Persian Language, Literature and Culture
New leaves, fresh looks

Edited by
Kamran Talattof
Critical approaches to the study of topics related to Persian literature and Iranian culture have evolved in recent decades. The essays included in this volume collectively demonstrate the most recent creative approaches to the study of the Persian language, literature, and culture, and the way these methodologies have progressed academic debate.

Topics covered include; culture, cognition, history, the social context of literary criticism, the problematics of literary modernity, and the issues of writing literary history. More specifically, authors explore the nuances of these topics; literature and life, poetry and nature, culture and literature, women and literature, freedom of literature, Persian language, power, and censorship, and issues related to translation and translating Persian literature in particular. In dealing with these seminal subjects, contributors acknowledge and contemplate the works of Ahmad Karimi Hakkak and other pioneering critics, analysing how these works have influenced the field of literary and cultural studies.

Contributing a variety of theoretical and inter-disciplinary approaches to this field of study, this book is a valuable addition to the study of Persian poetry and prose, and to literary criticism more broadly.

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Persian Language, Literature and Culture
New leaves, fresh looks

Edited by Kamran Talattof
In honor of Dr. Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak
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18.2 Prayer by Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhīlī (d. 656 AH/1258 CE) Iran or Turkey, 11th/17th century. Back cover and flap of a leather-edge binding in brown goatskin, faced with gold-flecked, pink colored paper, and further embellished with partially gilt, die-stamped recessed matching leather onlays. Walters Art Museum, W.578.


18.5a Turkish translation of al-Shifā‘ bih Ta’rīf Huqūq al-Muṣtafā (The Remedy by the Recognition of the Rights of the Chosen One) by the Mālikī scholar ‘Iyāḍ ibn Mūsa al-Yahṣūbī (d. 1149). 1132 AH / 1720 CE. Upper cover and Foredge flap (5a) and interior front (5b) Painted, gilt, and lacquered paper-faced Ottoman binding with “turned-out” internal leather doublures. Folger Shakespeare Library Shelf mark N.a.95.

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18.7 Upper board of a composite leather binding faced with suede, with wide red goatskin edges. Heavily embellished with fully gilt die-stamped and recessed central mandorla with detached top and bottom finials, decorative corner onlays, and a partially gilt cartouche border comprising both matching recessed and protruding leather onlays. Seventeenth-century Ottoman muraqq’a concertina calligraphy album attributed to Şeyh Hamdullah Amasi (d. 1520). Walters Art Museum, W. 672.

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A number of people have made the publication of this book which intends to honor the career of Dr. Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak possible. Our community is blessed by the presence of people like Fred Farshey in our midst who may not be scholars in the strict sense of the word, but who read scholarly works and understand the importance of scholarship on Persian literature and culture as an integral part of the humanities in the twenty-first century, particularly in contexts related to Persian and Iranian studies in American universities. It is in that spirit that, as editor, I take particular pride in acknowledging the support this book has received from Mr. Fred Farshey in the form of a generous publication subvention. I am also thankful to Dr. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi for his support and help with the publication process and with organizing the event at ISIS. Dr. Homa Katouzian also helped expedite this project. Finally, I must thank the contributors to this book who worked with me diligently and in a timely matter; without their cooperation and dedication to Dr. Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, this book would naturally not exist.
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Shadi Mazhari completed her PhD in French and francophone literature at University College London in September 2012. Her thesis, entitled “The Pre-and post-Revolutionary Political Representation of the Self in French-Language Autobiographical Works by Two Iranian Exiles: Les Nuits féodales by Fereydoun Hoveyda and Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi,” explores the representation of the self as defying closure by the totalitarian systems of the Pahlavi shahs and the mullahs, and the interlinking of the self with its sociopolitical context, whereby dissent from dictatorship implies a mental space where democratic sensibility develops. Her research interests, however, include and extend to twentieth- and twenty-first-century French literature and thought, comparative criticism, francophone identities in visual arts, and autobiographical writing. Her overarching interests concern autobiographical writings and their links with modern democracy and modern political philosophy, text and image, and the relation of literature and art with political activism. Her recent article “The Violation of Human Rights in Marjane Satrapi’s Persepolis” is due for publication by Critical Inquiry. Dr. Mazhari has also presented papers in conferences in London, Sheffield, and Tehran. She holds an MA in critical theory and French from University College London, in addition to a BA honours degree in French literature from the University of Tehran.

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Displaced Life (H&S Media, 2013). He is also the author of three short-story collections, three books of poetry, one memoir, and a collected volume on literary criticism – all in Persian. He was the guest editor of a special issue of West Coast Line called “Iranian Emigration Literature” (36, no. 3, spring 2003) and the co-guest editor of the special issue of the Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory called “Religion, Democracy, and the Politics of Fright” (8, no. 2, spring 2007). His contributions have appeared in several refereed journals and his essays, poems, short stories, and interviews have appeared in English, Persian, Kurdish, and German.

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Introduction

Leading literary – on Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak’s scholarship and service and about this collection

Kamran Talattof

_In the last three decades, concepts like Iran and Iranica, Persian (both in the sense of a language and in that of an ethnic group) and the Persian-speaking world, have undergone historic changes. Many “contexts,” “reciprocal influences,” and “cultural relations” that were invisible to the world at large a generation ago have now burst into our view with explosive intensity._

(AKH)

Persian studies outside Persian-speaking societies and particularly in the West have been essential and thriving in the modern period. In the United States for example a few generations of American, Iranian, and Iranian American scholars have produced an enormous amount of serious scholarship and have helped establish Persian programs in nearly forty universities. In a sense, these efforts continue the Persian studies that began in Europe in the seventeenth century when a number of pioneers deeply and even ideologically interested in ancient Persian civilization began to work on Iranian old languages, religions, and civilization and for their purposes established departments and libraries and translated Persian texts into European languages.¹

Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak is one of the many contemporary outstanding scholars in the field and one whom the contributors to this book intend to acknowledge and honor for his contribution and his career on the occasion of his retirement. I believe what brings us together to mark this occasion is perhaps a common cherished experience: we have been touched by the thoughts and ideas of Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak directly or otherwise, and we have had the pleasure of his acquaintance as his students, colleagues, and ultimately friends. This shared involvement can possibly explain the subtle similarity of our understanding and assertions regarding some essential issues related to Persian literature and Iranian culture documented in the contributed articles. By participating in this project, we intend to celebrate and appreciate his long history of seminal academic activities and scholarly endeavors, his unrelenting intellectual travail on behalf of the field, and the time he spent guiding many students in their scholarly work.

