Debating Iranians: The discursive practice of Munāzirah and the making of Modern Iran

by

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Abstract

Iranian modernity has chiefly been examined in the context of a dialectical antagonism between “traditionalists” and “modernists.” Following this binaristic approach, early demands for reform within the country have often been (de)historicized as a theatre of national “awakening” resulting from the toils of secular intellectuals in overcoming the resistance of traditional reactionaries, a confrontation between two purportedly well-defined and mutually-exclusive camps. Such reductionist dialectics has generally overwritten the dialogic narrative of Iranian modernity, a conflicted dialogue misrepresented as a conflicting dialectic. Historical evidence suggests that in fact the heated debate over the definition of being modern and the limits of modernization was often conducted on the universally acknowledged premise of the simultaneity and commensurability of Islam with modern civilization. This defining feature of Iranian modernity has been silenced in scholarship that views modernity as the dialectic, and diametric, opposition of the old and the new. The genre that recorded the dialogue of rival discourses, the munāzirah (debate or disputation), draws on a long-standing tradition in classical and religious literature. However, in the modern era the munāzirah gradually transformed from a polemic between the mentor and the disciple, the wise and the haughty, to a debate between competing discourses which engaged in opposing, informing, appropriating, and complementing each other. Beyond its narrative manifestation in the form of treatises, the discursive practice of the munāzirah was also present in social practices, official policies, intellectual endeavours, and cultural expressions. In each of these articulations, rival discourses had to vie for legitimacy, often with the shared but ambiguous sentiment that there is no fundamental difference between east-Islam and west-civilization. The binaries so central to the contemporary studies of modern Iranian history disintegrate into overlapping hybrids when put in historical perspective. The munāzirah is the account of modern Iranian histories.
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*Munāzirah: The Narrative of Iranian Modernity*

The history of modern Iran has too often been described as the dialectical confrontation between “modernists” and “traditionalists” engaged in a ceaseless battle where the former camp worked tirelessly for reform and progress while the latter concentrated all its efforts to thwart those attempts. And indeed such is often the case in scholarship on the subject, which is primarily conducted on the *a priori* assumption that the narrative of Iranian modernity (with the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 at its crux) is the account of political confrontation between the forces of “tradition” and the armies of “modernity,” viewed as distinct political entities.¹ The binaries regressive-progressive, traditional-modern, secular-religious and the like are the inevitable result of such conceptions and abound in studies premised on these binaries. This is, of course, not to deny that there indeed was a fierce conflict between advocates of modern notions and adherents to traditional norms in the history of modern Iran. However, viewing a highly heterogeneous socio-cultural phenomenon as a binaristic “political” showdown between the homogeneous categories “traditional” and “modern” is reducing it to an artificial and linear temporal politics which is a recent innovation of Western thought but not a transcendental category.² It is also limiting other aspects of societal change (such as social, cultural, economical, artistic, and discursive, among others) to a reductive system of reading premised on temporal binarism.

It has been as a result of such views that much scholarship on the topic has been a reiteration of an essentialist grand narrative that views modernity and tradition as well-defined and closed entities, as mutually exclusive binaries, and as temporally distanced poles engaged in a bitter confrontation. Such readings suppress the contestatory and contested history of modernity. In the

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¹ I am aware that any form of conflict may be termed political in the sense that it is a struggle for power and ascendancy. However, latent in this latter sense is a distinction between political and politics. As such, paying analytical attention to the *politics* of a conflict might liberate tendencies which cannot always be designated as essentially *political*. This is a distinction which, I believe, has not been made in much of the scholarship on modern Iran.

² There is, of course, an enormous body of scholarship on time and modern temporal categories. For a discussion of time as a cultural, rather than a philosophical, construct, see, among others, F. R. Ankersmit’s *History and Tropology*, 34-44, and Peter Osborne’s “Modernity is a Qualitative, Not a Chronological, Category.” For an investigation of cultural or temporal differences as distance, see Fabian, *Time and the Other*. 
words of Hanna Arendt, history so conceived suppresses “the overwhelming mass of the most divergent values, the most contradictory thoughts and conflicting authorities … [and] reduce[s] [them] to a unilinear, dialectically consistent development.” While there indeed was intense rivalry between the proponents and opponents of a wholesale adoption of European civilization, this opposition must not be understood in the ideologically evaluative terms dictated by the posthumously invented categories “traditional” and “modern.” For contemporary sensibility did not conceive of the traditional and the modern as essential opposites. Quite the contrary, the consensus among “traditionalists” and “modernists” alike was the essential commensurability and simultaneity of the two. The debate, then, revolved around the difficult question of how to adapt one set of values to another.

A general survey of selected scholarship on the subject reveals the extent to which such assumptions underlie the accounts of the history of Iranian modernity. In her study of educational reform in early modern Iran, for example, Monica Ringer notes that the “use of ‘the West’ as a yardstick ignores the complexity of causal variables. Non-Western countries experience the process of modernization later than Western countries. They are therefore affected by retrospective analyses of Western modernization, even while they confront their distinctive chronological, cultural, and institutional environments.” This apt observation is shortly after overturned when Ringer declares that “Modernization in nineteenth-century Iran was a process of translation.” The typical conclusion of such observations is that modernizing projects inevitably lead to “the emergence of bipolar categories: modernization, Westernization and secularization [being] intimately connected … were viewed as being jointly and directly opposed to tradition and Islam.” Following Daryush Shayegan, to whom Ringer refers, this “cultural divide between proponents and opponents of modernization” is perceived as “cultural schizophrenia.” Although Ringer rightly observes that “the ultimate import of the period lies in the intellectual debate about modernization,” such observations represent brief moments of

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5 Ibid., 10-11.
insight in a grand narrative that is premised on the dialectical confrontation of essential opposites.\textsuperscript{6}

