

The book's conclusion offers a bold vision for a global Arabophone studies in comparative literature. Importantly, it does so with both a sense of promise and cautionary tales from the development of Francophone and Sinophone studies.

Accordingly, the book's intended contribution is most explicitly directed to a comparative literature field that has at times struggled to think of literature in global terms beyond English or a North–South comparison in which the postcolony always speaks back to empire. But it also makes an important contribution to a rapidly calcifying debate on race in the study of West Asia and North Africa. One side resists the applicability of a racial framework largely derived from the context in which legacies of Atlantic and more specifically American slavery are definitive. Instead, other forms of difference, in particular religion, appear more salient. From this perspective race is only analytically valid analogically. The other side refuses the use of race as an analogy of difference and insists instead on the singularity of racial difference, particularly in the form of regionally specific formations of blackness. By pivoting to the ethnolinguistic, Lienau pays careful attention to the ways that difference and identity are discursively, and therefore historically, formed, and are not simply sociological categories that are universally available. The work also contributes to the ongoing work of decentralizing the study of Arabic and Arabic script literatures by identifying shared questions like the debate over the use of Latin script and common points of departure such as the inheritance of Arabic as a prestige language in geographies across Africa and Asia instead of the all-too-common diffusionist model of center to periphery influence.

One might register a question that emerges all the same. Throughout the book, Lienau deploys several figures of race-critical thought, including “linguistic passing,” “code-switching,” and “segregation.” The use of these phrases is rhetorically clear when deployed in the text. However, given the sophistication of these concepts, and others, in Black studies, there remains an exciting opportunity for a greater engagement with Black studies theory in Arabophone studies.


All of that said, Lienau has produced a fine work that promises to be a model in the study of global Arabophone literature. It offers original interpretive work in several languages from Asia, Africa, and Europe, and abundantly demonstrates a mastery of vastly different scholarly literatures and traditions of criticism. It is a feat to be celebrated and a work to be engaged.

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The Rebellion of Forms in Modern Persian Poetry

Farshad Sonboldel (New York: Bloomsbury, 2024). Pp. 255.

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In the field of Persian literary history, mainstream narratives have frequently overshadowed the contributions of lesser-known poets who were instrumental in advancing the boundaries of poetic form and content. The book under review offers a substantial contribution by critically reassessing the roles of these marginalized poets. Through a



deconstruction of dominant literary historiography, the book challenges the conventional framework, providing an alternative perspective on the development of modern Persian poetry.

The author's central thesis asserts that alternative poetic movements, often overlooked or relegated to the periphery, were instrumental in the development of modern Persian poetry. By forging independent trajectories alongside the mainstream, these poets made significant contributions to the broader aesthetic evolution of Persian literature. The volume's originality is evident in its dedicated reassessment of these movements and its endeavor to position them within the wider global discourse of modernism.

The theoretical framework employed is ambitious, drawing on the ideas of notable political philosophers and literary theorists such as Jacques Rancière, Walter Benjamin, Harold Bloom, Peter Bürger, and Renato Poggioli. This interdisciplinary approach enriches the analysis and allows for a nuanced exploration of how aesthetic innovation intersects with political and cultural resistance. The use of Western critical theories to examine Iranian literary phenomena is both a strength and a limitation. Although it enables a broader comparative analysis, it also risks imposing external frameworks on a unique cultural context. Nevertheless, the book succeeds in demonstrating the relevance of these theories to the study of Persian poetic modernism. The volume's application of "the Benjaminian ragpicker" (p. 167) to Tondar Kia's poetic career is illuminating.

The book is organized into four chronological periods: the Literary Return Movement (1780–1900), Constitutional revolutionary poetry (1900–20), post-Constitutional poetry (1920–40), and the domination of modernism (1940–60). This periodization, although logical, may leave the reader with a desire for further elaboration of the author's rationale for these divisions. Overall, Sonboldel presents a well-argued and coherent narrative, but certain sections would benefit from more clarity. For instance, references to the "right wing" and "left wing" of the literary revolution in Chapter 3 call for more detailed explanation of these terms and their implications for the politics of literature.

