

To the Editor:

The rebuttal of an incompetent book review is a literary genre only slightly superior to the review itself. Nonetheless, Michael M. J. Fischer's review of my *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini* (*Iranian Studies*, XIV:3-4, 264-266) is so replete with error and distortion that it cannot be left unanswered, particularly in view of its publication in a journal with sporadic pretensions to scholarly respectability.

As an instance of my alleged failure to provide the necessary context for the pieces translated, Fischer cites the speech delivered by the Imam on Ashura 1963. He claims that I have deleted references to the audience bursting "into refrains of mourning," references supposedly present in the Persian text. All that is to be found in any of the texts available (*Khomeini va Jonbesh*, n.p., 1974, pp. 4-7; Hamid Ruhani, *Barrasi va Tahlili az Nehzat-e Emam Khomeini*, n.p., n.d., pp. 456-460; and *Majmu'e'i az Maktubat, Sokhan-raniha, Payamha va Fatavi-ye Emam Khomeini*, Tehran, 1360/1981) is the phrase in brackets, occurring four times, *gerye-ye hozzar* (weeping by those present). Weeping is something different from the "refrains of mourning" that Fischer claims to discern in the text. As for "introductory items and explanations" that I supposedly omitted, they are nonexistent in any of the available texts. Also imaginary is an alleged clarification by the Imam that "he will begin with the *rawzeh*, instead of, as is usual, ending with it." In fact, the application of the word *rawzeh* (the precise sense of which Fischer is evidently unable to grasp; see his definition of it as "homiletic sermon" in *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution*, p. 291) to this address of the Imam is inappropriate; the mere evocation of Karbala at the beginning does not constitute "the *rawzeh*."

Fischer's comparison between my version of *Hokumat-e Eslami* and the JPRS translation--apart from being careless and confused on matters of detail--fails to mention a crucial point: that my translation is based on the Persian original, whereas the JPRS rendering is an approximation of an Arabic translation. The appropriate question to be raised in assessing my translation is, therefore, how accurately it compares with the Persian original, not how it reads in comparison with the translation of a translation. It is significant that in his whole discussion Fischer makes not a single reference to the wording of the Persian text (or, for that matter, the Arabic translation on which the JPRS version is roughly based). But putting aside this fundamental point, and exempting Fischer from the onerous task of reading some Persian and Arabic, we see that he has failed to compare accurately even the two English versions. He says, for example, that the JPRS version has "the real rulers are the jurisprudents," while my version "insists" "rulership ought officially to be theirs." In fact, my version reads: "the true rulers are the *fugaha* themselves, and rulership ought officially to be theirs" (*Islam and Revolution*, p. 60). In other words, the same phrase that occurs in the JPRS version is present in mine as well, and the statement "rulership ought officially to be theirs" is not a substitute for that phrase, but an expansion upon it. The notion that the *fugaha*--under certain conditions--are the true rulers is to be found both in the Persian original (*dar in surat, hokkam-e haqiqi haman foqaha hastand; Hoku-mat-e Eslami*, Najaf, 1391/1971, p. 60) and in the Arabic version used by the JPRS translator (*fi hadhihi 's-sura, fa 'l-hukkam al-haqiqiyun hum al-fuqaha; al-Hukumat al-Is-lamiya*, Najaf, n.d., p. 47). The Persian text then proceeds: *Pas bayesti hakemiyat rasman be foqaha ta'alloq girad, na be kasani ke be 'ellat-e jahl be qanun majburand az foqaha tab'iyat konand*. Hence my translation, "rulership ought officially to be theirs"; there is no question of some arbitrary "insistence" on my part that the text read a certain way.

Fischer deems the JPRS version to be clearer when it "has Khomeini saying Islam is the religion of those who do not want the infidels to dominate the believers" (p. 2), since my version "merely claims it to be 'the school of those who struggle against imperialism.'" Here, too, he has failed to compare accurately the wording of the two

English versions, let alone refer to the Persian and Arabic texts. The JPRS version says: "Islam is the religion of the strugglers who want right and justice, the religion of those demanding freedom and independence, and those who do not want to allow the infidels to dominate the believers." My version reads: "Islam is the religion of militant individuals who are committed to truth and justice. It is the religion of those who demand freedom and independence. It is the school of those who struggle against imperialism." In other words, there is a large degree of similarity between the two versions; they diverge only in the last part of the Imam's description of Islam--this, because the Persian original and the Arabic translation differ. The Persian reads: *maktab-e mobarezan va mardom-e zedd-e este'marast* (p. 8); the Arabic: *al-Islam din...aladhina la yuriduna an yaj'alu li 'l-kafirina ala 'l-mu'mina sabila* (p. 8), this wording being an allusion to Quran, 4:41.

The strangest part of the whole review is, perhaps, Fischer's assertion that in a certain passage of *Hokumat-e Eslami*--that concerning the necessity of learning as a qualification for rule--"the word for ruler is *hakim-i shar'*, an archaic term carrying historical and linguistic associations preserved in neither translation." The expression *hakim-i shar'* does not, in fact, occur at this point in the Persian text (p. 61); the word used is *zamamdar*. The Arabic (p. 47) has *hakim*, but not *hakim-i shar'* (or *hakim ash-shar'*), which is a different matter. This is not the first time that Fischer has indulged his penchant for analyzing nonexistent occurrences of the term *hakim-i shar'*. In *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (p. 153) he claims that the term occurs on p. 179 of *Hokumat-e Eslami*, transcribing it (twice) as *hakim-i shahr* and translating it as "rulers...monarchs or other leaders." The word found on p. 179 is again *zamamdar*, not *hakim-i shar'*. This time Fischer has at least got the spelling of the term right; it remains for him only to find out where in fact it occurs, and then to figure out what it means.

A final point is that Fischer faults my translations as too "polished and bookish," lacking the "inflammatory" qualities of the originals. Certainly it was not always possible to convey in translation the vigor and force of the Imam's words, but it is doubtful that Fischer is in a

position to appreciate such stylistic nuances. Certainly the opposite is suggested by the pages in *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (pp. 132-133) where he finds it appropriate to place in the mouth of the Imam--in an imaginary dialogue with Kasravi--expressions such as "great!" and "big deal."

When it comes to the reviewing of a translation (not to mention other and more important tasks of scholarship) fashionable flimflam about "the pragmatics of speech" and "the problems of transmission" is no substitute for a sound command of the language (or languages) involved. The editors of *Iranian Studies* might do well to bear this in mind if they wish to salvage anything of the scholarly potential of their journal.

Hamid Algar

To the Editor:

Mr. Algar does himself no service in his "rebuttal," for he merely confirms all the primary points of my review. By omitting, as he admits, such information as the phrase "gerye-ye hozzar," he has reduced the vitality and accessibility of the translation. This is a general problem for translations, not only for this particular one. I tried to point out a variety of devices which translators might use to help in the process of *cultural* as well as *literal* translations. This includes comparison of variant texts (the Persian and Arabic versions in this case, but also and more importantly the original tapes of the spoken delivery), which Algar only partially and belatedly acknowledges in his "rebuttal."

Many readers of this journal will know enough Persian and Arabic, and certainly English, to judge for themselves whether my review has done Mr. Algar's literal translation any injustice. They will, as well, be able to read my book and see how Mr. Algar has fabricated his references to it.