Vanessa Martin’s \textit{Iran between Islamic Nationalism and Secularism: The Constitutional Revolution of 1906} displays a similar contradiction. In her own literature review, Martin aptly points out that most scholarship on the era highlights the secular perspective, citing Edward Browne’s \textit{The Persian Revolution} (1910), Janet Afary’s \textit{Iranian Constitutional Revolution} (1996), and Mangol Bayat’s \textit{Iran’s First Revolution} (1991), among others, as cases in point. Martin then asserts that her own focus on the role of the ‘ulama (the clerical establishment) will balance this view. Yet, in her discussion of an article on secularism published in the contemporary periodical \textit{Habl al-Matin}, Martin notices the reformist writer’s attempt to equate the tenets of secularist governance with the teachings of Islam (a very common argument at the time) but views the equation as a contradiction in terms: “Therefore, in essence, the writer argues against secularism as such in terms of its undermining faith, but at the same time supports progress, rational organisation and reason, and by implication science, without seeing these objectives as being in any way contradictory.”\textsuperscript{7} In discussing the constitutionalism of the mujtahids Mazandarani and Khurasani, Martin sees a similar kind of opposition between “secular” and “traditional.” She draws our attention to the “profound preoccupation of the constitutionalist ‘ulama of Najaf with the need to protect and strengthen Islam, and their limited understanding of the liberal constitutionalism being sought by reformers in Tehran and Tabriz,” implying that the “reformers’” understanding was in some way more complete than the ‘ulama’s, that the reformers did not attempt to strengthen Islam, or that certain ‘ulama did not endorse secular governance.\textsuperscript{8} Historical evidence challenges all these assumptions as we shall abundantly see below, but one such member of the clerical class who adamantly supported the establishment of a constitutionalist government was Haj Aqa Nurallah Najafi Isfahani (1859-1927) who published his constitutionalist views in \textit{Muqîm u Musâfir} (The Resident and the Traveller) in 1909. In Martin’s reading, however, \textit{Muqîm u Musâfir} reflected “Haj Aqa Nurallah’s Islamist

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 13. Emphasis in original.

\textsuperscript{7} Vanessa Martin, \textit{Iran between Islamic Nationalism and Secularism} (London : I.B. Tauris, 2013), 40.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 138.
[v]ision,” an epithetic valuation that places Nurallah’s “vision” on one side of the binary Islamist-modernist, a posthumous reading that imposes Isfahani’s designation as a cleric on his “vision,” which must inevitably be “Islamist.” This was indeed not the case, as we will see below, but such readings typify much scholarship on the subject. As the title of Martin’s (and of similar monographs) suggests, “Islamic nationalism” and “secularism” are not only irreconcilable opposites, there will always be a fissure “between” them.

Ringer’s and Martin’s nuanced binarism is not replicated in studies founded on gross reductionist assumptions that proceed from the given that “Islamic” and “secular” are essential categories and are organically opposed. This view has led to the creation of a functional rhetoric which I call “the politics of camouflage.” The politics of camouflage, as it is deployed by scholars in this category, is meant to explain (away) the overlap of Islamic and reformist discourses, the cooperation between reformists of various ideological orientations, as a clever plan on the part of the “secular” reformers to enlist the services of the powerful ‘ulama by adopting Islamic rhetoric.

Examples of such apologetics abound in scholarship. Mangol Bayat contends, for example, that intellectuals “found allies among clerical dissidents, whom they converted to their secular cause. Using a rhetoric reminiscent of the theosophers’, they expressed their concern with the need to see religion adapt itself to the reality of new social and cultural conditions.” A similar logic underlies Janet Afary’s claim that by “camouflaging their secular and modernist views, which significantly differed from the beliefs of the mainstream Shi’ite ‘ulama, religious dissidents and freethinkers helped create a broad nationalist coalition with wide public appeal that called for limits on the authority of the shah.” According to such readings, intellectuals “were convinced that the participation of the ‘ulama in the nationalist movement was pivotal and were willing to deemphasize, or even hide, their strong secular and modernist views so that the ‘ulama would join them in their antigovernment and anti-imperialist coalition.”

9 Ibid., 178. Emphasis added.
10 Mangol Bayat, Mysticism and Dissent (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), xv. Emphasis added.
12 Ibid., 23. Emphasis added.
assessment of Mustashar al-Dawlah’s treatise on law, *Yak Kalimah* (a treatise equating every clause in the French constitution with Islamic principles), draws on a similar line of thinking: “Mustashar al-Dawlah, taking into account popular sentiment and contemporary circumstances, has tried to equate those principles with the principles of Islamic Sharia.”13 Such thinking has penetrated the work of some of the most widely cited scholars such as Nikki Keddie. In her *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, Keddie observes that “the ulama’s virtual inviolability and their ties to the guilds could make even secular reformers recognize them as useful allies in a struggle against foreign control.”14 This handful of examples illustrates the extent to which a binaristic premise informs readings of modern Iranian history. Significantly, few, if any, of the contemporary historians, statesmen and intellectuals conceived of the Iranian modernization project as a battle between “Islamists” and “secularists.” As we will amply see, even historians perceived to be hostile to Islamic sentiments did not fail to notice the hybrid and overlapping interaction between these fluid categories.

