

Resume Booklet

The Formation of Modern Persian Literature: A Comparative Investigation into the Writings of Taqī Raf‘at

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This dissertation aims to study the emergence of modern literature in Iran alongside modernism in the international context by focusing on a particular case study, Taqī Raf‘at’s oeuvre. The historical, philological study is excluded in this dissertation for the sake of form and volume. As a result, one can find a reading of some parts of Raf‘at’s oeuvre in this writing, yet using the philological tool when needed. A reading of Raf‘at’s oeuvre, any literary modernism in Iran, and even traditional literature produced in modern Iran are entangled with the question of the West. Every instance and moment in modern Iran is an encounter with the West since the modern economy is the expansion of capitalism, smashing various geographies, economies, and cultures into each other within the vortex of capitalization. Therefore, it is no surprise that a reading of Raf‘at’s oeuvre turns out to be a comparative study since the encounter between the superstructure and the substructure of different lands is inevitable within the capitalist economy. It is valid to turn our attention toward other cultures and compare the emergence of this vortex in each of them. Furthermore, the forms and internal logic of Raf‘at’s oeuvre itself boldly suggest a turn of attention toward the West, legitimizing a comparative study of his oeuvre.

Rudolf Hilferding provided an account of the dynamics of the emergence of capitalism in the so-called backward countries. What is significant is that being “swept into the capitalist maelstrom” brings about tensions and clashes, which could be traced even in the forms of the superstructure in each nation.¹ In such a scheme, where different societies are forced to encounter in the maelstrom rendering them as intertwined systems that must surrender to the capital, then it is meaningful to consider a comparison. Obviously, the first level is the comparison between the substructures and their relationship and how they impact each other, or better to say, how they exploit and get exploited. This could be a political-economical study. On the other hand, as Hilferding points out, in such a dynamic, particular forms in the superstructure may appear that can affect the whole dynamic as the substructure has. As a result, one can indulge in comparing these forms of the superstructure as far as they seem to play a role in this dynamic, and be sure that such comparison is not merely a comparison for its own sake, rather it can have a meaningful influence on the dynamic in which one is involved. This means that a comparative literary study could be possible within this scheme as long as it notably establishes itself within the economic scheme and does not indulge in studying art for art’s sake. This is what we aim to do in this dissertation. To some extent, this means that the forms of the superstructure, here the literary forms, could have certain autonomy to play their role in the larger economic and political scheme. There have been some studies like *The World*

¹ Rudolf Hilferding, *Finance Capital: A Study of the Latest Phase of Capitalist Development* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 322.

Republic of Letters,² which particularly use the economic jargon to talk about literature. However, one must pay attention that this does not really fit into our discussed scheme. For the mere usage of economic jargon does not establish a reading's relation to the economy and particularly the emergence of capitalism. Rather, the relationship among entities that are all rendered as mere commodities with exchange values is the focal point of this scheme. A reading must reflect such a dynamic and establish its relation to it to be a valid reading within our discussed scheme.

Interestingly, the same argument could be found in Raf'at's writing, where he compares the thoughts and sensations in the Iranian atmosphere to a train that has reached Iran's borders, and people are obliged to find a way for that train in the country.³ The new mode of production is entering the country, and no one can stop it. The only way seems to be finding a strategy to settle it in favour of people. In the same writing and within the same argument, he overtly mentions some sources by which he had been influenced in the literary sense. He overtly mentions that accusing him of being under the influence of the Ottomans is meaningless, and he has well read classical, Romantic, and contemporary French literature. He mentions that he always had intended to improve that knowledge with his own understanding of the condition and settle a new literary paradigm fit for Iran's condition. Interestingly, he mentions that if such ideas were found in Ethiopia, he would have considered them seriously.⁴ Surprisingly, one can see the idea of autonomous forms of the superstructure that result from the substructure, but work their own way even if one had to meet them in the void and in another context. In this sense, one can easily see that the encounter with the West or, better to say, the obligation to be part of the capitalist economy also seriously affects and gets affected by the forms of the superstructure, namely the literary forms.

With the emergence of the capitalist economy and its arrival at the Iranian borders, as the train that Raf'at described, drastic changes began to occur in Iran. The emergence of capitalism and a capitalist economy in Iran was an inevitable doomed destiny because the imperialist powers struggled over their benefits in Iran which caused Iran to enter this maelstrom, as Hilferding described. As a result of the economic changes that were meant to happen inevitably, political and cultural changes occurred, culminating in the Constitutional Revolution.

