

Societas Iranologica Europaea
Mid-Term Conference

*How to Write the History of Modern Persian Literature –
State of the Art, Approaches, and Perspectives*

Bamberg (Germany), 10-12 July 2009

Conference Program

Abstracts

List of Participants

Bamberg, 10 – 12 July 2009

Conference Program

Friday, 10 July 2009

Zentrum für Interreligiöse Studien (ZIS), Fleischstraße 2

9:30 - 10:30 **Welcome and Opening Session**

Welcome address by Birgitt Hoffmann, Professor of Iranian Studies in Bamberg

Claus Pedersen

Canonization of Literature and Modern Persian Prose Literature

10:30 - 11:00 Coffee Break

11:00 - 12:00 **Panel: Blueprints of Literary History** (Chair: Claus Pedersen)

Roja Dehdarian

An Insider's View from the Outside: Bozorg Alavi as architect of literary history

Roxane Haag-Higuchi

What is Modern about the History of Modern Persian Literature?

12:00 - 12:30 **Summary Discussion**

12:30 - 14:30 Lunch Break

14:30 - 16:00 **Panel: After the Break-Up of the Poetic Community** (Chair: Birgitt Hoffmann)

Syed Akhtar Husain

Indian Perspective of Modern Persian Literary History

Aleem Ashraf Khan

Reception of Persian Literature in the Sub Continent

Stephan Popp

Is Muhammad Iqbal's Persian Poetry Persian Literature?

16:00 - 16:30 Coffee Break

16:30 - 17:30 **Panel: Negotiating Poetic Traditions** (Chair: Justine Landau)

Amr Ahmed

The Persian Čahârpâre: At the Source of a New Poetic Form

Marek Smurzinsky

The Broken Mirror of Persian Lyric Tradition and Postmodern Aesthetic

17:30 - 18:30 **Summary Discussion**

Saturday, 11 July 2009

An der Universität 11 (U11), room 016

9:30 - 10:30 **Panel: New Literary Genres** (Chair: Claudia Ott)

Nader Nasiri-Moghaddam

Analysis of the Historical Novels Published under Rezâ Shâh Pahlavi's Reign (1925-1941)

Yuriko Yamanaka

Birth of the Novel in Iran and Japan: a Comparative Study

10:30 - 11:00 Coffee Break

11:00 - 12:00 **Panel: New Literary Genres** (continued) (Chair: Yuko Fujimoto)

Anna Krasnowolska

Literary Self-portrait of an Iranian Intellectual

Behzad Ghaderi Sohi

Ali Nasirian and Modern Iranian National Theatre

12:00 - 12:30 **Summary Discussion**

12:30 - 14:30 Lunch Break

14:30 - 16:00 **Panel: State of the Art, Approaches, and Perspectives** (Chair: Christine Nölle-Karimi)

Stephan Guth

Three Approaches I Liked and Which Work for Arabic and Turkish – Advantages and Disadvantages

Kamran Talattof

Persian Literature, History, and the Turn of the Millennium: Is Ideology Still Relevant?

Madeleine Voegeli

Rook di goo, rook di goo! There's Blood in the Shoe! or: How to Make Literary Works Fit for their History to Be Told

16:00 - 16:30 Coffee Break

16:30 - 17:30 **Panel: Women's literature as a distinct category in literary history** (Chair: Stephan Popp)

Pegah Shahbaz

The Thematic Analysis of the Iranian Women Novelists' Works during the Last Ten Years

Christoph Werner

Women Novelists of the 21st century

17:30 - 18:30 **Summary Discussion**

Sunday, 12 July 2009

An der Universität 11 (U11), room 016

9:30 - 11:30 **Final Session** (Chair: Claus Pedersen, Roxane Haag-Higuchi)

Panel: Presentation of Projects in Modern Persian Literature

Yuko Fujimoto

Women and Narration: Gendered Narratives in Oral and Written Persian Literature

Nima Mina

Contemporary Persian Literature in Exile

Eva Witte

Redefining Modernity – Persian Poetical Changes at the Turn of the 20th Century

Final Discussion

*How to Write the History of Modern Persian Literature –
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Amr Ahmed: The Persian *Āhârpâre*: At the Source of a New Poetic Form