It is apparent, then, that such significations have been imposed on these “historical” categories in retrospect. Their deployment has resulted in blanket statements that (de)historicize Iranian adaptation of modernity as a conflict between exclusive, well defined, and opposing camps. They have led to claims that identify modernity with secularism or reformers with secularists or that see any cooperation among the allegedly opposing “religionists” and “secularists” as a paradox.15 They have also led to nagging yet unanswerable questions about whether we should categorize a clerical activist as a reformer, a Bābī or an ‘Azalī, or how we can explain (away) the “religious” sentiments of a reformist.16 They have resulted in conceiving of any cooperation among different

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15 Iranian intelligentsia, for example, are said to have “identified modernity with secularism,” Bayat, “The *Rowshanfekr* in the Constitutional Period,” in *Iran’s Constitutional Revolution*, edited by H. E. Chehabi and Vanessa Martin (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 174.
16 This anxiety is evident in questions and conclusions such as these: “Was Nizam al-Islam, one of the respected clerical leaders of the revolution, an Azali? Or was he merely a man in favour of a new social and political order? His activities in the pre- and post-revolutionary years; his high praise, not only of Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani and Ahmad Ruhi, but also of Afghani, Malkum, and Iranian reformers in general; his close collaboration with Sayyid Muhammad Tabatabai, the mujtahid leader whom he described as a man who ‘wished to increase his knowledge of the Europeans’ … prove that he was essentially a reformer sharing other reformers’ conceptions of the ‘new Iran.’” Mango Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 185. Emphasis added.
factions or of shifting alliances as “tactical inconsistencies.””\textsuperscript{17} They have even led – when faced with the allegedly unlikely overlap between binary opposites – to unfavourable psychological prognoses.\textsuperscript{18} They have led, finally, to self-contradictory statements which on the one hand acknowledge the hybrid nature of the reform movement in Iran but which on the other impose on participating figures designations that would fit binaristic taxonomies: “Islamic Society (\textit{shirkat-i islami}), was founded by the freethinkers Malik al-Mutakallimin and Sayyid Jamal al-Din Isfahani, who were in favour of modernization and of curbing clerical influence” (186). Both Malek al-Mutakallemin and Isfahani were well-respected clerics and their society, called \textit{Islamic}, “recruited members from among the ulama themselves.” The Secret Society founded by Nazim al-Islam and others “followed a similar pattern of recruitment and programming.”\textsuperscript{19}

Such binaristic readings of modernity and tradition inform the majority of scholarship on the literary history of modern Iran as well, coupled by a persistent tendency to equate literary history with political periodizations. In his \textit{Genesis of the Persian Novel}, for example, Christophe Balay frequently equates literary history with “political or economic systems.”\textsuperscript{20} Balay’s study is premised on the unquestioned assumption that the modern novel – but also modernity at large – is the result of translation and of importation: “The importation of Western paradigms does not

\textsuperscript{17} The eminent scholar Abrahamian was confounded by the heterogeneity and hybrid character of the reform movement in Iran: “The intelligentsia thus considered constitutionalism, secularism, and nationalism to be the three vital means for attaining the establishment of a modern, strong, and developed Iran. The first, they argued, would destroy the reactionary power of the monarchy. The second would eliminate the conservative influence of the clergy. And the third would eradicate the exploitative tentacles of the imperialists. But these three movements although aimed at the same goal, often created temporary shifts in immediate tactics. For the intelligentsia found itself at times allied with the shah against the ‘ulama, at times with the ‘ulama against the shah; at other times, with the shah against the imperial powers, and sometimes, as in the Constitutional Revolution, with the ‘ulama against both the shah and the imperial powers. These \textit{tactical inconsistencies}, as well as the general consistencies, can be seen in the life and works of the two most important members of the nineteenth-century intellectuals: Sayid Jamal al-Din ‘al-Afghani’ and Mirza Malkum Khan,” \textit{Iran between Two Revolutions} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 62. Emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{18} Disturbed by historical evidence pointed to the “secular reformist” Malkum Khan’s association of European civilization with Islamic principles, Adamiyat observes, “in a psychological analysis of Malkum it must be said that his being a Armenian and his Christian background had created a spiritual complex [\textit{‘uqdah-i rūḥi}] in him. Especially because he promoted modernism and European civility, in order to avert his opponents’ charge of apostasy, in his writing he did his utmost to equate progressive thoughts and social justice with religious principles,” \textit{Fikr-i Āzādi} (Tehran: Sukhan, 1340/1961), 104.

\textsuperscript{19} Bayat, \textit{Mysticism and Dissent} (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 186.

\textsuperscript{20} Christophe Balay, \textit{Genesis of Persian Novel} (Tehran: Mo’in and the French Society for Iranian Studies, 1386/2007), 9, 12, 68, 73-5, 84. All references henceforth to Balay’s work are from the Persian translation of the book originally written in French under the title \textit{La Genèse du Roman Persan Moderne}. My translations are from the Persian edition.
take place only within the literary field; it also includes economics, science and technology, education, and religions.”

21 The novel is therefore “the product of a rupture.”

22 In all cases, non-Western literary modernity starts with attempts to reinterpret traditional literary forms to make them compatible with the novel form; then, due to the influence of the European paradigm through translated works, the historical novel is born, and finally, “within 10 to 20 years,” different tendencies toward realism emerge. The closer a non-European entity is to Europe the sooner these predetermined literary changes will take effect. This is why, according to Balay, the genesis of the novel in Turkey precedes similar developments in Iran, Punjab, and the Arab world.

23 Such temporalization of the relationship between the West and the Rest informs the basis of Balay’s analysis, and comes complete with founding fathers, advents, introductions, and a grand narrative of “progress” from lower indigenous genres to the ideal European prototype known as the novel. It is not surprising, therefore, that the growth metaphor is readily applied throughout the book to the development of the Persian novel whereby early developments in the Iranian novel are compared to the “unripe fruits of this tree” whereas “twenty years later (1310 [1931] onward) they will reach complete growth.”

24 Following this logic, Malkum Khan becomes the first one to “introduce the art of dialogue and conversation into writing” while Jamalzadeh’s “Persian Is Sugar” becomes “the first example of this literary genre [the short story] in Persian.”

