *The Ruba’iyat of Omar Khayyam* (2004). There are also a few lines from Hafiz in the first two chapters. In the opening chapter, I have used Dick Davis’s translation in *Faces of Love: Hafez and the Poets of Shiraz* (2012); in one instance in the second chapter, for a lack of a better rendition, I have relied on H. Wilberforce-Clarke’s translation from *Dīvān-i-Hāfiz* (1891). For the meaning of words in Persian, I have used *Dehkhoda Dictionary* (1998). All the biblical excerpts in this study are taken from the King James Bible, and all the translations of the Qur’an are from Arberry’s *The Koran Interpreted* (1955).

**Notes**