

With the Support of the Jahangir and Eleanor Amuzegar Chair in Iranian Studies

Bilingual Lecture Series on Iran

present

Public Lives and Private Letters: Iran's First Literary Couple



A lecture by Houra Yavari, Columbia University

* Lecture in Persian

Sunday, May 4, 2014 | 4:00 PM | 161 Dodd Hall

Simin Daneshvar (1921-2012) and **Jalal Al-e Ahmad** (1923-1969) are regarded as Iran's most famous intellectual couple. From radically different backgrounds - she was raised in a middle class family with a modernist outlook, while Al-Ahmad's family was clerical and conservative - and married in 1928, it did not take long for their life to take on the quality of legend among Iran's intellectual elite. Hers was a literary career. His was a life as a public intellectual. And although his literary oeuvre remained formidable, it was overshadowed by his socio-political essays, most notably his *Gharbzadegi* or *Occidentosis*, first published in Iran in 1962. The course of their lives coincided at every turn with structural transformations in almost every facet of life that shaped Iran's social, political and cultural landscape, simultaneously shaping and being shaped by it.

In addition to their published works (she translated several modern classics of Western literature, and wrote several celebrated novels, all of them quasi autobiographical including *Suvashun*, perhaps Iran's most widely read work of fiction; and he published travel accounts, literary and cultural criticism, and fiction that was mostly autobiographical as well), which provide a wealth of information on the rifts and gifts of their lives, they wrote hundreds of letters. In 2007, a few years before her demise and decades after Jalal's passing, Daneshvar published - with the assistance of a recently minted PhD from the University of Tehran's Literature Department - in four volumes, letters exchanged between husband and wife. Beside quotidian chatter - what they ate, who they saw, and above all, money problems - the letters testify to an intense emotional bond and an almost religious commitment to sharing fully the internal and external lives they led when they were apart.

It is the premise of the study that the letters exchanged between them, in which Al-e Ahmad, the public intellectual par excellence, is revealed in his most unguarded moments, hold a unique critical value for studying both the traditional, as well as modern modes of interpretation and representation of narratives of public and private life. They not only reflect and symbolize the expansive vicissitudes of a nation in the course of fundamental transformation, but also offer a glimpse into the intellectual history of the period, and provide a tribunal to interrogate the period's social and political convictions.

Houra Yavari is Assistant Editor in the Center for Iranian Studies, and Consulting Editor on Modern Persian Fiction, *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Columbia University. She received a BA in English Language and Literature, and an MA in Psychology from the University of Tehran. Pursuing her studies in France and the United States, she received an M.ED. from the Bank Street College of Education, while studying literature and literary criticism, particularly as applied to modern Persian fiction. She has published extensively on topics in psychoanalysis and Persian literature, including numerous articles and six books, including *Modernity & Persian Fiction: A Literary Perspective* (Tehran, 2009); *Living in the Mirror: A Literary Perspective* (Tehran, 2005); and *Psychoanalysis and Literature in Iran: Two Texts, Two Selves, Two Worlds* (Tehran, 1995, repr., 2007).

Campus map is available [HERE](#). | Parking map is available [HERE](#).

iranianstudies@humnet.ucla.edu | www.iranian.ucla.edu