25 The convenient exclusion of munāzirah or its influence on the works of Malkum Khan or Jamalzadeh is a readily discernible instance of silencing texts that do not fit the confines of such posthumously imposed readings. A more nuanced example is Balay’s assertion of our indebtedness to the journal Habl al-Matīn for first serializing The Travelogue of Ibrahim Beg (published in book form in Istanbul ca. 1903) and the translation of James Morier’s Hajji Baba of Ispahan (1824), works that conveniently fit within Balay’s translation-imitation paradigm. In such a reading, the same journal’s publication of the

21 Ibid., 10.
22 Ibid., 10.
23 Ibid., 11.
24 Ibid., 40.
25 Ibid., 28.
26 Ibid., 29, 73, 79.
27 Ibid., 26.
munāẓirah “Conversation between the Iranian Traveller and the Indian Person,” written by the influential Sayyid Hasan Kashani, editor-in-chief of the Tehran office of Habl al-Matīn, as well as its wide dissemination through repeated publications in book form, becomes a non-issue. This is of course not surprising when the author’s rubric for the reading of the history of modern Iranian novel is explicitly announced as such: “To understand the evolution of this literary system at the end of the century and especially to comprehend the genesis of the novelistic genre following the European paradigm, we need to determine those intra-systemic relationships which translation as a supra-system establishes with the literary system.” It is in keeping with such rubrics that Mustashar al-Dowlah is said to have “translated the French constitution in Yak Kalmiah” with no mention whatsoever of the author’s claim to the contrary or his stated aim of equating the French codes with Islamic principles, a feat that Balay’s translation as deferred imitation simply cannot attain.

Interestingly, Balay’s diligent scholarship cannot ignore several anomalies presented by historical evidence disrupting the translation paradigm, though these are conveniently brushed aside as “contradictions.” Balay notices that numerous “translations” were in fact adaptations since “translators without any reservation drop parts of the original text, thus modifying the text to the new readership’s taste.” Elsewhere, Mu’ayyid al-Islam, the publisher of Hajji Baba, makes the “contradictory” statement, according to Balay’s estimation, that the novel, prior to its advancement in Europe, was a common feature of Persian and Arabic literatures. This “contradiction,” as we will amply see, is in fact part and parcel of the dialogic discourse of the munāẓirah in which the discourses of Islam and European civilization as simultaneous and complimentary categories partake in continuous redefinitions of modernity. Mustashar al-Dawlah’s (and many others’) assertion that European principles are translations of the tenets of

28 See Chapter 2 pages 73-85 below for an in-depth analysis of this text as well as details on its publication.
30 Ibid., 49.
31 Mustashar al-Dawlah, like many other contemporaries, believed that European laws are a translation of Quranic principles. See Chapter 1 pages 56-64.
33 Ibid., 95, 98-9, 104.
Islam finds similar expression in Mu‘ayyid al-Islam’s and other translators’ comments about the novel. This, along with the generic plurality that the translators accorded the novel, persistently compels the author to labour explanations. Balay, for example, considers the translators’ view that the novel is a form of history a “contradiction” and an “error in judgment,”34 though as we will abundantly see, this is part of genre syncretism whereby rival genres compete for expression in the frame narrative of the munāzirah. Interestingly, hard as Balay tries to call it a contradiction, his own analysis reveals to what extent translators of European novels rejected the idea of the novel as a European construct and to what extent they equated it, variously, with hikāyat (tale), ravāyat (account), vuqū‘āt (occurrences), geography, sciences, literature, and history revealing coexistence of genres characteristic of the dialogic munāzirah.35 In his own analysis of the Travelogue of Ibrahim Beg, Balay cannot but notice the “variety of accents, discourses and languages … direct address [khutbah],” though he considers this polyphony as “likely one of the weaknesses of the novel” thereby explaining away a salient feature of the dialogic munāzirah as a weakness.36 The contradictions apparent in Balay’s study result from readings that equate the history of non-European (literary) modernity with posthumously constructed chronicles of “progress.”

Another such instance is Kamran Talattof’s The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature. In this study the author establishes a framework an “episodic literary movements” to present a reading of contemporary Persian literature under the rubric of “ideology of representation.” In Talattof’s estimation ideology in this context can be redefined “in terms of metaphor.”37 With the goal of uncovering the metaphors that represent the ideology of representation of each episodic movement, Talattof sets out to establish a “causal relationship between literary discourse and ideology,” resulting in a parallel “relationship between metaphor and movement” which in turn can “explain the emergence of a new ideology of representation.”38 This poses several problems. The reduction of literary representation to ideology equates literary

34 Ibid., 103.
36 Ibid., 336-7.
38 Ibid., 15.
movement with “leftist, oppositional, [or] revolutionary” ideology and thus reduces it to a political movement. Another problem is that such a reading, in its attempt to fit everything into an “episode,” imposes a politically determined temporality on literary history. Yet a third issue is the inevitable exclusion of works that do not fit in with this definition (something that Talattof indeed does by either completely leaving out certain works or referring to them in passing in an odd end note. Sohrab Sepehri, for example, is completely left out of the “committed literature” movement as his poetry cannot be read as such, while Bozorg Alavi is only alluded to in end note as his works do not comfortably accommodate Talattof’s “Persianism” episode). But perhaps the boldest claim made is that “each literary movement has forced its own way of reading,” suggesting that not only literary products in a given episode but also their reading is determined by political events. Talattof goes on to claim that “such an enterprise shapes the readers’ literary tastes and teaches them to value political meaning more than literary form.” Thus we have not only a literature that is determined by ideology, but we also get an imaginary readership that only seeks (along with Talattof perhaps) political meaning over any possible extra-political concerns. A brief look at each “episode” examined in the book will clarify such misconceptions.