At the beginning of the 20th century, the modernization of Persian poetry was just under way. Among the many enthusiastic experiments poets ventured at the time, one new poetic form was to appear: the *dobeyti-e peyvaste*, sometimes called *zuqâfiyateyn* and better known today as *Āhârpâre*. The lexical hesitations that came with it express the theoretical uncertainties raised by the novelty of a form unknown to the repertoire. Some critics believed it to be a development of the classic *robâ'î*. And though others acknowledged the Western origins of the *Āhârpâre*, they never went as far as to identify them with certainty.

This paper aims to show that the *Āhârpâre* is nothing other than the Persian appropriation of the French quatrain. Initiated by such poets as Yâsami and Bahâr, who claimed Western poetry as a model for their own poetic reform, the *Āhârpâre*, as will be shown, is formally quite distinct from the classic *robâ'î*. What is more, the first published *Āhârpâre*, *Parvâne va gol* by Rašid Yâsami (1916), can be proved to establish decisive intertextual relations with a poem by Victor Hugo, itself a succession of quatrains. The joint analysis of Yâsami and Hugo's poems will serve as a starting point to establish that the *Āhârpâre* represents a turning point in the adoption of Western patterns by the Persian poets. More decisively, what is at stake in this reading of French poetry is the encounter of Iranian poets with the strophic form.

Aux origines d'une nouvelle forme poétique : le *Āhârpâre*

Au début du siècle dernier, les premiers pas furent engagés en Iran dans la voie de la modernisation de la poésie. Dans le bouillonnement d'expérimentations qui marque cette période, une nouvelle forme poétique allait faire son apparition : le *dobeyti-e peyvaste*, parfois dit *zuqâfiyateyn* et mieux connu aujourd'hui sous le nom de *Āhârpâre*. Les hésitations terminologiques qui en accompagnent l'émergence traduisent des incertitudes théoriques réelles face à la nouveauté d'une forme inconnue du répertoire traditionnel. Certains critiques ont cru y voir un développement du *robâ'î* classique. Et si d'autres ont décelé des origines occidentales au *Āhârpâre*, ils n'ont pas poussé l'analyse au point de les identifier précisément.

Nous entendons montrer ici que le *Āhârpâre* n'est autre que l'adoption du quatrain français. Initiée par des poètes qui, comme Yâsami et Bahâr, revendiquaient la poésie occidentale comme modèle à la réforme qu'ils avaient entreprise, cette forme se distingue nettement, nous allons le voir, du *robâ'î* classique. Le premier *Āhârpâre* qui nous soit connu, *Parvâne va gol* de Rašid Yâsami (1916), établit en outre un rapport d'intertextualité décisif avec un poème de Victor Hugo composé d'une succession de quatrains. Leur analyse conjointe nous servira de point de départ pour établir le tournant capital que représente le *Āhârpâre* dans l'adoption de formes poétiques occidentales en Iran. Ce qui se joue alors, par l'intermédiaire de la poésie française, n'est rien moins que la rencontre des poètes persans avec la forme strophique.

Roja Dehdarian: An Insider's View from the Outside: Bozorg Alavi as architect of literary history

Bozorg Alavi (1904-1997), a leading figure in the early stage of modern Persian prose, became one of the first and most influential architects of modern Persian literary history in German language after his emigration to the German Democratic Republic (1954). In his *Geschichte und Entwicklung der modernen persischen Literatur* (History and Development of Modern Persian Literature, Berlin 1964) he constructs the development of modern Persian prose and poetry as an evolutionary and continuous process caused and highly influenced by the political and social changes that took place in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Iran.

My analysis will draw on Alavi's narrative of literary history pointing out his underlying historical conception and focussing upon the way in which Alavi read the interaction between literary phenomena and socio-economic processes as the main constituent element of literary history. Assuming that literary history is always written with a more or less precise concept, I will examine how his political and social environment influenced Alavi's perception of literary history. Moreover, I will put forward the question of how his approach to modern literary history is related to the then contemporary discourse in and outside Iran.