The revolutionary movement of Iran actually started long before the Constitutional Revolution, when the Russian dominance was not questionable, and Britain was struggling to fit in the atmosphere. While we are concerned with the impact of the changes in the substructure in the shape of the political arrangements, we must consider to some extent, the autonomy of superstructural forms, as was mentioned by Iransky: "Iran's uprising was not a spontaneous event. It started in the form of sanctioning [tobacco]."⁵ This refers to the Tobacco Protest when people in an organized way sanctioned using tobacco since the tobacco concession was given to an English company.⁶ This protest manifested unity and the power of people's organization in their uprising. People's belief in their power was a sort of autonomous form of the superstructure that later played a significant role. It could be understood as the beginning of the long struggle of the liberal bourgeoisie of Iran against the despotism of the monarchs.⁷

² Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, translated by M. B. DeBevoise, (Harvard University Press, 2004).

³ Taqi Raf'at, "Tajaddud dar Adabiyāt" (Modernism in Literature), *Āzādīyistān*, No. 3, 12 August 1920, 31.

⁴ Raf'at, "Tajaddud dar Adabiyāt," 32.

⁵ S. Iransky, Pavlovich M. and V. Triya, *Si Maqālah darbāriyi Inqilāb-i Mashrūfīyyat-i Iran (Three Essays on Iran's Constitutional Revolution)*. Translated by M. Hushyar. (Tehran: Sherkate Sahami Ketabhaye Jibi, 1357 [1979]), 124.

⁶ Edward Granville Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909*. (Cambridge University Press, 1910), 31-58.

⁷ Iransky, 125.

However, the emergence of capitalism and Iran's economic development was rapid to the point that Iran became the clash point of two imperialist powers: Russia and Britain, which led to the so-called sharing of the country between themselves in the 1907 treaty. These imperialist powers, alongside the Iranian bourgeoisie and clergy, played different roles through the years and changed the direction of their support from the despots and lords to the liberals and revolutionaries, many times according to their benefits.

In the turbulent material and political condition of Iran on the verge of the emergence of capitalism, i.e., from the pre-Constitutional period afterward, one element played a vital role in linking all the events and conditions. This was the Persian language and literature. This not only represented the changes and chaos in the condition, but it also extensively affected the condition for the literary forms to a great extent, proving themselves autonomous of the substructure and relevant economic condition. Therefore, a study of the literature and the so-called modernism in literature is a beneficial tool to go deep into the condition. We will see how modern literature was shaped and based on the material condition and also affected the material condition symbolised in the famous dispute over literary modernism (*tajaddud-i adabī*).

Defining the Constitutional Revolution itself has been problematic, for it is not easy to define a time period for that literature. Though the main works are easy to determine and situate historically, long before and after the period, the works related to the constitutional literature existed to a great extent. However, one can aim for the core of this literature, so then the reader can relate other writings to that. In defining constitutional literature, Baqer Momeni writes: "perhaps one could call the literature which emerged in the late nineteenth century as the new literature as opposed to the traditional old one. However, one can never claim that this literature in its entirety was progressive, or all classes welcomed it in the same manner, or it served all classes."⁸

The first chapter of this dissertation tries to depict the canonized dispute over modernity and modernism in Persian literature that greatly influenced and formed contemporary Persian literature. This chapter will provide a reading of the whole canonized dispute so Raf'at can be situated in that. Thus, the reader would be able to situate Raf'at and his oeuvre within the historical and paradigmatic context.

Chapter two tries to dive into a particular image manifested in Raf'at's writing, which is the shipwreck of the Titanic. Through the image of the Titanic, it is possible to grasp Raf'at's perception of modernity and the modern moment. In this scheme, the reader can see that the modern moment was perceived as a disastrous one by Raf'at. This proves his critical distance toward the material condition of his time, which can be used to depict and analyse his ideas on this solid ground.

The third chapter deals with the image of Dehqan and its manifestation in Raf'at's poetry and other poetical productions, alongside a look at the material condition of Dehqan. This links the disastrous perception of modernity to the immediate material condition of peasants and masses. Simultaneously, it provides a more metaphysical basis for the rebellion, which is Raf'at's strategy toward the modern disastrous moment.

Chapter four focuses on reading Raf'at's oeuvre as an absence that could have been saved in a moment of recognition in the Benjaminian sense. The image of a flying flare is used to historically describe Raf'at's emergence and his consequent fade into oblivion in a meaningful historical sense that simultaneously is material and theological. This links it to the metaphysical

⁸ Bagher Momeni, *Adabīyāt-i Mashrūṭah (Constitutional Literature)*. (Tehran: Golshaei, 1354 [1976]), 7-8.

ground of rebellion observed in its previous chapter and also links it with the material rebellion, which is based on a materialist perception of history, which perceives modernity as disastrous.

The last chapter tries to grasp the internal form and structure of Raf'at's oeuvre concerning the disastrous modernity and his shaky presence in his rebellious stance and struggle in the modern condition. This is reflected in the concept of anxiety which could be observed in his formulation of the modern disastrous condition and also the internal structure of his writings, which is anxious fragmentary writing.