After brushing aside “traditionalists” of the Qajar period (such as Furughi Bastami) as irrelevant, Talattof takes us to the episode of Persianism under Reza Shah. Literary figures of this episode were, according to Talattof, “campaigners” of the simplification of Persian and its purging of Arabic words, in other words, linguistic nationalism. Realizing perhaps that such a definition imposes insurmountable obstacles for including all (at least major) literary works, Talattof clarifies, apologetically: “By ‘Persianism,’ therefore, I refer to this literary episode that reflected upon and deeply criticized many aspects of Iranian national characteristics, including social life and traditional culture but excluding the Persian language.” Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of such a limited reading is the identification of a writer such as Jalal Al-i Ahmad (1923-1969) as

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39 Ibid., 15.
40 Ibid., 196.
41 Ibid., 16.
42 Ibid., 25.
a representative of the “Persian literary movement,”\textsuperscript{43} completely ignoring his leftist or revolutionary writings, the subject of the next chapter of the book.

The “committed” literature of this episode which, according to Talattof, begins with the reign of Muhammad Reza Shah in 1953 marks “the demise of Persianism” and the dawn of a new episode, that of revolutionary literature, which “derived its principles from Marxism.”\textsuperscript{44} Subjugating a whole range of literary productions to a single Western principle (Marxism) notwithstanding, Talattof goes on to establish a problematic causality of an Orientalist nature between eastern literary production and western philosophy in which the unquestioned superiority of Western thought is underlined. Thus, the writers of this episode, influenced by the engagé literature of Maxim Gorky and Berthold Brecht, “deemphasized form, as opposed to content.” These writers were also “influenced” by the works of Herbert Marcuse (\textit{The Aesthetic Dimension}, 1977) and Ernst Fischer’s (\textit{The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach}, 1963), from which they “learned a concise version of Marxist literary theory.”\textsuperscript{45} Of interest here is the inclusion of Forugh Farrokhzad (1935-1967) in the episode of committed, revolutionary literature.

The “post-revolutionary” and “feminist” episodes which follow are equally based on political periodization and on the assumption that “Modern Islamic Persian Literature” cannot have literary merit comparable to Western literature (from which, according to Talattof, Iranians can either learn or depart). Talattof’s not-so-unprecedented treatment of literature as a political/ideological repository provides us with a “history” of modern Persian literature that is fraught with gross generalizations,\textsuperscript{46} obscure formulations (one such formulation holds that works of the “Islamic episode” did not “lead to any works of great literary value,”\textsuperscript{47} and the inevitable conclusion that modern Iranian literature is, following its political history, a narrative of lack.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 70-71.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., pages 115, 117, 123, for example.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 114.
M. R. Ghanoonparvar’s *Prophets of Doom: Literature as a Socio-Political Phenomenon in Modern Iran* more blatantly draws on such assumptions to assess modern fiction in Iran. *Prophets of Doom* is a structuralist work whose main argument is that literature is at the same time a product and a record of society.\(^48\) Not only its content but also its form reflects social content and social structure.\(^49\) This claim does not seem to pose a great problem per se until we realize that by “social structure” the author means political episodes. It is in this way that the literary output of the 1920s to 1940s become products, as well as records, of Reza Shah’s policies: because of Reza Shah’s nationalist policies “the genre of historical novel … thrived.” Similarly, the interest of Reza Shah’s government in modernization, women’s rights and social progress was also reflected in and reflective of the concerns of a number of sentimental novels, such as *Tīhrān-i Makhūf* (Tehran the Terrible, 1922) by Moshfeq Kazemi. Even Hedayat “reveals in his themes his conformity to the current trends of nationalism and sentimental social criticism found in contemporary literature.”\(^50\) Another example is Reza Shah’s challenge to the cultural dominance of the clergy. This is why Jamalzadeh’s *Yakī Būd Yakī Nabūd* (Once upon a Time, 1921), “which is commonly regarded as corresponding with the birth of modern Persian fiction and the modern Persian short story, includes stories criticizing the clergy.”\(^51\) And again, the “end of the rule of the first Pahlavi monarch also marked the end to the early phases of a revolution in Persian literature which Iran had been experiencing during the first four decades of this century”\(^52\) because there was a relative period of freedom after the abdication of Reza Shah: “The flourishing of modern Persian prose fiction, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, may have been in some ways the direct result of writers’ reactions to the politically stifling atmosphere.”\(^53\) Similarly, the revolutionary spirit of the years between the Constitutional and Islamic revolutions means that “modernist Persian literature may also be characterized as revolutionary.”\(^54\) It is in this vein that we can read the two sections of Hedayat’s *Blind Owl* (1937) as reflections of an old world (part 1) in which the beloved was etherealized and idealized and the new world (part 2) in

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\(^{49}\) Ibid., 24.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 7.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 7.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 8.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 11.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 12.
which the promiscuous wife epitomizes the new woman of modernity.\textsuperscript{55} Hedayat’s style, too, was not immune to the political context; therefore, “in the later years of Reza Shah’s reign, when the political atmosphere in Iran permitted no criticism of the regime and censorship was strictly enforced, Sadeq Hedayat’s \textit{The Blind Owl} (1937), one of the most enigmatic works of modernist Persian fiction, was written. In contrast, following the abdication of Reza Shah, when freedom of speech was restored for nearly a decade and government censorship of the press and other publications was lifted, Hedayat’s writing style and fictional approach became more direct and unambiguous.”\textsuperscript{56}

Of interest is the assumption throughout the work that the modern author is secular, that secular means West, that religious content is backward, and that “artist” derives artistic inspiration from the Western model. Indeed, Ghanoonparvar’s study, as the title of the book suggests, is built on the essentialist myth of the exceptional artist, the “prophet,” the “intelligentsia.” For such a figure as the “intelligentsia, in Iran, who generally adhere to secular ideologies – an Islamic form of revolution does not seem to have been envisioned by them for their society.”\textsuperscript{57} It is not surprising that such essentialist elitism leads the author to the conclusion, at the end of the book, that “due partly to the very nature of this modernist literature and partly as a practical ploy to avoid government censorship, created a rather esoteric literature which excluded not only the general public … but also many of the literate Iranians who did not comprehend these novel approaches. Consequently, in terms of its social impact, modernist Persian literature … seems to have fallen short of accomplishing its mission.”\textsuperscript{58} It does not take a close reading to notice the extent to which binaries Islam-modern, following the country’s political history, inform such analyses. Fatemeh Keshavarz takes this very issue to task in her \textit{Recite in the Name of the Red Rose: Poetic Sacred Making in Twentieth-Century Iran}.