Behzad Ghaderi Sohi: Ali Nasirian and Modern Iranian National Theatre

Ali Nasirian (1935-), mostly known as a celebrity in Iranian cinema, had been preoccupied during the 1950s and the 1960s with creating dramas based on Iranian folklore and popular theatre. In this period, he wrote more than 10 plays, most of which draw on popular, Iranian theatrical forms. This article discusses the contradictions, limitations and possibilities of Nasirian's attempt at making a 'national' theatre and dramatic texts at a historic moment when Iran, at the brink of entering a new phase which we may call the "South" social formation or the Asian version of modernity, was forced to adopt a hurried version of the "North" social formation, a program which took centuries to consolidate in Europe.

Stephan Guth: Three approaches I liked and which work for Arabic and Turkish – Advantages and disadvantages

The presentation will discuss three models of periodization which I have applied in recent years in comparative studies, both inner-Middle Eastern and cross-cultural, for two modern literatures of the region, Arabic and Turkish. All three approaches are meant to fill the terminological gap that emerges from the fact that autochthonous literary traditions undergo modifications as a result of increasing integration into global systems of norms, processes and world views, and that postcolonial theory is not really applicable (although 'hybridity', despite the term's smack of racial biologism, can be an interesting concept when understood in a creative sense). All three are *generalist* rather than *particularist* positions, i.e., rather than stressing (though in no way neglecting) the peculiarities that arise from the specificities of Middle Eastern literary traditions, they underline the fact that Middle Eastern cultures, and hence literatures, have since long begun to communicate with global systems and thus become part of the latter.

The first of these approaches consists of an *amplification* of *existing* periodizational terminology, making it necessary to redefine what is meant by established terms like 'Romanticism', the new meaning of the old terms incorporating both Western *and* Middle Eastern 'variants' of basically the same global periods. In contrast, the second approach prefers to operate with a *new* and *more general* vocabulary, in this way avoiding terminological confusion (but of course introducing a hitherto unknown list of novel expressions). While the first two clearly are products of a time before the deconstructionist

turn, the third is meant as an attempt to write history despite the breakdown of the 'grands récits' and the so-called 'end of history'. Rather than concentrating on an established canon and on a longer temporal unit it focusses, almost arbitrarily, on *one year* in world history and tries to collect for this segment as much and as diverse data as possible from all over the world and from many different cultural fields and spheres, describing, in a synchronical cut, a certain 'moment' in global history as a *rhizome* of shared or opposing, but interrelated views, interconnected processes and overlapping and intersecting concepts (or 'dispositives' and 'codes', in the theory's own words). The lack of diachrony in this approach is partly compensated for by the temporal 'horizon' to which the data of the one selected year point.

Roxane Haag-Higuchi: What is Modern about the History of Modern Persian Literature?

Written in the 1930s, Bahâr's *Sabk-shenâsi* is considered as a pivotal text in the formation of a coherent and still dominant view of Persian literary history. Written down as a textbook for the course of Persian literature at the newly established University of Tehran, the institutional aspect of *Sabk-shenâsi* must not be neglected. The transformation of an apparently amorphous field like Persian literature into a stratified academic discipline, intertwined with a propagation of the unifying function of the Persian language were the basic requirements for Bahâr's approach.

Bahâr chose stylistics and evolutionary theory as the formative theories for his literary history. With its clearly outlined theoretical premises, *Sabk-shenâsi* must be considered as the first modern history of Persian prose, rendering the genre of *tazkere* obsolete. But Bahâr's oeuvre does not tackle the subject of the literature in his own time, it is a modern literary history, but not a history of modern literature. Starting from Bahâr, this paper discusses various conceptional aspects of literary histories.

