Persian poetry, an aesthetic system now over 1100 years old, has
gone through a series of changes. Emerging in the steppes of Central
Asia through the late-ninth and tenth centuries CE, it was founded
initially on an aesthetic of *joie de vivre*, a worldly view that remains
unique in the annals of Persian poetry. A courtly milieu and themes
of *carpe diem* and a variety of ideas seemingly based on a healthy
hedonism gave this early poetry a simple sophistication that
remained unparalleled in the works of the generations that followed.
Concurrent with the ascendance of Sufi institutions and power
structures through the twelfth century, new processes got under
way that were marked primarily by a grand interiorization of poetic assets
and machinery of the previous aesthetic system. Mystically inclined
theosophists and poets gradually redirected many primordial figures
of the pre-Islamic Persian past toward new purposes. Novel discursive
and ideological shifts were adopted to accommodate their vision and
explore other vistas of poeticity. Also, in a grand process of cultural
realignment with Europe over the past two centuries, diverse
modelling activities began to change Persian poetry’s system of
signification and communication once again to bring about a new
aesthetic that is now thriving in Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia. In
order to move beyond the narratives provided by the medieval
Tazkerehs and the largely positivist and nationalist paradigms of
existing histories of Persian literature, we must begin to take
sufficient note of the logic of change in this aesthetic tradition based
on new insights into the internal dynamics of the expressive system
underlying Persian poetry.

Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak is a professor of Persian Language, Literature and Culture at the University of Maryland and now a
visiting professor at the UCLA Department of Near Eastern Languages. He is the author, translator and editor of twenty-
three books and over one-hundred academic articles, and has contributed to various leading encyclopedias such as
*Britannica* and *Iranica*. His works have been translated into many languages and the Persian translation of one of his most
important books, titled *Recasting Persian Poetry* (Persian title: *Tali‘eh-ye Tajaddod dar She’r-e Farsi*) is the standard
textbook for Ph.D. programs in Persian literature in Iranian and Indian universities.

*Light refreshments will be served*
iranianstudies@humnet.ucla.edu  |  www.iranian.ucla.edu