Dr. Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak earned his BA in English literature at Tehran University in 1966. He received an MA in English literature from the University of Missouri in 1974, and another MA in comparative literature from Rutgers

For almost two decades, he taught Persian language and literature at the University of Washington and then in 2004 moved to the University of Maryland to found and direct for many years the Center for Persian Studies at the School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures (now named the Roshan Institute for Persian Studies).

During all these years, with many administrative and academic callings, which included active participation in the International Society of Iranian Studies (where he served as president from 2003 to 2005), he maintained a dynamic research agenda. As the director of the Center for Persian Studies, he organized several conferences on important and hitherto ignored topics, as evident by such titles as “An International Conference on Iranian Jewry” (2008) and “An International Conference Toward a Culture of Civil Liberties, Human Rights and Democracy in Iran” (October 28–31, 2010). Under his leadership the center also hosted the Ehsan Yarshater Lecture Series as well as many other lectures and academic events.

Reviewing Karimi-Hakkak’s scholarly output and academic activities is perhaps the best way to explain his personal interest in Iranian cultural studies, and his disposition as well.

Poetic’s traders

Poetry and prosody have been Karimi-Hakkak’s major preoccupation. There is hardly any other scholar who has focused on modern Persian poetry for so long with such intensity. Among his key works on the inception and analysis of this subject is his monograph titled *Recasting Persian Poetry: Scenarios of Poetic Modernity in Iran*. In it, Karimi-Hakkak uses a semiotic model to explain the poetic change in contemporary period due to Iran’s contact with Europe in the nineteenth century and through the connection between early modern Persian poetry and French free verse as a complex process of borrowings and adaptations. He contends that through the production of numerous imaginary ideas about European culture and literature and within a series of textual maneuvers and cultural contestations, the new generations around the turn of the twentieth century recast the classical tradition in a mold that could address new concerns. This is an evocative, systematic, and theoretical attempt to redraw or complicate the otherwise widely accepted strict line between the classical tradition and the modern in Persian poetry. In further explaining and illustrating this interplay between continuity and change, he applies the notion of ambivalence on which Bakhtin and Lotman have pondered in different contexts. The appearance of patriotic *qasida*s and political *ghazal*s in the constitutional era, is, in his belief, an evidence of textual cohabitation of “new and old elements, itself a sign of increasing ambivalence within the system.”

His fascination with modern Persian poetry also resulted in the publication of many other works, including the coedited volume on the poetry of Nima Yushij, *Essays*

In his article “Revolutionary Posturing: Iranian Writers and the Iranian Revolution of 1979” (International Journal of Middle East Studies 23, no. 4 [November 1991]: 507–531), he focuses on the revolutionary poets to address some broader literary and cultural phenomena in Iranian society. Exploring the literary works produced around the theme of revolution, Karimi-Hakkak sheds light on the “evolution of a community of literary meaning” and the revolutionary process itself. He shows how literary production “as part of the system of signs” helps to shape the culture. However, the most important question that the article addresses is “why under certain social conditions attempts at fresh articulations of such oppositions in communal myths and metaphors succeed in creating new cultural artifacts, while under other conditions the system of cultural constraints prevents such re-articulations from breaking through the complexities of discourse and erecting new structures for cultural expression” (507).

In “Preservation and Presentation: Continuity and Creativity in the Contemporary Persian Qasida,” Karimi-Hakkak problematizes the existing definition of qasida, offers his own way of defining the concept, and exemplifies his case. He states that in twentieth-century Iranian society qasida continued to be written, but the terms governing its internal dynamics as well as its production and dissemination changed.

Modernist stereotyping of all classical poetic genres notwithstanding, the Persian qasida has historically been used to express, record and serve a staggering variety of emotions, situations and purposes. Having undergone structural, thematic, even formal changes in the process of Iranian modernity which are unique in the history of Persian poetry, the qasida has nonetheless remained an important site for the inscription of many historical observations and social or political visions.

Despite this continuity, the concept of the qasida itself has not been fully defined in the Persian or English scholarship on Persian poetry. Karimi-Hakkak uses Bakhtin’s notion of genre to provide a specific definition of qasida. He writes,

Each literary work, according to Bakhtin, uses the resources of the genre in a specific way in response to a specific individual experience. The genre is thus changed slightly by each usage, but continues to “remember” its past uses so long as it is drawn upon by new generations of poets and readers.

That is, contemporary poets try to preserve certain aspects of classical poetic exemplars, but they “cannot help but make their textual creations, whatever their
generic status, relevant to certain actually present conditions.” In this and in a subsequent article, he uses this framework to analyze a number of early twentieth-century qasida poems.

In all of his work and generally in his studies of modern Persian poetry, Karimi-Hakkak treats his subject with excitement, passion, and profound respect. He makes the new poetry as interesting as the old trade.

Karimi-Hakkak has generously contributed to many encyclopedias, sometimes with multiple entries. These include insightful entries on Persian literature, folk literature, book publishing, gender issues in Forugh Farrokhzad’s poetry, and so on, in such publications as Encyclopedia Britannica, Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender: Men and Women in the World’s Cultures, Encyclopædia Iranica, and The Encyclopedia of Folklore and Folk Literature.

Eagle’s eyes

Karimi-Hakkak is not blinded by his love of poetry, far from it. He has written extensively about modern Persian fiction, and in many cases he has helped to bring the attention of scholars to otherwise ignored literary issues and literary activities in Iranian society. He pioneered in writing about literary works of such authors as Sai’di Sirjani, Shahrnush Parsipur, and Fataneh Haj Seyyed Javadi. For example, he gives an introduction in Persian to Parsipur’s book of short stories entitled Adab-e Sarf-e Chai. One can argue that without the introduction, readers would have had a hard time making sense of the meanings and even the genre of the pieces. Explaining the short stories in the context of exilic literature, he brought more attention to the volume. His article “A Storyteller and His Times: Sa’idi-Sirjani of Iran” (World Literature Today 69, no. 3 [Summer 1994]: 516–522) remains a unique contribution to this day on the writing of a thinker who was otherwise known solely for his opposition to the theocracy. It was under Karimi-Hakkak’s leadership that the International Society for Iranian Studies established the Sa’idi Sirjani book award.