Syed Akhtar Husain: Indian Perspective of Modern Persian Literary History

During the modern period literary developments took place in Iran and scholars of Persian studies have recorded them in their literary histories in the 20th century. Indian scholars of Persian studies have responded to it with their state -of -the art of writing Modern Persian History. Among them, Dr Mohammad Ishaque and Dr Munibur Rahman deserve special mention. They dealt with the subject in methodical manner which is easier to grasp and follow the literary developments of Iran beyond the fixed parameters of Nationalism, Patriotism, Despotism of the Qajar Kings, etc.

Dr Mohammad Ishaque presented the literary development of Iran of the Post World War period in his: ***Sukhanwaran-i- Iran dar asr-i-hazir***, incorporating 94 poets. It has a preface by Jamal Zadeh who lauded the literary efforts of Indian scholar with a quotation from Goethe: Wer den Dichter will verstehen; Muss in Dichters Lande gehen.

Dr Ishaque personally met the poets in Iran; compiled their bio-data and discussed them with their anthology of poems in his book. The poets are introduced in alphabetical order and the entire work appeared as A Dictionary of Modern Persian Poets, rather than History. Indeed, it is a step towards understanding the literature but not a holistic way of looking at the literary development. None the less, it opens quickly a vista for the readers to enter into modern Iran.

Post-Revolution Persian Verse by Dr Munibur Rahman of India shows a methodical approach to writing the history of modern Persian literature. He has discussed Persian literature of the late 19th and early 20th century in the form of cause and effect theory. The political and social developments of Iran discussed by him in the preceding chapter and the literary developments arising out of them appeared in the subsequent chapters. Secondly

the entire literary output of modern Iran was not jam packed as sardines but categorized in eight verse forms and in separate chapter it was discussed thematically. *Sources* in writing modern Persian literary history constitute a very effective tool of research and study. Rahman has always banked upon original sources which makes the quality of the work fresh and new.

I propose to discuss the state-of-the art of writing Modern Persian Literary History adopted by the Indian scholars in the forthcoming SIE Mid Term Conference at Bamberg (Germany).

Aleem Ashraf Khan: Reception of Persian literature in the Sub Continent

Persian teachers of the sub continent have conceived the whole idea of modern Persian literature quite different from their counterparts in Iran. Dr. Zahuruddin Ahmad and Professor S. H. Qasemi contributed a good number of research papers to history of modern Persian literature. Dr. Zahuruddin Ahmad in his " Criticism of Persian Poetry in Indo-Pak sub continent has given an exhaustive account emergence of Modern Persian literature of the Qajar & Pahlavi Iran. It is written in Persian and published by Iran Pakistan Institute of Persian Studies, Islamabad, Pakistan in 1995 in 133 pages. The learned scholar has adopted a critical study of the modern Persian literature of Iran. Critical study of literature appears more effective than the typical Persian way of narrating modern literary history. Prof. S. H. Qasemi has reviewed the modern Persian literature of Iran in which revolutionary, social and modern effects of the 20th century has been traced in literature. They have focused mostly on Parveen Etesami, Malikush Shoara Bahar, Shaharyar, Aarif Qazvini, Iraj Mirza, Farough Farrukhzaad, Parvez Natil Khanklari and a host of others who have given new trends to the modern literature of Iran. Study of modern literature with respect of trends is mostly preferred in the sub continent by the scholars.

Modern Persian literature in the sub continent also demands a comparative study with other Indo Pak literatures which are taught in a number of universities in the sub continent. The comparative study of literature of contemporary Iran, Pakistan and India can evolve a better understanding of the Asian literature at the dawn of the 20th century or the dusk of the 19th century. This is an appropriate way of correlating events of Asian origins for example the pan Islamism, birth of Persian newspaper, press and publication, all these things Iran share with the sub continent.

It can be concluded that there is a good reception of modern Persian literature in the sub continent where the writers of literary history try to inter relate Iran with her neighbours and prepare a comprehensive history of modern Persian literature in the sub continent by showing the presence of Jamaluddin Afghani, emergence of Persian newspapers, Persian printing press at Lahore, Lucknow, Calcutta, nationalists movements of India etc. These are receptions of the subcontinent which can interweave the narrative of modern Persian history writing.