1. This canonized dispute, to some extent, was and still is a meaningless dispute. Because at its face, it is a dispute between those supporting modernity and modernism in literature (which surprisingly seem to appear as the same) and those opposing it. However, this is meaningless because none of the camps are what they pretend to be and what they are perceived to be. To observe this, one can look at the fact that those supporting literary modernism or literary *tajaddud*, which seems to be the revolutionary camp in this dichotomy, many of them are supporters of the status quo and the established material condition.

On the other hand, not all those opposing literary *tajaddud* were supporters of the status quo. It seemed that both camps had a distorted relationship with reality, and they seemed to be occupied with literature while they did not understand that the literature was the result of the newly established condition. It was as if they had forgotten their immediate material condition and were struggling over an accidental appendix of the condition. This was well formulated by Baqer Momeni, where he wrote: “[different] classes had different relations to the production and economy, while distinguishing the borders between them was difficult... Each of them claimed to own many different literary works which, in fact, were supporting the other class.”⁹ Thus, there is a vague border between the classes and their consequent struggle over their benefits that, to some extent, cause the vagueness in the literary dispute and its futility. However, since there is an actual class distinction, the dispute could have some profound meaning which occurs in some particular cases like Raf'at, Nima, etc.

What actually happened in the nineteenth century in Iran is that with the emergence of capitalism, since the old economy and its pillars (aristocrats, feudalists, etc.) resisted the new economic order, the newly emerged bourgeoisie was the revolutionary class. As a result, as Momeni mentions, anything related to this newly emerged class in the late nineteenth century is progressive and revolutionary. The same is true about literature. Anything related to the aristocracy, even if it was new in its form, was reactionary and anything reflecting the benefits of the bourgeoisie was progressive.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the time passes, and with the establishment of capitalism and the bourgeoisie's settlement as the class in power, it soon becomes a reactionary force and produces and supports the reactionary literature while defending the status quo. Moreover, during the emergence of capitalism, some reactionary forces like aristocrats and feudalists joined the bourgeois cause because of political reasons. Therefore, the canonized dispute over literature and modern literature was just as indistinguishable as the borders between these classes. This made the whole canonized dispute seem like a fuss over an appendix of the condition rather than being concerned about the condition itself.

2. The image of the Titanic well serves the purpose of a comparative scrutiny over modernism and modernist literature in Iran particularly in Raf'at's oeuvre. This chapter aims to provide a reading of Raf'at's essay “A Literary Rebellion.” In this reading, we are specifically interested in one particular motif in that essay: the Titanic. There is no particular study on the reception of the Titanic in Iran. This makes it difficult to trace the Titanic and its story in the Iranian

⁹ Momeni, 6-7.

¹⁰ Momeni, 24.

cultural atmosphere. From 1912 when the Titanic disaster happened, until 1918, when Raf'at published his essay, there is no evidence of the Titanic's reception. So at this point, Raf'at's essay is the first known document about the Titanic in Iran. Although one can assume that there must have been other writings related to the Titanic before 1918 in the cultural scene of Iran, still the importance of this very essay is not possible to dismiss.

This chapter will take us on a journey to observe the disastrous Titanic from different aspects. Our journey will start six years after the calamity when the picture of the Titanic sinking in the sea shows up cinematically in Raf'at's essay. This is the point where one seems to doubt whether to wish that he had experienced it or that he would never face it. Such doubt would take us back to 1912, right after the shipwreck, where we can meet a famous poet, Thomas Hardy, composing his poem about the disaster. Having read the poem, we can familiarize ourselves with the critical receptions. Having met the Titanic in the British atmosphere, we can get back to the Iranian scene of 1912, where a report by Sir Percy Sykes can shed light on the disastrous influence of the Titanic on Iranians, not as a shipwreck, but as a mass murder in Mashhad. Through such a journey, we can understand how Raf'at could have understood the Titanic and its meaning in his text.

3. This chapter is intended to go forward with our reading of Raf'at's oeuvre and his perception of modernity. This could be the point where we can focus on the formal changes of the Persian poem in the last century, which mainly affected the meter, the rhyming pattern, and the length of the lines. After observing these formal changes, we can get into something more profound, which is the change of the imagery in Persian poetry particularly in Raf'at's poetry. We will specifically focus on one of Raf'at's compositions titled "Nowruz and Dehqan," which presents the apparent formal changes in poetry and demonstrates the more profound changes in poetry and its imagery.