Bio-historiography

Constantly cognizant of such theoretical and topical interlocutors, Karimi-Hakkak is resourceful and profound when he pens literary biography or historiography. In his piece on the history of the Writers Association of Iran (Kanun-e Nevisandegan-e Iran), he offers details and contextual information to exhibit and expound upon the unique place this puzzling organization played in Iranian intellectual history. He writes, the association’s “fortunes, consisting of periods of feverish activity and lifeless dormancy, epitomize the pattern of intellectual life in Iran, reflecting its problems and promises, its intellectual validity and artistic vitality, its ideals, achievements, and failures.”

After detailing the events that led a group of writers who were tired of censorship to heed a government-sponsored attempt to create a writers’ association, Karimi-Hakkak scrutinizes the “Statement Concerning the Writers Congress,” drafted
by this group of dissenting intellectuals. The statement not only announces the creation of the association, but also demands and emphasizes the necessity of freedom of expression and assembly. He continues by chronicling the ensuing events and analyzing the subsequent activities of the founding members and going over their other statements and announcements. Nowhere else had there ever been an analysis of the activities of the association so properly conceptualized. In particular, the association’s debate over a parliamentary bill about censorship is illuminating in regard to the mindset of those authors.

In June 1968, Association members obtained a copy of the bill, studied its details, and notified the Majles in a letter that in the view of the Association the bill contained many loopholes and pitfalls which had to be corrected if the law was to respond in some measure to the long-neglected need to protect Iranian writers from print piracy and related problems.

In response to this letter, the Parliament’s Commission on Culture and the Arts invited the association’s representative to discuss their concerns. One was sent and “a laundry list of the shortcomings and inadequacies of the bill were discussed one by one.” Any hope that such an interaction could have resulted in cultural understating was, according to Karimi-Hakkak, shattered by the inauguration of what became known as the armed struggle and the regime’s increasing suppression of the press and intellectuals.

The association played a major role in giving rise to the revolutionary discourse of 1976–1979 despite (or perhaps because of) its failure to fight against the newly established and increasingly powerful system of censorship. Its role in that revolution was very much similar to that of the other “nonconformist, leftist, rebellious writers.” In particular, after the Shah’s White Revolution, these writers and other intellectuals became even more suspicious of the Shah’s rule and reforms. These authors often sought their answers in Marxism even when they thought of the ideals of the Constitutional Revolution of 1906. Through the review of the history of this organization, Karimi-Hakkak explains the “mutual distrust and outright antagonism” between the intellectual community and the ruling power.

Notwithstanding the association’s important and decisive role in the rise of the 1976–1979 revolutionary movement and the downfall of the Shah, it continued to be highly visible for a while thereafter though in constant and painful struggle with the postrevolutionary religious regime. On this long journey, Karimi-Hakkak writes,

Defeated and drained, Association members were forced to choose between exile at home or migration abroad, between emotional or physical homelessness. Those who have stayed are trying hard not to allow the prison-house of the world to close in upon them; those who have left are increasingly becoming aware of the need to open up new vistas of activity, new ways of making themselves heard.
He ends the essay with a thought-provoking, sober-minded statement:

No Iranian writer who lived through the Iranian Revolution remained unaffected by the history of the Writers Association of Iran. Its agonizing over questions of national identity and cultural integrity, over limits of literature and politics, and over the nature of intellectualism in the national life, its doubts over the character and purpose of the Iranian Revolution itself, its initial joy and eventual despair, were all of immense importance both in and of themselves and as part of a national experience.\(^\text{12}\)

Karimi-Hakkak has also written several biographical essays in which he chronicles and details multiple aspects of the life of his subjects, placing them in historical context, and these are often adorned with telling personal snapshots.

It was as if he were eyeing me on two levels, a constant surface look that seemed simple and trusting, and a sharp occasional glance, skeptical and testing, that penetrated at times all the way down into my very soul, fixing it as if at the point of a needle.\(^\text{13}\)

That is how he starts his article about the famed Mehdi Akhavan Saless and his poetry on the occasion of his death in 1990. To continue his expedition into the poet’s life story, Karimi-Hakkak travels back to a number of decisive moments.

It was his move to Tehran that brought the young Akhavan into contact with the modernist movement in Iranian poetry. . . . In time he would become first a high-school teacher of Persian literature and eventually, during the brief thaw in the political climate in 1960 and early 1961, an editor of \textit{Farhang}, the journal of the Ministry of Education.\(^\text{14}\)

Then the article gradually and logically arrives at the analysis of Akhavan’s famous poem “Zemestan.” He writes, “In comparison with Akhavan’s later compositions, ‘Zemestan’ leaves the reader at an impasse from which the poet can envision – and the reader can find – no release. For a moment, in the face of a devastated landscape of frustrated desire, life itself seems frozen beyond all hope.”\(^\text{15}\) This resembles the impasse portrayed at the end of the \textit{Book of Kings}. And to overcome matters, Akhavan suggests learning from the ideas of Zarathustra and Mazdak, ancient Persian prophets. Karimi-Hakkak writes,

Reconciling the two, then, meant in the first place uniting those ancient forces that, whatever their direction, had their origin in Iran’s pre-Islamic past. On the plane of social perception, a reconciliation between these two ancient Iranian strands of thought – one mystical, the other egalitarian – was in a more common sense a combining of the will to individual salvation with an undying desire for social justice, a fusion, as Akhavan’s contemporaries saw it, of Nietzsche and Marx, both forces present in the Iran of the 1960s more than at any other time in that culture’s modern history.\(^\text{16}\)
Akhavan brought to the movement a solid background in the classical tradition and uncanny sense of dramatic storytelling, and a facility with words that distinguishes his style from all the other members of that generation, one that includes such notable figures as Ahmad Shamlu, Sohrab Sepehri, Forugh Farrokhzad, and Nader Naderpour.