Nader Nasiri-Moghaddam: Analysis of the historical novels published under Rezâ Shâh Pahlavi's reign (1925-1941)

Almost four years after his *coup d'état* of 21 February 1921, Rezâ Khan Mir-Panj was proclaimed king and founder of the Pahlavi dynasty by a Constituent Assembly on 12 December 1925. The name of the dynasty refers to the language of the Sassanids (224–651) and was supposed to recall the glory of pre-Islamic Iran; it comes from the family name that Rezâ Shâh (1925-1941) had chosen shortly beforehand, when the law of 4 June 1925, instituting the civil register in Persia, required each person to choose a family name.

Surrounded by reformers such as Dâvar (1887–1937), Teymurtâsh (1879–1933), Tadayyon (1881–1951) and the others, Rezâ Shâh launched a far-reaching programme of

modernization and administrative centralization, with a more long-term aim of “westernizing” the country. In the field of culture, the education system was modernized: education was made compulsory for both genders in 1936, though exceptions existed especially in rural areas. The founding of the University of Tehran in 1934 had also a long-term impact on the cultural development of the country. Nationalism was strengthened by eliminating Arabic elements from the Persian language as well as emphasizing and promoting the pre-Islamic aspects of Iranian culture. From this point of view, the writing of the historical novels such as *‘Eshq o saltanat yâ fotouhât-e Kourosch-e kabir*, *Dâstân-e bâstân yâ sargozasht-e Kourosch*, *Dâm-gostarân yâ enteqâm-khâhân-e Mazdak*, *Dâstân-e Mâni-e naqqâsh*, *Lâzikâ* and finally *Dalirân-e tangestâni* reinforced this policy indirectly. Nowadays, after nearly eight decades, we can ask ourselves how much the novelists, who created these works, were informed of the ancient history of Persia? What were their sources of inspiration? Were these novels based on the Greek writings, on the archaeological discoveries or only restricted to the Iranian myths? What types of elements do the novelists use to stir up nationalism among their compatriots? These are the questions to which I will try to answer in my communication.

Claus Pedersen: Canonization of Literature and Modern Persian Prose Literature

This paper will discuss the pitfalls of and problems with writing literary history which one researcher has deemed almost impossible but necessary (David Perkins, *Is Literary History Possible?*, The John Hopkins University Press, 1992, p. 17). Included in this discussion will be a brief mentioning of the canonization of certain works of literature and finally the whole discussion will be set in the framework of Persian literary history where the period of early modern prose fiction (ca. 1920-40) will be used as an example.

Stephan Popp: Is Muḥammad Iqbāl's Persian Poetry Persian Literature?

Muḥammad Iqbāl (1877-1938), the last Persian Poet of India, was read and recommended by the Iranian poets of the 1920s and 30s, especially Bahār, who praised Iqbāl in a qaṣīda. Dominating Urdu literature between 1920 and 1938, exposing his philosophy of self-realisation in both Urdu and Persian, rewriting Ḥāfeẓ ghazals according to his philosophy, explaining Western thought in short verse and trying to strengthen Muslims against the West in his Persian verse, Iqbāl was the leading Islamic poet of India between the world wars, besides being a major Islamic philosopher too. As a dedicated pan-Islamist who felt much indebted to Ḥāfeẓ and Moulavī, he was much affected by Iran's development. However, he never received much attention by the general Iranian public, whereas Pakistan uses him as the mentor of the nation and Afghanistan as a great thinker showing the way to the future. When the Islamic Republic of Iran tried to promote him finally, Iranian literary taste had moved on to *še'r-e nou* and to ghazal with political allusions. It was not prepared to accept a poet from the time and style of Bahār as the cry of the day. Why did Iqbāl hardly gain ground in Iran? The literary discourses of both Iran and India between 1920 and 1940 were fairly similar. Both were greatly influenced by national (neo-) romanticism, and even literary features resemble each other, such as retention of traditional forms but great innovation in contents (with the exception of Nīmā Yūšij, who does not have a parallel in India). This lecture will therefore compare the literary discourses of Iran and India as they appear in representative poems of Iqbāl, Pārvīn E'teṣāmī, 'Ešqī and Bahār, using semantic structure analysis. It will elaborate the basic thoughts (“paradigms”) of these

poems by relying on the oppositions of key words of their verses. Further, it will link these paradigms to the paradigms of the literary discourses. It will also show Iqbāl's position in Indian literature in the same way and, comparing this with the Iranian literary discourse, show why the last Indo-Persian poet was, above all, not an Iranian but an Indian poet.