At this point, we can observe how the modern condition, which was loaded over the Iranian lands, affected the poetics of Persian poetry. The victorious qasidas of the classic Persian literature turn into a great sense of loss and defeat. This is the point that one finds himself trapped in a new condition where it is no more possible to produce poems of victory and victorious moments. This is when the whole army of the Iranian culture loses the battle, and the same happens with the literary troops and devices. The castle of the classic Persian meter and rhyming pattern falls, and one has to decide what to do with the remains of that tradition in the new condition

4. It is not solely the presence that can shed light on dark aspects of a case; its absence could reveal as much. The literary products and authors are usually treated posthumously with a curatorial attitude as parts of a cultural heritage to be preserved for museums and curious audiences who may visit them once in a while. In fact, in many cases, the whole reception of an author and his oeuvre happen posthumously. A well-known example of this is Franz Kafka, who gained fame posthumously when Max Brod ignored Kafka's will to burn all his manuscripts unread. Thus, one can say that the absence of an author or his oeuvre has a vital force in itself which can put into light some aspects of its study.

That is also the case with Taqi Raf'at, but things are more complicated in this one. Raf'at was not received like any other author or cultural figure. His emergence on Iran's political and cultural scene was abrupt and ambiguous. He also faded abruptly. It is tough to trace his presence or later influence on the cultural scene of Iran. The essential thing in his presence and absence is this abruptness. As if something flares up in this scene and quickly fades. No one could be sure where it comes from and whither it has gone.

In this chapter, we aim to trace this flare, study it in detail, and try to grasp what it means for any entity to flare up on the scene of history. The emergence of an entity on the historical scene is related to a more profound study of history in a philosophical sense. However, we are able to observe this spectacle on the historical scene with our naked eyes and without any philosophical tool. Nevertheless, the literary tool can prove itself very useful in such an observation. Thus, this chapter is a quest for the image of a flying flare or a sparkle or a sudden lightning which enlightens the scene for some moments, and then everything fades into oblivion.

Such a quest would enable us to better understand Raf'at's presence on the historical scene with its peculiar flare-like characteristic. This quest also lets us discover the image of a flare and the flaring images in other contexts so we may situate our reading of Raf'at better. This may also allow us better perceive history and any historical understanding and recognition of a past moment as it flares up.

5. Previously, we observed the meaning and connotations of Raf'at's presence on the literary scene of Iran and consequently on the historical scene in general. The Messianic image of the flying flare provided us with an understanding of Raf'at's presence as an instance flaring up, which must be seized and recognized in the moment of danger. This moment of danger proved itself always present in history, even in the moment of this writing. However, the moment of danger, consequently, results in some specific rhetoric and internal structure of a writing which is present in Raf'at's oeuvre since we have already seen how deeply his oeuvre relates itself to the "weak Messianic" power and the "moment of danger."

Thus, now it is time to provide an alternative narrative of Raf'at's life and writing and ultimately of Iranian literature in the modern condition and of the people living in that condition. The moment of danger we live in requires us to recognize this past moment. And we have seen how alternately the enemy narrated this past. Now let us tighten our boots to visit this enemy and base our narrative on something deep in this battle: the image of an anxious individual caught in the modern condition and modernization who experiences this condition with sheer fear. Our narrative is the narrative of the anxious individual caught in such a disastrous moment of modernity. It is the narrative of anxiety.

Therefore, this chapter aims to read and interpret the images of anxiety in Raf'at's oeuvre and trace its relationship with the image of the flying flare and other loci where anxiousness plays a vital role in defining the condition. This will include the image of anxiousness in some essential modern writings, which we will investigate in this chapter. Interestingly, this introvert approach ends in a severe extrovert materialist approach, as we will see in Raf'at's writings on the condition of food and famine in Tabriz of the day. The journey starts with observing the symptoms of anxiousness, digging deeper into the existential angst and its formulations, then the doomed Messianic perception of anxiety, and finally, the material response to such a condition.

List of Publications

--- "The Disaster in the Heart of the Modern Moment: The Titanic and Disastrous Modernity in the Writings of British Authors", *ROMANIAN JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES*, Vol.19 issue 1, pp 96-104 (2022).

--- "Strange Presence: The Animal Who Could Be Absent", *The Strange(r) in Literature, Art, and Culture*, Szeged: SZTE BTK Magyar Nyelvi és Irodalmi Intézet, Összehasonlító Irodalomtudományi Tanszék, pp 106-115 (2021) (Among Texts ; 24).

--- "New Subject, new form of philosophizing: An interpretation of self and self-consciousness in Marx and Hegel", *Tavaszi Szél 2022 / Spring Wind 2022 Tanulmánykötet I*. Bp: Association of Hungarian PHD and DLA Students, p. 444. (2022).

--- "The Story of the Titanic: From West to East", *TISZATÁJ: IRODALMI MŰVÉSZETI ÉS TÁRSADALMI FOLYÓIRAT*: (2023). Forthcoming

--- "Quest for an International Shipwreck: Taqī Raf'at and the Titanic", *Iran Namag: A Quarterly of Iranian Studies* (2022) forthcoming