(AKH)

The article is replete with telling anecdotes, revealing accounts of their encounters, and pertinent references to the poet’s works and activities. The piece ends with a conversation Karimi-Hakkak had with the poet talking to him from England:

Akhavan told me in our last telephone conversation that he would apply again next year to come to the United States. “Should we live on, of course,” he added after a pause, quoting from his favorite poem. Then his voice dropped suddenly, as if into the ocean that separated us. Barely two months after his return to Tehran, Mehdi Akhavan Saless died of massive heart failure on Sunday evening, 26 August 1990.17

Karimi-Hakkak’s article about the famed reform-minded author Ali-Akbar Sa’idi-Sirjani starts with the account of his arrest by the postrevolutionary authorities and pondering the penal codes under which he was accused and the reactions the arrest caused in Iran’s intellectual and academic communities.

Beyond the obvious necessity of defending an imprisoned writer, Sirjani’s fate provides an occasion for revisiting the issue of writing under severe sociopolitical constraints. Totalitarian state structures habitually resort to violence in order to silence writers whose works they perceive as undermining their legitimacy or criticizing their policies. The more relevant the authorities judge an oppositional stance enunciated through writing, the likelier they are to suppress the works or to silence their author.18

With this background, he adds a new dimension to his literary-historical deliberation on the works of Sirjani. From here, he embarks on writing a biography that is rooted in the social reality and enriched by literary analysis. Perhaps allegory, parable, and tales that “seem to be the author’s remembrance of a narrative recited from the pulpit by a provincial preacher” can explain his style and forms; those which even defined the open letter, which, “sealed the author’s fate in a way that no previous writing of his – be it an anecdotal essay, a political allegory, or an open appeal – had done. It went far beyond a plea of not guilty by an individual author and questioned the legitimacy of the state and the authority of its spiritual leader.”19

In some of his vignettes and fictionalized sketches Sirjani stays at the level of current events, depicting situations where futile efforts inspired by revolutionary zeal for purity prove pitifully comical to everyone except those who believe the power of the state to be unbounded. In others he delves into the depths of Iranian history or probes the bottom layers of the culture to fetch the
pearl of a single relevant episode about the trappings of power or mechanisms for exercising it. In all such writings the butt of the joke seems to be the pious pretension of purity by a few power-hungry and hypocritical politicians who have mastered the art of dissimulation.

(AKH)

After explaining Sirjani’s sad destiny and its connection with his prolific writing career, Karimi-Hakkak closes with

What Sirjani communicates is immediately relevant to his readers because it is already present to them. In their movement from the diffuse, polyvalent space of the culture to the dynamics of a definable interpretive ambience, his narratives become most specifically political, meaningful, and relevant, for the power vested in them comes directly from the culture.

Finally, another article belonging to this streak of Karimi-Hakkak’s writing is his work on Nima Yushij, with which, as part of a coedited book, I have even a closer familiarity. This article challenges many of the existing accounts of Nima’s life story. Indeed, “there are many romanticized accounts of Nima’s life crafted by numerous disciples and admirers,” but this one, following the usual objective methodology that combines the poet’s life events in the broader social and political events of his time, Karim-Hakkak provides a groundbreaking account and analysis of Nima’s life story, his work, and his role in the development of the new poetry. The following paragraph outlines and demonstrates the content of the article.

As Nima grew up in the northern village of Yushij and its lush, green surroundings, Iran was going through rapid and radical political, social, and cultural changes. In direction and in tempo, Nima’s life reflects much of this change, as we shall see in this essay. To a boy of his generation, the world must have seemed in a state of perpetual flux. By the time he began to make a name for himself, he had already contributed to the alteration of his society; as he was drawn to poetry, Iran’s cultural jugular vein, he helped bring about the greatest change of all. In the last decade of his life, Nima was viewed increasingly as the embodiment not just of the desire for literary change, but of its shape, as well. Yet just as he moved back and forth between his native village and the capital city, he moved between old and new poetic styles all his life. This constant undulating movement can provide us with the basic trajectory within which this modernist poet’s life story can be imagined.

With this, Karimi-Hakkak moves “beyond and behind Nima’s writings – and those of his admirers – to capture the consciousness, profoundly social, that shapes the poetry and to explore its meaning.” Nevertheless, this move includes meticulous textual analysis of Nima’s many writings including an autobiographic sketch, which Nima presented to the First Congress of Iranian Writers.
Even as the news of Nima’s death spread in the streets of Tehran, cultural forces were at work to conceal the truth of that life behind layer upon layer of reverential glorification.

(AKH)

These articles indicate Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak’s objective, analytical, informative, and edifying approach to biography and literary history. In these and in fact in his other historical or biographic writings, he has avoided the customary romanticized accounts of the celebrities’ lives, the prevalent charming anecdotes through which conclusions are drawn, the many doubtful memories constantly in circulation, shaky impressions, hyperbolic appreciative homage, and subjective self-descriptions. In his works, he has even taken unfavorable facts into account unabashedly.

What a good command of language!

Karimi-Hakkak has rendered beautifully a substantial amount of modern Persian poetry and fiction into English. Of significance is his translation of a collection of contemporary poems into English published as *An Anthology of Modern Persian Poetry* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1978). The date of the publication of this book is telling. Published on the eve of the 1979 Revolution, it is yet another indication of Karimi-Hakkak’s dedication to his discipline; it is in fact the first anthology of Persian New Poetry published in an English volume. It includes poems by twenty-six poets written in the 1950s and 1960s. Among the poets are Yushij (1895–1960), Shamlu (1925–2000), Farrokhzad (1935–1967), and Akhavan-Saless (1928–1990), to all of whom he returns in his later publications for more translation or more analysis. This was a unique and long-lasting contribution for its time.

In those early days, his translation of short stories by Sadeq Hedayat, G. H. Saedi, Hushang Golshiri, and Ebrahim Golestan were instrumental in teaching courses on contemporary Persian literature. He encouraged others to do the same and wrote forewords to their resulting publications.

Prolific Both Ways

Karimi-Hakkak’s translation of Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones* (1749) into Persian should in my opinion be a must-read, an essential item, in Persian courses on translation. It is precise, fluent, and powerful. It demonstrates the translator’s deep connection with the long-lasting history of Persian rhetoric once developed in the literary tradition of the northeastern province.

