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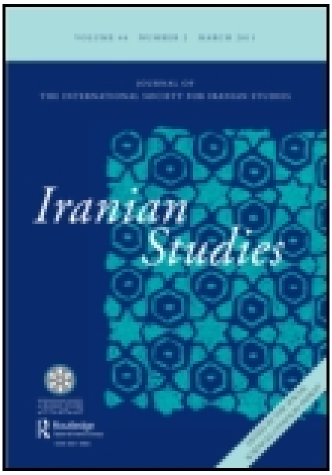

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The World of Persian Literary Humanism

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be compared to changes in Iranian society at large, even before the Islamic Revolution. One should not forget that Khomeini was able to unite many different political forces in his struggle against Mohammad Reza Shah, some of which definitely had a very different vision of a future Iran than him. Although today many Iranians long for reform, it is questionable whether all have in mind the same type of "liberal democracy." At the same time, there are still many forces within society that support the conservatives or even the nationalist-militarist forces to which former President Ahmadinejad belongs. Therefore one should not separate between the political elite and the rest of society in Iran. The elite is a reflection—indeed part and parcel—of society. Just like Khatami's election in 1997 came as a surprise to Iranians and especially to the world, the election of the nationalist-militarist hardliner Ahmadinejad astounded people. At the same time, Ahmadinejad's presidency is also only an episode in the struggle for power between the political factions in Iran, which has now been going on for decades. This struggle became apparent again in the presidential elections of 2013, in which the Guardian Council allowed no real reformist figure to be nominated as candidate. The struggle for power has not been reduced but rather intensified during the Ahmadinejad period. It will be interesting to see how the new President Hassan Rouhani, yet again a religious figure, will run his office domestically as well as in regard to foreign policy. Khatami's project was to normalize relations with the US and strive for Iran's re-integration into the international economy. Both of these goals were not new but had already been on the agenda when Rafsanjani was president (1989–97). But Iran's foreign policy cannot be separated from domestic politics. As Tazmini rightly says: "Khatami called for a dialogue among civilizations but that dialogue had to begin inside Iran" (p. 128).

In sum, her book shows how and why Khatami was unsuccessful in moderating this dialogue inside Iran. Her book is of major interest to all those scholars and students who aim at learning more about the activities and constraints of Khatami's presidency. In the end, although Khatami's reform project was doomed to fail, it left the taste of hope for change in Iranian state and society.

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The World of Persian Literary Humanism, Hamid Dabashi, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012, ISBN 978-0-674-06671-7, x + 372 pp. (hardback)

This monograph bears the hallmark of Dabashi's ambitious and wide-ranging scholarship and offers a rich and enriching study of the history of Persian literature. Divided into eight chapters that trace Persian literature from the seventh century to the present time, Dabashi's study, as he indicates in his introduction, is inspired by the late George

Makdisi, a teacher he holds in great esteem. Dabashi draws on Makdisi's work on scholasticism and humanism in classical Islam and his argument that both movements are rooted in the Muslim Sacred Scripture, the former geared toward teaching and the latter intended for autodictats. Dabashi agrees with Makdisi's supposition about scholasticism but disagrees with him on the roots of Islamic humanism. Although respectful of the sacred forms of knowledge, humanism of the Islamic world, Dabashi argues, is rooted in the cosmopolitan and the worldly complexities of the Abbasid empire. Thus diverging from his erstwhile mentor's perspective, Dabashi undertakes a chronological study of Persian literary humanism and its formation in relation to Arab domination as well as dynastic power in the Persianate world.

The Persian term Dabashi uses for his translation of humanism is *adab*. He rightly emphasizes the multifaceted connotations of the word encompassing etiquette, finesse, grace, culture, and *belles lettres*. He also invokes an oft-cited poem by the thirteenth-century poet Sa'di likening humanity to the human body and the impossibility of one limb's pain not affecting the others. Of particular relevance to Dabashi's discussion is the last hemistich: "Thou who art indifferent to others' misfortune, / You are unworthy to be named human." The Persian word Sa'di employs to describe the condition of being human is *Adami*, from the word Adam, which, to quote Dabashi, "means both a human being and the state of being a human being, or just 'humanity' or even 'humanism,' if we were to allow ourselves a bit of leeway" (p. 6). Given the different meanings the term humanism has acquired over time, Dabashi's poetic license is understandable. As an eminent scholar of Persian and comparative literature, Dabashi draws on scholarly terms and theories from a variety of traditions. His admirable command of critical theory gives him ample room to maneuver, but, as we shall see, some of his innovative intellectual border crossings prove more productive than others.