In Chapter 1, the author contends that a poet does not fully internalize democratic principles unless it leads to a transformation of the "infrastructure" of their poetry. Although Sonboldel does not provide a precise definition of infrastructure, his analysis—particularly of Bahar's poetry—indicates that he is referring to the "form" of the poetry. This interpretation, which places considerable emphasis on formal changes, may be somewhat limiting. Although experimentation with poetic form is indeed a significant expression of democratic ideals in poetry, the internalization of democratic principles is not confined to form alone; it also may manifest as innovation in other aspects of poetry, such as language. The author himself argues that Qa'em Maqam endeavored "to liberate his work from the language, and occasionally the established norms, of classical poetry, which had become excessively pompous and affected by that time" (pp. 23–24).

Rebellion of Forms puts poets from the periods under study in three groups: mainstream modernist; marginal modernist (i.e., experimentalist and avant-garde); and traditional. Sonboldel describes mainstream modernists as the focus of most scholarly attention, with the contributions of marginal modernists largely overlooked. The volume is dedicated to rectifying this oversight, offering a thorough examination of these neglected poets. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that focusing on marginal modernists should not come at the expense of ignoring the innovative contributions of poets in the traditional group. As I have discussed in my study of Parvin I'tisami, some poets who adhered to traditional forms also played a vital role in the poetic modernism of their time.¹ It is hoped that, in addition to

¹ Behnam M. Fomeshi, "'The Female Rumi' and Feminine Mysticism: 'God's Weaver' by Parvin I'tisami," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 50, no. 2 (2023): 340–50.

the attention this volume brings to marginal modernists, future scholarship will illuminate the poetic innovations of those who wrote in traditional forms.

The scholarship in this volume is thorough and well-researched, with the author drawing on a wide range of sources to support his arguments. The analysis of the aesthetic, cultural, and political dimensions of the selected poets' works is particularly noteworthy. The book's focus on previously neglected experimentalists in Chapter 5 is a significant contribution to the field, as such figures have not been extensively studied previously. Similarly, the exploration of Kia and Irani in Chapter 6 adds depth to our understanding of the period's avant-garde movements. Even when the volume addresses mainstream poets, for instance in Chapter 4, it proposes novel and refreshing interpretations of poems.

Sonboldeh's writing style is generally effective, although at times dense and laden with theoretical jargon. This may be appropriate for a scholarly audience, but might limit the book's accessibility to a broader readership. Presentation of complex theoretical concepts without extensive explanation also may pose a challenge to readers not already familiar with the works of thinkers such as Rancière, Bloom, and Bürger. Providing somewhat more context and simplifying some of the language would have enhanced the book's readability without compromising its intellectual rigor. Furthermore, the volume would benefit from more rigorous proofreading, as there are a few errors that detract from the overall polish of the work. For instance, the sentence "This was the outset of a critical correspondence within which Raf'at *defended* and Bahar *denounced* the opinions of the writer of *Maktab-e Sa'di*" (italics mine; pp. 70–71). It was, in fact, Raf'at who denounced and Bahar who defended these opinions.

Despite these critiques, *The Rebellion of Forms in Modern Persian Poetry* is a crucial addition to the study of Persian poetry and modernism. The author's innovative use of Western critical theories to analyze Iranian poetry opens new avenues of understanding, although there remains a place for future scholarship to develop indigenous theoretical frameworks. This book is especially relevant for those interested in alternative poetic movements and broader global modernism. Its interdisciplinary approach also makes it valuable for readers exploring the intersection of literature and political theory. In summary, this volume offers a fresh perspective on the evolution of modern Persian poetry and is recommended to those interested in the rich and complex landscape of Persian poetic modernism.

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Reading across Borders: Afghans, Iranians, and Literary Nationalism

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Aria Fani recently published an interesting result of several years of research on the place, role, and transition of literature in the 20th-century intellectual life of Afghans and Iranians. I was familiar with several of this scholar's articles and had the opportunity to attend one of his online lectures, in which he discussed the process of redefining the concept of *adab*