Karimi-Hakkak has also translated into Persian the works of V. Gordon Childe, Pablo Neruda, Carl Sandburg, and a French scholarly work, *Aux sources de la nouvelle persane*, by Christophe Balay and Michel Cuypers (Tehran: Anjuman-e Iranshenasi-e Faranseh, 1987). The latter is an indication of his expertise in French as well.
Contributions, eloquently

Karimi-Hakkak has made significant contributions to the field through his countless speeches in countless academic and cultural settings in the United States and elsewhere. Many of these speeches have not been published, but the record shows that they cover a wide array of topics related to Iranian culture and Persian literature. The joy of attending his talks in usually packed rooms might be another experience shared by the contributors to this volume and many of the readers.

Some of these oral contributions were made eternal when Karimi-Hakkak was invited to recite and produce a number of books on tape. Among them are the divan of Muhammad Taghi Bahar, the collected works of Iraj Mirza, and the poems of Yushij. Sponsored by the Mehrgan Foundation, these electronic formats include lectures on specific topics such as love or freedom in Persian literature.

*We can perhaps say that each book is a bridge between thoughts and ideals, between what has to be said and what has been said, between what has been heard and what has not been uttered, and between what we have contemplated and what we have accomplished; all that we leave for the future.*

(AKH)

Attaining an approach

In addition to the scholarly excitement his works engender, what distinguishes Karimi-Hakkak’s work is his ability to navigate between the intrinsic and extrinsic features of modern Persian literature, between the study of the components of each literary piece and the literary output of the nation as a whole, between individual creativity and the ideological exigency, and between the works of early twentieth-century writers and those of contemporary expatriates. This is looking at the structure and social dynamism simultaneously. It is being able to disintegrate historically and integrate discursively.

With this methodology, Karimi-Hakkak has been able to identify the significance of Persian literary works not only to their genres and their topics but also to world literature. In order to do so, and inevitably, he has not been too worried about the relevance of this body of work to specific moments in Iranian history, simply because of the powerful autonomy that he assigns to aesthetics. It was when he concerned himself with context that he illustrated how specific and original the text engaged with the social situation.  

In sum, believing in the intimacy between facts and interpretation in literature, Karimi-Hakkak therefore proposes an alternative hermeneutic for explaining literary preoccupations with social agencies, political activities, or cultural institutions in each specific text, a hermeneutic that does not necessarily start with reflection upon text-context relationships, a hermeneutic that takes into consideration the significance of literary social structures.

*We might well once again raise the question of how one conceptualizes – or evaluates, to move the matter on to the axiological plane – those epitomes*
That congenial greeting

I would like to end this survey with another word about the person that Karimi-Hakkak is. The contributors to this volume and those readers of this book who know Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak have actually more in common: the pleasant memory of their encounter with the man. To many, his unwavering welcoming salutation upon encountering others is symbolic of his warm character, his good intention, and his overall aspiration for not only the field of Iranian studies or academia, but also for humanity in general. It might not be an easy contention to prove, but I believe that the energy with which Karimi-Hakkak and several other scholars of his generation worked to keep the field of Iranian studies and, in particular, Persian literary studies alive in the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution on the campuses of US universities would not have been fruitful without their positive attitude, without their cheerfulness. The fruit of their optimism and perseverance is the existence of several prestigious and vibrant Persian programs across the nation that continue to thrive, against all odds.

This volume

The articles in this volume are connected not only by their authors’ relationship with Karimi-Hakkak but also by their common effort in applying new approaches to Persian and Iranian studies as well as the inspiration they have received from the works of this man. I hope that the collection can show how critical approaches to the study of topics related to Persian language and literature as well as Iranian culture are evolving and how creative approaches to this study are being employed. In that regard, the articles cover the more specific topics of literature and life, poetry and nature, culture and literature, women and literature, freedom of expression, Persian language, power and censorship, the problematics of literary modernity, and the issues of writing literary history and translating literary works. In dealing with these seminal subjects, some contributors contemplate how the works of Karimi-Hakkak (and other pioneering critics) have influenced the field of literary and cultural studies and, by doing so, celebrate the contribution of this prominent scholar and academic leader. With this link and given the diversity of the topics, the articles following this introduction fall into three broad categories that have become the following sections: “Poetry and Poetics,” “Fiction and Prose,” and “Culture, Criticism, and the Problematics of Translation.”

The book begins with the section “Poetry and Poetics” and Franklin Lewis’s contribution “Soltân Valad and the Poetical Order: Framing the Ethos and Praxis of Poetry in the Mevlevi Tradition after Rumi.” Bahâ’ al-Din Moḥammad-e Valad, better known as Solṭân Valad (1226–1312), played a critical role in expounding...
the teachings of his father, Jalâl al-Din Rumi, in crafting the public presentation of his family history, promoting and preserving its legacy, and in structuring the Mevlevi order beyond Konya. Lewis reviews and examines Solṭân Valad’s poetical works including his Divân, but especially his narrative maṣnawi, looking for evidence of a Mevlevi theory of poetry. Lewis demonstrates that despite Rumi’s immense output of nearly sixty thousand lines of devotional, ritual, and mystical verse, Solṭân Valad nevertheless maintains an ambivalent or apologetic stance toward the composition of poetry, arguing that the poetry of his father and himself is prompted by divine inspiration rather than clever endeavor and a desire for reward and recognition. And yet, Solṭân Valad, while attempting to promote his father’s poetry and legacy, and acknowledging its influence over him, also adopts certain techniques and declines to adopt others, in order to differentiate himself and his own poetic approach from that of his father.

The articles in this section also include analyses of Persian poetry with an emphasis on gender and politics. Marta Simidchieva’s “Three Songs for Iran: Gender and Social Commitment in the Poetry of Parvin, Forough, and Simin” explores the factors behind the enduring relevance and popularity of three poems, one each by Parvin E’tesami, Forough Farrokhzad, and Simin Behbahani, by applying to her analysis the notions of “literary topicality” and “referentiality” as used by Karimi-Hakkak. These three contemporary poems promote the assumption that while the initial impetus for a poem’s popularity might be its engagement with the highly relevant social issues of its time (that is, its topicality), its longevity is ensured by the stylistic devices that translate the “rage of the day” problems into more nebulous symbols and allegories (that is, its referentiality), which can be appropriated by other social actors and applied with equal success to other historical circumstances. In supporting this contention, Simidchieva’s article situates the poems in the historic events taking place during their composition and proposes that these works reflect women’s visions of their agency as citizens (as articulated by three influential female literary voices) and their role as social actors at key junctures of modern Iranian history.