Dabashi's passionate and erudite history of Persian literary humanism begins with its emergence after the arrival of Islam and as a form of resistance to the dominance of Arabic, the language of the victors and conquerors. He posits Persian as "peripherally vernacular and the language of cultural resistance to Arabic imperialism in the western Islamic world," and yet aware of its own domination of non-Persian languages in the eastern Islamic world. These conditions, he maintains, endowed Persian language and literature with innate paradoxes. Equally significant is the centrality of the lyrical mode of expression in Persian and the absence of gender markers in Persian that render the "lyrical subject ... at the heart of Persian lyricism ipso facto decentered, unreliable, evasive" (p. 29). The uncertainty and fragility Dabashi pinpoints in Persian poetry is set against a backdrop of what Dabashi sees as the "feminization" of Persian language and literature on the part of Arabic culture. Here it is crucial to follow Dabashi's own words: "As Arabic became the paternal language of the hegemonic theology, jurisprudence, philosophy, and science, the maternal Persian, the language of mothers' lullabies and wandering singers, songwriters, storytellers, and poets, constituted the subversive literary imagination of a poetic conception of being" (p. 58). Dabashi points to the persistence of this gendering of Arabic and Persian in recent scholarship such as Joseph Massad's *Desiring Arabs* (University of Chicago Press, 2007). Interestingly, Dabashi appropriates what he identifies as hostile and masculinist, i.e. the ascription of a “feminine disposition” (p. ix) to Persian literary humanism, the decisive characteristic of Persian literary humanism: “The proposition of *Adab* as the literary subconscious of a masculinist civilization posits the subject that it invokes as creatively unstable and always already somewhere else, beyond the command and control of any sacred certitude” (p. ix). The negative valences of this gender binary are resolved for Dabashi in the potential they extend to Persian as the ultimate vehicle for cultivation and culture. In its relationship to the court, Persian literature becomes a means of “moral and imaginative legitimacy” (p. 74) and in the tradition of Mirrors for Princes literature offers rulers instructions on the responsible and judicious exercise of power. Because of its function as the “lingua franca of cultural resistance to Arab imperialism” (p. 103), the Persian language, Dabashi contends, “made the Persianate world possible, and the making of that world was the political disposition of successive empires that laid claims on the poets and the literati who represented and furthered their legitimacy” (p. 103).

This formulation, empowering and generative as it becomes in Dabashi’s argument, has inescapable reverberations of a fundamental logic of binaries (Arabic/Persian, masculine/feminine) that cannot be easily cast aside, as is the very invocation of the term humanism. The problematic history of humanism is difficult to neglect particularly in light of Dabashi’s vigilance manifest in the latter part of the book. For instance, he refuses to liken Persian literary and cultural production of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to any European movements. In the last chapter, entitled “New Persian Literary Humanism,” which is devoted to the study of the literary and cultural production between 1906 and the present, he writes: “What I have put forward in this book is a theory of subjection from within the historical matrix of Persian literary humanism to which the entire European spectrum of tradition, modernity, and postmodernity is entirely tangential. This is a reading of Persian literary humanism that in fact overcomes the notion of ‘modernity’ altogether” (p. 299). And in his critique of Persian literary historiography he demonstrates that “European Orientalists and American literary comparativists alike mutilated the history of Persian literary humanism” (p. 261). Against this backdrop, does humanism need to be the operating term in what is otherwise a history of Persian literature and culture liberated from European and American intellectual paradigms? There is no one as erudite and capable as Dabashi to undertake such further extrication of Persian literature and culture from the tradition of humanism in whose name the projects of Enlightenment, civilizing mission and modernity were imposed on the Persianate and the Arab world among others.

The complex and richly nuanced history Dabashi relates illustrates that the Persian cultural sphere remained expansive, syncretic, and dynamic and capable of withstanding change. In Dabashi’s view what changed was the loss of its vital link to power: “The frame of reference in Persian literary humanism has always been ‘power,’ and as the Qajars began to lose it so did poets and literati begin to wonder and wander around and be drawn to the emerging centers of power” (p. 242). Even this ultimate decentering of Persian did not augur its end, but rather a transition from the court to a newly minted public sphere and new directions. Dabashi ends with clear indications that Persian term *adab*, like humanism, might well have outworn its usefulness: "The current condition of its self-worlding keeps moving from one creative register to another—from film to fiction, poetry, drama, photography, and any number of other visual, performing, and literary arts, all perceived, conceived, and delivered on a vastly expansive public domain" (p. 326). The vital and dynamic public cultural sphere Dabashi describes might demand new conceptual frames of reference. And those who undertake the task will have much to learn from Dabashi's laudable rendition of the history of Persian literature.

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Beyond Dogma: Rumi's Teachings on Friendship with God and Early Sufi Theories, Jawid Mojaddedi, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, ISBN 978-019536923-6, 256 pp. (hardback)

Mojaddedi's book *Beyond Dogma* is a challenging and poignant work, which discusses the various issues surrounding the concept of Friendship with God (*velayat*) and its relation to prophethood (*nabovvat*) in the Sufi literature. He focuses on the writings of celebrated Persian mystic Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273) as well as the works of the early Sufi authors. While the book is written in a very accessible language, to fully appreciate its arguments one requires a certain level of knowledge in both Islamic theology and Sufism, as well as a good grasp of Rumi's major works to comprehend it. Since the book is mostly dedicated to one central theme, namely Rumi's teaching on the Friends of God (*Owlia'*), the mind of the reader does not wander off to different topics as it often does with other works on Rumi. Another remarkable aspect of Mojaddedi's book is his approach to the study of Rumi's hermeneutics. Unlike some of the new scholars who rely heavily on the modern European philosophies of Derrida, Foucault and Lacan to reconstruct Rumi's work, Mojaddedi remains loyal to the traditional approaches of Sufi studies to present his argument. He draws his conclusions and interpretations solely from early Sufi works as well as Rumi's own writings. This methodology, which requires the mastery of all of Rumi's works and early Sufi texts, a skill that Mojaddedi clearly possesses, is perhaps the best way to unlock the mysteries of the Sufi hermeneutics without reference to modern Western philosophies.

In chapter 1, titled "Sources," Mojaddedi introduces the major sources for his research and provides the grounds for choosing these particular works. These sources include two of Rumi's works, *Fihe Ma Fih* and the *Masnavi*, and six major Sufi treaties which include: Kharraz's *al-Kashf va al-Bayan*, Hakim Termezi's *Sirat al-Owlia'*, Sarraj's *Ketab al-Luma' fi Tasavvof*, Kalabadi's *al-Ta'arrof le-Mazhab-e ahl-e Tassavof*, Qushairi's *Resaleh* and Hojviri's *Kashf al-Mahjub*. In each chapter