One of the few works that challenges the critical orthodoxy, \textit{Poetic Sacred Making} opens up room for much needed critical scrutiny. The main argument of Keshavarz’s book is that expressions of the sacred or the secular in modern Persian poetry are constitutive not descriptive.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 15-16.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 152.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 66.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 179-80.
She argues that reading modernity, modern literature, modern poetry, and so on as a simple opposition between the “traditional/sacred/religious” and “modern/objective/secular” reduces the complexity of the processes of transformation within these concepts to simplistic, fixated concepts that close our reading to alternative modes of interpretation. In this respect, modern Persian poetry is often labelled as “secular,” a reading that restricts interpretation to preconceived ideas and excludes “the sacred” (in its refashioned and reconstructed forms) from these texts. Therefore, viewing the advent of the 1979 religious revolution as a period of, alternatively, decline or “secular” protest overlooks the genealogy of the notions of sacred and secular in modern Iranian literature: “the poetic encounter with the sacred in twentieth-century Iran includes decades of artistic expression prior to 1979 … These valuable accounts of the sacred will fall through the cracks if we continue to define as secular all who do not embrace a traditional Muslim way of life … An even greater handicap is the one-sidedness of the modern critical apparatus, which has deprived us of a deeper insight into the human inner developments by succumbing to uncompromising categories such as the secular.”

Thus, for example, we can challenge mainstream views of two major poets of modern Iran, Forugh Farrokhzad and Sohrab Sepehri (1928-1980). Farrokhzad in such views is a “revolutionary” and “secular” poet while Sepehri is considered a spiritual poet, ignored in some anthologies, or dismissed as “petty bourgeois” in others. However, both poets in much of their poetry “replaced direct Qur’anic quotations with an adoption of the scriptural rhythm.” The co-existence of the sacred and the secular which Keshavarz refers to has, as we will see, its genealogy in the discursive practice of the munāzirah, a benchmark that allows for a redifinition of modern making in Iranian literature.

Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak’s Recasting Persian Poetry: Scenarios of Modernity in Iran is another rare example of such an attempt, one of the few works that takes a more balanced and nuanced approach on the issue of poetic modernity. Unfortunately, however, Recasting Persian Poetry is still not immune to moments of resorting to the developmental-evaluative discourse. Thus, for example, “[t]hat he poetic text is also a kind of abstract social structure, its forms and functions somehow related to, or reflective of, the evolution of concrete social structures, emerges as the

60 Ibid., 26.
main point of agreement in the process of recasting Persian poetry.”61 Much like the “social structure” deployed by Qanoonparvar and others, the social structures of which Karimi-Hakkak speaks turn out to be politically determined entities so that “the rechanneling of the lyrical impulse toward events of socio-political moment comes to constitute a primary index of poetic modernity.”62 The underlying assumption in such statements, as we have seen, is often the benchmark that pitches the “traditional” against the “modern” in a “political” battle. It is as a result of such a premise that in examining the evolution of “New Poetry” from its classical predecessor the author asserts that two aspects of traditional Persian poetry – tazād (contrariety) and tibāq (coincidence) – had eliminated the possibility of any relative distinction: “I stress the exclusive nature of binary oppositions because in their inability to conceive of any difference in terms other than utter opposition, they illustrate a far larger issue. The ‘language’ of classical Persian poetry, particularly the lyrical tradition in it, had gradually given rise to a relatively closed system of poetic signification and communication which did not allow for the assimilation of new elements.”63 Though the author takes special care to historicize literary modernity without producing another version of the Orientalist narrative of tradition versus modernity throughout the book, the pervasive assumptions of the developmental-evaluative approach still find room to shine through in such instances. Thus it is that the intense debates that took place between the proponents of New Poetry and supporters of the “Return Movement” headed by Bahar are repeatedly referred to and analysed in Karimi-Hakkak’s otherwise excellent study as a diametric opposition between traditionalists and modernists, without heeding their dialogic rivalry.

Finally, Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami’s Modern Reflections of Classical Traditions in Persian Fiction is another similar attempt at departing from the binaristic-political approach. In his study Khorrami draws attention to a much overlooked area of investigation regarding modern Persian fiction, namely, methodological considerations in an area of scholarship which has been dominated by socio-political discourse. Khorrami contends, rightly, that historical studies of modern Persian prose literature have largely been driven methodologically by content analysis and ideologically by socio-political discourse. In such studies the modern Iranian novel is a