In “Killed by Love: ‘Eshqi Revised; An Iranian Poet’s Quest for Modernization,” Sahar Allamezade writes about Mirzadeh ‘Eshqi (1894–1924), who was mostly admired by his contemporaries and is known to critics for his ardent nationalism. She redirects and extends Karimi-Hakkak’s implementation of the notion of ambivalence where he uses these notions to “suggest that in the seemingly traditional patriotic qasidas and political ghazals of the Constitutional era, we can see the ‘interplay between continuity and change at the level of the artistic text.’” Allamezade employs this notion of ambivalence and the state of in-betweenness and extends it to the issues of women put forth by such “new intellectuals” as ‘Eshqi. She contends it is true that ‘Eshqi’s poems may well have brought some attention to the cause of women’s unveiling at that time. Nevertheless, his fatalistic tone in both poems and the violent suggestion of “annual bloodbath,” of punishing treachery, in the conclusion of “The Three Tableaux” point to the primacy of political discourse, and the unsophisticated nature of the discourse on women’s issues. This article concludes that ‘Eshqi’s radical views may well have
undermined women’s unveiling instead of proposing a constructive solution to the cause at hand.

In “Rebellious Action and ‘Guerrilla Poetry’: Dialectics of Art and Life in 1970s Iran,” Peyman Vahabzadeh puts a literary spin on a previous extensive research on the rise and fall of the guerrilla movement in Iran. His article draws on the initiation of the urban guerrilla movement and its tremendous impact on Persian poetry in the 1970s. It argues that the relationship between the guerrilla movement, as the highest expression of rebellious action, and the poetry of dissident literary figures in this period was indeed a dialectical one. To this end, the article shows the representation of the heroic guerrilla and the poetic depiction of both the demeaning conditions of the country and the rebellious militant voice within a type of poetry – known as guerrilla poetry – contributed to the popularity of the elusive Fadai Guerrillas and other militant groups, as I have discussed in Chapter 3 of *The Politics of Writing in Iran* (2000). According to the author, this poetic movement was partially enabled by the social sensibilities with which the modernist movement in Persian poetry was born.

The articles in the “Fiction and Prose” section employ theoretical approaches in the analysis of a number of important contemporary novels. Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami’s “Explaining Tragedy: The Voice of Ironic Nondiscursivity in Bahram Sadeqi and Mohammad Asef Soltanazadeh” builds upon the assumption that discursive, content-oriented approaches to many contemporary works of Persian fiction have led to reductive readings that inevitably have ignored numerous components of these works. Khorrami mentions a variety of methodologies that others have used to construct alternative readings and thus remedy any shortcoming, but he proposes the approach that is primarily informed by concepts related to Russian formalists, including the “critique of everyday life.” In order to demonstrate the applicability of this approach, the article offers close readings of Bahram Sadeqi’s “Sarasar Hadeseh” (“Action-Packed”) and Mohammad Asef Soltanazadeh’s “Damad-e Kabol” (“The Bridegroom of Kabul”) and “ . . . ta Mazar” (“ . . . to Mazar”), emphasizing their lack of affiliation with prevalent discourses.

Razi Ahmad’s “A Postcolonial Reading of Simin Daneshvar’s Novels: The Spiritual and the Material Domains in *Savushun*, *Jazira-ye Sargardani*, and *Sarban-e Sargardan*” provides an analysis of nationalism as reflected in the seminal works of Simin Daneshvar (1921–2012). Using a postcolonial theoretical framework, he analyzes the “material” and the “spiritual” domains of Iranian society as represented in Daneshvar’s novels. In her fiction, Daneshvar creates a material dimension that acknowledges the influence of the West in promoting modernity but juxtaposes it with a spiritual one that resists its intrusion. She also uses the spiritual domain as a literary tool to subvert state-sponsored narratives of national identity and hegemonic sociocultural policies. To show Daneshvar’s ideology-driven representation of the spiritual sphere, Ahmad divides her writings into pre- and postrevolutionary works, taking a cue from my episodic literary movement based on their sociopolitical discourse. Ahmad contends that Daneshvar achieves her objectives by creating liminal and hybrid characters and spaces, attaching varying degrees of importance to the Islamic or ancient Iranian heritage, and depicting Muslim religious characters sympathetically or unsympathetically according
to changing sociopolitical conditions. This, I believe, parallels Karimi-Hakkak’s work on Daneshvar’s “Kayd al-Khainin.”

Next Fatemeh Shams’s article, “Literature, Art, and Ideology under the Islamic Republic: An Extended History of the Center for Islamic Art and Thoughts” tackles the complex and eventful history of the highly significant Center for Islamic Art and Thoughts (Howzeh-ye Honar va Andisheh-ye Islami). Having been left grossly understudied in both Persian and English scholarship, Howzeh is arguably the most influential state-sponsored cultural institution after the 1979 Revolution and therefore the subject of precise evaluation in this article. It was established in 1980, as part of the nationwide Islamization campaign launched by the newly established state as an alternative cultural institution to the prerevolutionary secular literary associations such as the Writers’ Association of Iran. The article shows that Howzeh, along with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, gradually took over the official cultural scene and played a formative role in shaping the postrevolutionary official literary scene. Here too, I see another a parallel with another work of Karimi-Hakkak on the Writers Association of Iran.

The section, “Culture, Criticism, and the Problematics of Translation” covers a variety of subjects and periods. In “Ventures and Adventures of the Persian Language,” Ehsan Yarshater writes about the Persian language that of all the Iranian languages of Persia, current or defunct, Persian is the only language with a clear pedigree. The article explains the older forms of Persian including Middle Persian or Pahlavi, which was originally the language of the Persian tribes who settled in southern Persia and became the official language of the Sassanid state under their rule (224–651 CE). Middle Persian itself was derived or was in fact a simplified continuation of Old Persian, the language of the Achaemenids (550–330 BCE).