Pegah Shahbaz: The Thematic Analysis of the Iranian Women Novelists' Works during the Last Ten Years

The enormous edition rise of the novels and short stories written by women during the last decade reveals signs of a new literary movement in Iran. The new wave of novel-writing preferred to other literary genres as poetry, is to be considered today as the commencement of a new era in modern Persian literature. Some of these works are globally rewarded and have brought literary prizes to their contemporary women writers. The current development in prose-writing is without doubt the result of the social transformation, recently occurred in the Iranian society.

After the presidential election on 2 Khordâd 1376 (22 May 1997) ending to the election of Mohammad Khâtami, the Iranian society experienced a sort of relief, caused by the decrease of social and political pressure. The intellectuals found a wide track for expressing their points of view and meanwhile women could take advantage of the fair freedom offered to them, even in their way of clothing or presence in the society. Ever since, some women writers have been tenacious enough to present a new analytical image of the unbalanced situation of women in Iran in comparison to men. Their literary works are mirrors that reflect modern women's way of thought contrasting the traditional clichés and Iranian social stereotypes; these works attract the common attention to the liberal women's challenges in Iranian society.

By taking a quick look on this evolutionary literary current, one may search for the reason why women writers today prefer realistic prose to allegoric poetry. How do story elements like trip, movement, etc. oppose traditional stagnant lifestyle? What challenging aspects of women's social life are under analysis in the novels? How do the modern writings develop structurally and thematically? Which characteristics are chosen to present the uniqueness of the novel characters? Are these stories the outcome of social transformation or do they, themselves, cause the change in the society?

These are the questions to which I'll try to answer by studying works of writers as Faribâ Vafi, Zoyâ Pirzâd, Shivâ Arastoo'i, etc. I'll focus mostly on the texts written and published in Iran and will not enter Diaspora domain.

Marek Smurzyński: The Broken Mirror of Persian Lyric Tradition and Postmodern Aesthetic

The paper will attempt to show that because of the changes in the Persian lyric paradigm in XV c. the proceeding lyric production till XVIII c. known conventionally as Indian style and the contemporary Euro-Atlantic postmodernism have a lot in common. The author will search for the factors which determine so-called postmodern aesthetic situation.

Kamran Talattof: Persian Literature, History, and the Turn of the Millennium: Is Ideology Still Relevant?

This paper revisits the author's previous work on the historiography of modern Persian literature in which the analytical model of episodic literary movement was presented as the way this history has been shaped and as a means of discerning the role of ideological representation in shaping such literary movements as Persianism, committed literature, modern Islamic literature, and feminism. The paper will discuss three aspects of such an historiography that can help understand further developments in modern Persian literature since the 1990s. First it explains how authors who do not advocate the dominant movements are rendered marginal. The analysis of the works of M. Shahrzad, a prerevolutionary artist and poet will illustrate this point. Second, it will discuss the issue of reception and how it is still defined by the discursive context within which readers approach a text. An analysis of the poetry of S. Behbahani will illustrate this aspect. Finally, the paper tries to explain the situation of literary activities around the turn of the millennium, arguing that a new movement has, indeed, begun to take shape. To support this argument, the paper will offer an analysis of a number of recent novels including the famous work of F. Haj Sayed-Javadi.

