

A Pilgrimage for Poetry: My Trip to Shiraz

Wahyuni Kamah visits the tombs of Hafez and Sa'adi and discovers the power of Sufi poetry over the centuries

“Don’t forget to visit Sa’adi’s tomb. His poems are truly humanist and his works are highly respected around the world,” said the passenger sitting next to me on my flight to Shiraz, Iran.

I could not forget — the express purpose of my trip to the “city of roses and nightingales” was to pay my respects to both Sa’adi and Hafez, the renowned Sufi poets of Shiraz.

As lifelong home of the two poets, the capital of the Fars province is also considered the capital of Persian art, culture and literature. The 1.7-million-strong city is further famous for its beautiful gardens featuring Persian architecture. Two such gardens house the tombs of Hafez and Saadi.

Little is known about the life Hafez, born Shamseddin Mohammad in 1325, though he was greatly legendized following his death in 1389.

A popular and plausible anecdote is that he memorized Al-Quran after hearing his father recite passages, providing the name he is better known by: “Hafez.” The word means guardian, and is attributed to individuals who learn the holy book by heart.

Hafez was a master of the *ghazal*, or Persian ode. He became a court poet for several rulers and founded the Shirazi literary school.

“Divan of Hafez” is a compilation of Hafez’s collected ghazal. He wrote about



The peaceful and pleasant gardens housing the tombs of Hafez and Sa'adi draw tourists from all over to the world to Shiraz.

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Wahyuni Kamah

love, spirituality and hypocrisy — themes which he made relatable to every reader, preserving his relevance over the centuries.

“Most Iranians have Divan of Hafez at home — it is like Al-Quran for us. We read it during Nowruz [Persian New Year],” said Mitra, a young woman of Shiraz.

Mitra’s love for her hometown poet is clearly shared by the rest of the country, which celebrates Oct. 12 as Hafez Day.

Though Hafez’s works were inspired by Islam and are cherished throughout the Muslim world, people of every culture and creed hold him in high regard.

The philologist William Jones brought the works of Hafez to a larger audience in 1771 with the first English translation, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau count the Sufi poet among their influences.

I went to Musalla Garden in the north of Shiraz to see the tomb of Hafez. The marble tomb and memorial hall sit on a seasonal river in grassy park planted with orange trees, pines, and overflowing flow-



ers. Two poems of Hafez are engraved in calligraphy on his tombstone.

Visiting the memorial site can feel like a spiritual experience. Young and old visitors alike approach his tomb to touch the stone, say a prayer, or recite his poetry.

Although the tomb was originally built in 1773, the current mausoleum was designed in the late 1930s by French archeologist and architect Andre Godard.

The garden is lined with small pools and also houses a library, book club, and shop selling works by Hafez and other Persian poets in both Persian and English.

The tomb of Hafez is clearly a great Shiraz must-see, but as instructed, I did not forget to visit Saadi’s tomb in northeast Shiraz.

Saadi’s mausoleum is situated in a large, lovely garden. The marble tomb, dating back to the 1860s, is inside of an octagonal Persian building with tall columns and an aquamarine dome.

Saadi’s poems cover the walls within the mausoleum as well as his tombstone, where people come to say prayers for him. Lovers of lyricism and literature

have made pilgrimages to Saadi’s tomb since the early days after his death, which is estimated have occurred in the early 1290s. The exact date of his birth is also unknown, but is thought to be around the year 1200.

Better known by his pen name Saadi, Abu Muhammad Muslih al-Din Abdallah lost his father as an infant, but traveled to Baghdad with the support of his uncle to study Islamic science, theology and Arabic literature at the renowned Nezamiyeh College.

The Mongol invasion of Persia sent Saadi on a 30-year exile through Turkey, Syria, Egypt and Iraq, even out to India and Central Asia.

The hardships of his wanderings and the richness of his adventures no doubt influenced his poetry about humanity, which he began to write upon his return to Shiraz.

The ruler of the city, Atabak Abubakr Sa’d ibn Zangy, highly respected the poet, to the point that he inspired Saadi’s pen-name.

Saadi’s works are recognized for their depth of thinking about society and morality. His masterpiece, Bustan (The Orchard), depicts the standard qualities of Muslims and reflections of behaviors of Sufis. His other great work, Golestan (The Rose), consists of prose, stories, poems and personal anecdotes.