I return to the question of Persian versus Farsi in a revised and expanded article entitled, “Social Causes and Cultural Consequences of Replacing Persian with Farsi: What’s in a Name?” The article explains further why such a substitution happens, who does it, and, finally, what the negative aspects of this replacement are. The problem of the name of this language in English and other European languages is a contemporary topic and dilemma. And it is only one of many cultural issues with which Iranians grapple. The problematics of the name of the language are similar to those of the name of the country, the reform of the Persian alphabet, the tasks facing the Academy of the Persian Language in regard to the fast-paced changes in technology and the information industry, all of which require urgent attention.

In “Ahmad Kasravi’s Critiques of Europism and Orientalism,” Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi thoughtfully connects Ahmad Kasravi’s ideas with those of the thinkers who wrote before and after him. A prominent Iranian journalist, linguist, historian, lawyer, and religious reformer, Kasravi promoted religious homogeneity and an Islam-based polity but was also critical of Shi’ism and clerical hierarchy in Iran. He was an advocate of language reform but was highly critical of Persian canonical texts. He served as a defense lawyer for the founders of the communist Tudeh Party but was a fervent antagonist of communism. And, most pertinent to the topic of this article, Kasravi was alarmed by the Iranian adoration
of Europe, a phenomenon that he called Europism. He viewed the Iranian mimicry of modern European norms as an “illness,” as a “trap” that instead of promoting civilization and humanism would contribute to war and to social devastation. With the exception of scientific innovations, he explained that Iranians could improve their own modes of life and legal and administrative structures without needing to import unsuitable European norms – norms that had promoted individual greed, social inequality, and world war. These are some of Kasravi’s ideas and thoughts that Tavakoli-Targhi carefully traces through to later prominent Iranian thinkers.

Arang Keshavarzian in “Mutual Comprehension and Hybrid Identities in the Bazaar: Reflections on Interviews and Interlocutors in Tehran” recounts and analyzes over a year of field research conducted with merchants in the Tehran bazaar in the early 2000s. Rather than treating these interviews as data or facts to reconstruct or retrieve a history of the bazaar, he explores how notions of identity, difference, and hybridity are formulated. What emerges is the distinct manner in which discussions and information were presented by these bazaar merchants and how their interactions with the author were fundamentally shaped by their expectations, assumptions, and knowledge of various dimensions of the author’s identity, such as his Iranian background, upbringing in the United States, education, and gender. While the variety of views and perceptions reflect the interests, experiences, and identities of these interviewees, ultimately they also indicate how these bazaar merchants and possibly many other Iranians, think about social and political relationships and give meaning to the world. These exchanges also imply that cultures cannot be fully translated as is sometimes assumed in the social sciences.

In “The Odyssey of Jalal Al-Ahmad’s Gharbzadegi – Five Decades After,” Liora Hendelman-Baavur examines the status of Jalal Al-Ahmad’s best known book five decades after it was published in its first thousand copies. According to her essay and research, Gharbzadegi continues to evoke reactions and interest in Al-Ahmad’s intellectual and literary legacy. This article is thus concerned with the mass appeal attributed to Gharbzadegi in prerevolutionary Iran and its alternating significance and conceptualization in the postrevolutionary era. More specifically, it explores why Al-Ahmad’s essay is credited by Iranian studies scholars with shaping the minds and actions of an entire generation of young intellectuals and how, despite being hotly debated and politically controversial, it became the best known and most cited – and doubtless the most influential – textual site for the emerging discourse of retreats from modernity. By probing the postrevolutionary discourse on Gharbzadegi, the article argues that a unique combination of timing, style, format, and content, as well as the author’s reputation, sociopolitical connections, and above all the emergence of the Islamic Republic, gave Al-Ahmad’s essay the edge in acquiring titles such as “the ideological ferment that ultimately led to revolution.”

“Marjane Satrapi’s Persepolis and the Overarching Problematic of Totalitarianism and Democracy in Postrevolutionary Iran” by Shadi Mazhari analyzes scenes of Marjane Satrapi’s representation of the self in her autobiographical comic Persepolis, where the self, defying closure by the totalitarian system of the clerics, refuses to be confined to a fixed national identity. The article explores the interlinking of the self
with its sociopolitical context, whereby dissent from dictatorship implies a mental space where democratic sensibility develops. Mazhari’s theoretical framework is Claude Lefort’s reflection on the birth of modern democracy and human rights during the eighteenth-century revolutions. From there, Mazhari concludes that Satrapi’s adoption of French and the Enlightenment tradition helps to define the self in terms of “the political,” that is, the decision to dissent from the demand that all subjects’ lives must conform to the official discourse of totalitarianism. The democratic significance of Satrapi’s opposition to the 1979 Revolution’s theocratic aftermath finds confirmation in Lefort’s analysis of the French Revolution of 1789.

Sima Daad’s “Accented Texts: The Case of Chahār Maqāle and Mohammad Qazvini” is drawn from a study on Chahār Maqāle and its critical edition by Mohammad Qazvini in the sociocultural contexts of its original composition and its twentieth-century reproduction. Setting out from current debates in textual criticism, the article makes it clear that every version of the work is a unique event informed by the sensibility of a particular milieu that enveloped the production (or reproduction for that matter) of each version. Viewed as such, departures from the author’s text at various stages of transmission and editing are explained in relation to the historical situation. By the same token, Qazvini’s rendition of Chahār Maqāle must be received as one version of the author’s work “appropriated” to demands and concerns of cultural and sociopolitical sensibility in Iran during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in national and international arenas.