The analysis of the select works of these three authors, from different periods and orientations, and the discussion of their reception by readers further explains the discontinuous process of literary production as their works reflect their changing discursive context, the broader social movements, and their roles in the debates on gender and identity. Ideology, as a major component of episodic literary movements, continues to interact with the process of literary production, albeit in a more creative and subtle way than in the prerevolutionary period. The theoretical works of such scholars as Michael Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, Hans Meyerhoff, Peter Burke, Stephen Greenblatt, and Harold Veeseer will inform the underpinning notion of the paper's approach to history and the philosophy of historiography.

Madeleine Voegeli: Rook di goo, rook di goo! There's blood in the shoe! or: How to make literary works fit for their history to be told

In this paper, some problems of Persian literary histories are discussed on the basis of a case-study: the manners of representation of Simin Daneshvar's *Atesh-e khamush*, a collection of 16 short stories published in 1948. One of these stories, *Kelīd-e sol* („Clef G major“), will be discussed with reference to its representations (or that of the collection and/or the author respectively) in Kamran Talattof's *Politics of writing*, Hasan Abedini's *Sad sal dastannevisi-ye Iran*, and Farzaneh Milani's (literary history of sorts) *Veils and words*. The representations will be paralleled to an episode of the brothers Grimm's fairy-tale *Cinderella*, which in turn is read as an allegory of the choice and application of (ill-)suited methods. The contribution aims at pointing out some desiderata for literary historiography coming to sight from the case-study's perspective – hoping to lessen the doves' need of giving the blood-alarm.

Christoph Werner: Women Novelists of the 21st Century

Whoever sets out to write literary history has to confront the question of how to incorporate recent developments. Bestselling authors might not stand the test of time and schools of writing as well as typical themes and issues can only be discerned in retrospective. This is similar to the uncertainties the historian of contemporary political history faces where a single event can turn previous evaluations invalid. The way out of this dilemma is usually to

largely ignore the present or to choose the safe way of placing the literature of the last ten to twenty years into an epilogue.

But is it still justified to add a postscript to the history of modern Persian literature entitled “Literature after the Revolution?” Or to subsume everything written in the last thirty years under the rubric “post-revolutionary literature”? Literary production has become quite confusing in the last years and shows often diverging trends and directions. This is partly due to the large number of books published, the vagaries of publishing permissions and the complicated relationship between authors in exile and a readership in Iran. The fact that contemporary Persian literature cannot be taught adequately inside Iranian universities or is restricted to officially sponsored categories such as “Holy Defense Literature” does not help the situation.

Among the most obvious trends in the first decade of the 21st century has been the presence of women writers, in particular women novelists, on the literary scene. The present paper attempts to delineate the contours of this phenomenon, placing special emphasis on the motivations for writing, the role of criticism and readerships as well as the difficulties in avoiding overtly simple categories.

Yuriko Yamanaka: Birth of the Novel in Iran and Japan: a Comparative Study

The modernisation process of the literatures of non-Western regions often passed through similar gateways and passages. The broader issues concerning the wake of modern literature are alike, in Iran as well as in Japan: for example, how did new concepts and genres crystallize, what were the themes and styles that were carried over from earlier traditions, how did literature relate to politics and ideologies, how extensive was the role of the West as a catalyst for change, etc. It may therefore be instructive for us to compare parallel phenomena in the early modern literature of Iran and Japan, to understand what “modern literature” exactly means in a global context, and also to shed light on the specific developments of each culture.

In this paper, I would like to raise some questions about the formation of the modern novel in Iran from a comparative perspective, by first presenting the work of Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935) who was the first Japanese author to draw up a theoretical framework for the genre of *shōsetsu* (the novel), in his *Shōsetsu shinzui* (*The Essence of the Novel*), published in two parts in 1885 and 1886.

Tsubouchi’s attempt to introduce the concept of the novel can be compared to the preface to *Yeki būd-o yeki nabūd* written in 1919 by Moḩammad Alī Jamalzāde, which is said to be the first *conscious* presentation of the European novel as a model for Persian prose. Both *The Essence* and the “Preface” are analogous events in the time line of literary history, in that they both declared a departure from old-fashioned styles and themes and an entry into a new age of prose writing.

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