Saadi’s global impact can be observed at the United Nations in New York City, where one of his poems is inscribed on the entrance to the Hall of Nations:

*Human beings are members of a whole,
In creation of one essence and soul.
If one member is afflicted with pain,
Other members uneasy will remain.
If you have no sympathy for human pain,
The name of human you cannot retain.*

I was impressed by how sincerely the Shirazi people revere their poets. In the thoughts and hands of great poets, words become immense, momentous and even magical. As a city devoted to its poetry, Shiraz is a testament to that statement.

Lost Without a Prayer in New HBO Thriller ‘The Leftovers’

Lorne Manly

In the town of Mapleton, N.Y., all appears normal. The shops on Main Street are open for business, and the neighborhoods are full of pristine homes and well-manicured front yards.

Except something has gone terribly wrong in this fictional town in the HBO series “The Leftovers.” Three years earlier, 2 percent of Mapleton’s — and the world’s — population mysteriously vanished. Nothing has been truly normal since.

A ghostly cult silently stalks the town, chain smoking. Feral dogs roam the streets. And as conspiracy theories ricochet through the country — if the mass disappearance wasn’t the Rapture, just what was it? — shadowy organizations emerge, their intentions unclear. In the midst of all this, the police chief — whose own family has been fractured by the departure — tries to hold both the town and himself together.

“The Leftovers,” which debuts on HBO on June 29, is not a David Lynchian exploration of small-town evil. The creation of Damon Lindelof and Tom Perrotta, based on the novel of the same name by Perrotta, it is an intimate family drama that traffics in issues like faith and loss and grief and how to proceed after an enormous tragedy.

“This show is about the condition of

living in a post-apocalyptic world where, if you look out the window, it doesn’t look like the apocalypse happened,” Lindelof said. “But it did.”

“The Leftovers” represents Lindelof’s return to television after the polarizing end of “Lost” in 2010, and his pursuit of perfection has led to a brief production shutdown and a missed premiere date following the season finale of the ratings juggernaut “Game of Thrones.”

For HBO, “The Leftovers” is its most recent high-profile attempt to adapt a closed-ended novel into a serialized show since it declined to pick up “The Corrections,” based on the Jonathan Franzen novel, despite spending more than \$5 million on a pilot.

“The Leftovers” also raises larger questions central to the alchemy of creating TV shows. Just how faithful should the series be to its source material, especially when the novelist is attached to the project as an executive producer and writer? And does a show like “The Leftovers” promise a compact with viewers to explain the mystery at its heart: How exactly did 140 million people vanish all at once?

Perrotta hit upon the idea for “The Leftovers” while writing “The Abstinence Teacher,” his 2007 novel revolving around a suburban high school teacher whose human sexuality class runs smack into the culture wars.

That novel had several evangelical



A scene from ‘The Leftovers,’ top; show creators Tom Perrotta, left, and Damon Lindelof, right, and cast members Liv Tyler, Justin Theroux and Amy Brenneman. Photos courtesy of HBO and Reuters/Andrew Kelly

characters, and while researching that unfamiliar world, he was constantly struck at how often the Rapture came up as a literal part of people’s faith. But Perrotta, whose earlier books include “Election” and “Little Children,” had no interest in engaging in easy satire of the Rapture and its adherents. He wanted to deal with those beliefs seriously. “One of the things that happened was, I started to think of the Rapture as an amazing metaphor for loss, and particularly sudden loss,” he said.

But Perrotta’s Rapture came with a twist: What if it was random? What if it took a wrecking ball to one’s entire belief system?

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“The Leftovers” premieres on HBO Asia on Sunday, July 6, 7.45 p.m. Jakarta time. It is showing on HBO Asia every Sunday at 8 p.m.

The book’s exploration of faith undermined, and the focus on the Garvey clan and small-town America, resonated with HBO executives when Perrotta and his producing partners pitched the network. With fantasy, genre or historical fiction shows like “Game of Thrones,” “True Blood” and “Boardwalk Empire” on its roster, the network was searching for a more intimate family drama.

“I loved the tone of it,” said Michael Lombardo, president for programming at HBO. “It’s as everyday and commonplace and recognizable as the most personal book or show we’ve seen. At the same time, it has an otherworldly quality that creeps in.”

After Perrotta took a crack at a first draft of the pilot, HBO decided to bring in an experienced TV show runner to help reimagine the book as a series. Lindelof, whose work on “Lost” deftly combined character-driven stories with supernatural overtones, was the first choice.

Since the end of “Lost,” Lindelof had been toiling on the film side of Hollywood as a writer for hire. He may have been well paid, but ultimately he was executing someone else’s vision, including Ridley Scott’s “Prometheus” or J.J. Abrams’ “Star Trek Into Darkness.”

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