In “Lizard as Arab Food: Representation of Arabs and the Shāhnāmeh Scholarship,” Abbas Jamshidi analyzes “Isfahān Nesf-e Jahān” (“Isfahān, Half of the World,” 1932) by Sadeq Hedayat, which recounts the author’s visit to the Iranian central city of Isfahan via a journey through the adjacent desert. After leaving the religious city of Qom, the car he had hired breaks down, providing him with an opportunity to spend time in the desert nature and its host of insects and animals. The descriptions in this section mainly focus on an animal loosely identified as “of the lizard genus”. Despite the timidity of other lizards, this one lingers long enough in sight to inspire a description by Hedayat. In Jamshidi’s understanding, Hedayat breaks away from “objective narration” and resorts to “an expression of ideological prejudice.” He believes that “Hedayat’s travelogue is mostly driven by a factual narration that offers detached, objective observations.” From this rather personal understanding, the author moves on to a larger body of work which also deals with “anti-Arab” representation in modern Persian literature, focusing on how in the seventeenth century certain Persian intelligentsia who migrated to India used that country’s relative freedom to promote anti-Arab representation. In The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature, I have addressed Joya Saad’s The Image of Arabs in Modern Persian Literature. He examines the so-called Dasātiri movement, which is considered a neo-Zoroastrian movement in India, arguing that the Dasātiri anti-Arab writing found in India has impacted modern Iranian writers too. He exemplifies this notion by drawing attention to Ākhundzādeh (d. 1878) and by showing how this thinker had drawn on the Dasātiri texts to conceptualize his critique of Persian culture in general.
Life narratives have been a medium for Iranian female authors to resist gender and class discrimination and also to construct identities that inspire, instruct, and resist gender and class discrimination. Firouzeh Dianat’s “Iranian Female Authors and ‘the Anxiety of Authorship’” examines the writings of Bibi Khanum Astarabadi’s *The Vices of Men*, Tahereh Qurrat al-Ayn’s poetry, Taj Al-Saltana’s memoir, *Crowning Anguish: Memoirs of a Persian Princess from the Harem to Modernity*, and the poetry of Parvin Etesami, Forugh Farrokhzad, and Simin Behbahani and links their expressions into recent life narratives inside and outside Iran to find out how female authors have managed to give birth to their voices, languages, and media of expressions. This paper suggests female authors have transformed and inspired each other in the process of self-liberation. Yet, the transformation of language and form continue as still female authors are exploring media of self-deconstruction and reconstruction to resist gender and class disparity. Although patriarchy has marginalized women and has denied them from their rights, women did not retreat into “angelic silence.”

Female authors, in the processes of uncovering and discovering self, have framed their narratives by forms used by male authors; nevertheless, they have managed to give birth to their voices, languages, and modes of expressions. Female voices have been ignored, disregarded, or accused of plagiarism; however, female authors have resisted false accusations and denial as they have criticized women’s subjugation. They have transformed and inspired each other in the process of self-liberation.

Samad Alavi’s “Living in Lyric: The Task of Translating a Modernist Ghazal” reflects on the critical processes involved in translating a single poem from Persian into English. Focusing on one particularly challenging but rich lyrical piece by the popular poet and scholar Muhammad Riza Shafi’i Kadkani (b. 1939), the article highlights the cultural, historical, and aesthetic resonances that the translator must confront as he or she brings the text to life in its new language. The article argues that Shafi’i’s poem “Az Būdan u Surūdan” (“On Living and Lyric”) on the one hand comments directly upon the Iranian sociopolitical events in 1971, the year it appeared, and on the other hand draws extensively from the poet’s profound familiarity with classical Persian poetics. Thus to create a sense of fidelity toward the original poem, the English translator must recover some of both the modern, politically symbolic codes and the semblance of a premodern, lyrical form. After reflecting on the process and proposing new approaches toward reconciling the myriad challenges that arise, the article concludes with the translator’s complete version of the poem under consideration.

Finally, in “Satisfying an Appetite for Books: Innovation, Production, and Modernization in Later Islamic Bookbinding,” Jake Benson writes on the fluctuating changes in style of bookbinding craft techniques in the Islamic world, which are often described in terms of fashion when in reality they are often developed to meet practical demands. Over time, these techniques evolved from scribal practices of the Late Antique period into a distinct trade. “Instead of an individual scribe producing an entire manuscript from start to finish, a specialized bookbinder would focus strictly on producing the cover of a manuscript, often in a
range of styles depending on their patron’s taste and budget.” Benson’s numerous findings include the changes in the techniques in subsequent centuries. He ends this fascinating journey by writing on the contemporary era.

One Indo-Persian treatise, the Kashf al-Šinā’at va Makhzan al-Bezā’at, or ‘Muntakhab-i Muhammadi’, compiles both traditional and foreign techniques for making inks, dyes, and paper coatings, as well as novel adaptations of traditional methods, such as application paper marbling techniques for the decoration of the edges of text block in the European manner.

He concludes that “When considered together with surviving physical evidence, these documents help to explain why, how, and to what extent the bookbinding trade dramatically changed in the Early Modern period.”

As these summaries indicate, the topics and disciplinary fields vary. However, they also collectively indicate that interdisciplinary approaches might be the best way to illuminate the complexity of these subjects, very similar to the approach Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak has espoused in many of his works; namely, an advocacy of the use of literary and cultural theories in the context of Iranian social history whether constructed within the text or documented in the official historiography.26

In a sense, what Stephen Greenblatt once termed as “cultural poetics” defines Karimi-Hakkak’s work and its evident influence in the pages of this volume.27 While I have always advocated for textual scrutiny as part of any type of analysis, I hope readers see here the connection between the power of Iranian social discourses and the marginality of the success and ephemerality of the aesthetics of the literary output in the contemporary era; a connection which must be understood somehow. And let us hope for the sprouting of new leaves in Persian literary and cultural studies and for fresh insights into our debates.

Notes

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.


9 Ibid., 199.

10 Ibid., 190.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 226.


14 Ibid., 18.

15 Ibid., 19.

16 Ibid., 20.

17 Ibid., 24.


19 Ibid., 521.

20 Ibid., 522.


22 Ibid., 12.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 One of the surprising places where Karimi-Hakkak’s preoccupation with methodology becomes highly evident is in his book reviews, which he actively pursued from the earliest days of his career until the early 2000s.


27 Stephen Greenblatt is considered to be the founders of New Historicism, the theoretical and critical practices which have collectively also been referred to as “cultural poet-ics.” (See Stephen Greenblatt, “Towards a Poetics of Culture,” in *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veeser [London: Routledge, 1989], 1–14.) We too have tried to understand our subject through its cultural, intellectual, and literary contexts.

References


Part 1

Poetry and poetics