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62 Ibid., 97.
63 Ibid., 25.
“derivative” construct, a largely poor imitation of its Western predecessor. Such studies ignore the “components which define the literariness of the word,”\textsuperscript{64} focusing instead either on the relation of a work’s content to its socio-political context or else through aesthetic comparisons with the superior Western model. Consequently, Khorrami’s objective is “to begin with the concept of literariness and structures of fiction and to then move on to the precise explanation of this specific ‘influence’ in this framework.”\textsuperscript{65} What Khorrami fails to point out, however, is that in the tradition of literary criticism in Iran there is not necessarily a “[d]isregard for linguistic-structural studies” just as this does not necessarily lead to “the separation of different components of the text, such as structure, language, content."\textsuperscript{66} There is in fact ample analysis of the above in scholarship. The problem, rather, lies in the fact that by virtue of being premised on an essential antagonism between the binaries tradition-modernity assessments of modern Iranian literature (be they political, ideological, aesthetic, or “linguistic-structural”) continue to reach similar conclusions. Khorrami’s own analysis draws from the Bakhtinian theory of the novel, particularly the notions of dialogism and heteroglossia. The focus, therefore, should be on “novelization” rather than on a definitive definition of the novel, an approach which will deem the novelistic genre to be perpetually unfinished.\textsuperscript{67} Khorrami goes on to demonstrate how using this approach, one can classify modern Persian fiction as a dramatization of the process of novelization and not necessarily an imitation of Western (particularly French) fiction. However, this does not prevent the author from reproducing the canon since the authors that fit his model of analysis are Jamalzadeh, Parsipour, and Mandanipour. This, I believe, is because Khorrami takes Bakhtin’s dialogism at face value, considering it as a theoretical given rather than as an analytical tool. This is caused by the author’s faith in the Russian formalist agenda to free literature from a terrain for the exercise of other disciplines (sociology, psychology, philosophy, etc.) in order to make literary studies an “independent” discipline, the very opposite of what Bakhtin means by “novelization.” This is evidenced by the author’s defence of the formalists in this noble effort of theirs.\textsuperscript{68} And hence there emerges a fundamental flaw in the author’s

\textsuperscript{64} Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami, \textit{Modern Reflections} (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 7.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 14-19.
argument: “literariness,” as proposed by the formalists and Bakhtin, is never defined. It is simply accepted as an ideal state where all literature is safely stored away, protected from other disciplines. The implication of such an approach is that it will, while challenging the mainstream tradition, turn into a one-sided analysis of the existence (or lack there) of some ideal (and decontextualized) state: literariness.

Though space constraints do not allow for a more comprehensive review of literature, the sampling of the works above or a cursory look through other commonly referenced works in modern Iranian literary criticism (other examples of such reference works include Abedini’s *Sad Sāl Dāstan Nivīsī-yi Īrān* [A Hundred Years of Story Writing in Iran] and Aryanpour’s *Az Sabā tā Nīmā* [From Saba to Nima]) confirm the existence of the above-mentioned assumptions, accompanied by the resulting monologic reductions, in scholarship on modern Iranian literature.

It is in light of such reductions that the *munāzirah* is subduced to “treatise” (*risālah*). Often defined as “political” (occasionally also referred to as “economic” or “social”)*69* *munāzirah* as treatise conveniently accommodates the requirement for a dialectic narrative that would advocate a certain ideology over others. As far as the definition of “treatise” as a work written on a specific subject is concerned, including the *munāzirah* as a subheading presents no difficulty. Nonetheless, where form and the requirement for a systematic approach to a single subject are concerned, this designation reduces the *munāzirah* to a monological (and mono-logical) text. It is more accurate, as I hope to illustrate in this study, to view genres such as the treatise, the epistolary, the novelistic, the petition, the journalistic, the memoir, the travelogue, the dramatic and so on as participating discourses in the genre of the Constitutional era: the *munāzirah*.

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69 Writings of this period, whether written in the form of *munāzirah* or not, are, when posthumously published, often categorized as “treatise” as long as they are not book length works or else not readily recognizable as travelogues or some such formally familiar nomenclature. See for example a collection of such writings edited by Fereydun Adamiyat and Homa Natig entitled *Social, Political and Economic Thought in the Unpublished Works of the Qajar Era* (Tehran: Agah, 1356/1977). The *munāzirah* *Shaykh u Shākh* is subtitled “A critical debate between a traditionalist Shaykh and a saucy modernist: A socio-political treatise from the end of the Qajar era” (Tehran: Rowzanah, 1373/1994), emphasis added. Similarly, Mustashar al-Dowlah’s *Yak Kalimah* (One Word) is subtitled, by the editors A. A. Seyed-Ghorab and S. McGlinn, “Mirza Yusof Khan Mustashar ad-Dowlah Tabrizi’s Treatise on Codified Law (Yak Kaleme)” (Amsterdam & West Lafayette, Indiana: Rozenberg Publishers & Purdue University Press, 2008). Emphasis in original.
The munāzirah as a literary genre has a long history in Persian letters stretching from pre-Islamic times to the present.\(^70\) The literal meaning of the term munāzirah is debate or exchange of opinions. As a literary genre, the munūzirah refers to a piece of writing in verse or prose in which two entities (objects, animals, human figures) put an issue to debate until one side overcomes the other through argument. These issues are often philosophical, moral, or didactic in nature. The earliest record of a munūzirah in Iran is Dirakht-i Āṣūrīk [Assyrian Tree] written in Achaemenid Pahlavi.\(^71\) It is a debate between a goat and a date tree over the question of which one is more beneficial to humans. Following Muhammad Taqi Bahar, Chavosh Akbari traces the roots of the munūzirah to pre-Islamic times in north west Iran and believes that the first munūzirahs are found in the Zoroastrian Gathas.\(^72\) In post-Islamic Persia, the earliest munūzirahs are attributed to Asadi Tusi (d. ca. 1072) who often started his panegyric qassidahs with a munūzirah between opponents such as night and day, earth and sky, Zoroastrian and Muslim.\(^73\) The poets of the so-called Iraqi and Indian schools also made ample use of the munūzirah in their poetry. The debate between Byzantine and Chinese painters in the Iskandarnāmah (The Book of Alexander, ca. 1210) of Nezami Ganjavi (born ca. 1136) is one such example.\(^74\)

In the early modern era, the classical munūzirah was revived through the contributions of a number of well-known poets. Muhammad Taqi Bahar (1884-1951) – poet laureate, politician, historian, and scholar of literature – wrote several of his poems in the form of munūzirah. These include the “Spring and the Stone,” “Scarab and Nightingale,” “Reed and Acorn” and so on.\(^75\) The Punjabi poet and philosopher Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), also known as Iqbal of Lahore, who composed poetry in both Persian and Urdu also wrote some of his poems in the form of a munūzirah. One such poem is entitled “Muhāvirah-yi ‘Ilm u ‘Aql” (the debate between knowledge and intellect).\(^76\) But perhaps the best-known poet for reviving the classical munūzirah

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\(^70\) There are numerous studies dealing with the munūzirah wholly or partially. For a recent example, see Maryam Sharif Nasab, “Irtibāt-i Kalāmī dar Shi‘r-i Kuhan-i Pārsī,” Kuhan Nāmah-i Adab-i Pārsī, 2/2 (1390/2011), 71-88.


\(^72\) Rahim Chavosh Akbari, Hakīm Bānū-yi Shi‘r-i Irān (Tehran: Sales, 1378/1999), 129-30.


\(^75\) Mehrdad Bahar, Dīvān-i Ashʿār (Tehran: Tus, 1365/1986).

\(^76\) Ahmad Sorush, Kulliyāt-i Ashʿār-i Fārsī (Tehran: Ketabkhaneh Sana’i, 1366/1987), 221.
in the modern era is Parvin E’tesami (1907-1941). Her poetic oeuvre includes numerous and well-known munāzirahs involving debates between, often, things, animals, or plants contemplating moral and philosophical questions in life. Although mostly in verse, there are a number of prose munāzirahs in Persian literature. Examples of prose munāzirahs include parts of Maqāmāt-i Hamīdī (Hamidi’s Stories) of Hamidi Balkhi (d. 1202) such as the debate between the atheist and the Sunni or the conversation between the physician and the astrologist and several prose munāzirahs by Sa’di and Attar. In all examples of the classical munāzirah the goal of the poet or the writer in fielding two opposing elements is to prove a philosophical view or to teach a moral while the winning side has already been determined depending on the writer’s allegiances.

From the middle of the 19th century onward, however, changing sociocultural configurations, together with the unprecedented presence of foreign influence in the country, provided for the conditions that would make the munāzirah the social genre of choice for the expression of shifting paradigms. Perhaps the term “genre” and its textual overtones cannot convey the sheer omnipotence of the munāzirah not only in the writings of this era but also in its discourse. For to understand the significance of the munāzirah, we need to heed its prevalence not only in the written text but also in the social text. To the extent that certain writings followed the formal constraints of the munāzirah (and multitudes did), it would be sufficient to call it a genre, and the sheer volume of writings produced in this form would justify designating it as the genre of the era. But even when writings did not follow the formal attributes of the munāzirah, I argue, they were informed by its dialogical orientation in various ways. In this capacity, it is important at the outset to lay out the shifting nature of the munāzirah from its ancient employment as a story involving two characters engaged in a dialogue to its evolved and evolving form as a dialogic narrative.

As mentioned earlier, the munāzirah draws on a long-standing tradition in classical literature (in the form of a dialogue between two characters often in verse and for didactic purposes) as well

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77 Heshmat Mo’ayyed, “Parvin E’tesami,” Encyclopeda Iranica.
as in religious prose (in the form *tawzīḥ al-masā’il* or exposition of religious matters). However, in the modern era the *munāẓirah* gradually transformed from a polemic between the mentor and the disciple, the wise and the haughty, to a debate between competing discourses which engaged in opposing, informing, appropriating, and complementing each other. Even when a polemic was not written compositionally as a *munāẓirah*, it was invested in its dialogical approach towards competing ideologies. Thus, the main feature of the *munāẓirah* is its dialogical orientation. It forms the frame narrative through which the foreign and the indigenous, the traditional and the modern, the religious and the national, the rational and the inspirational coexist, intersect, repel, attract, overlap, and, most importantly, inform each other. The narrative features of the *munāẓirah* reflect the social dialogue among disparate yet complementary ideologies.

Indeed, narrative overlap is a salient feature of the *munāẓirah*. It is first and foremost interdiscursive: compositional modes (dialogue, prose, poetry), narratorial orientations (vague or overlapping boundary between the split author-narrator, direct and indirect speech), genres (memoir, political pamphlet, travelogue), languages, accents, and styles are mixed and set in motion in dialogic interaction.\(^{80}\) These “voices” are not only reflected in speech but also in the medium and style in which they are uttered. This polyphonic, “multi-voiced,” and “multi-styled” feature of the *munāẓirah* constitutes its “language.”\(^{81}\) It is reflected in a variously mediated author-narrator whose speech has no clear authorial, much less authoritative, boundaries. It is also reflected in a syncretic formation where other texts (newspapers, constitutional codes, verse, histories, religious axioms) are quite literally placed next to each other on the page within the frame narrative of the *munāẓirah*. The *munāẓirah* is a compendium of quoted speech from social classes, genres, and schools of thought. What makes these “voices” dialogic is their interaction which is filled with tension and contradiction.\(^{82}\) Languages, quite literally, Arabic, French, English, Turkish, Russian, Hindi, compete for expression within the frame language of the

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\(^{80}\) These are purported to be the features of postmodern novel as well. See for example Mieke Bal, *Narratology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 70.

\(^{81}\) These Bakhtinian concepts are applied to the novel. However, whereas for Bakhtin these constitute the linguistic feature of the novel, in the case of the *munāẓirah* they constitute the building blocks of the narrative structure. In other words, heteroglossia and multi-styled-ness are linguistic phenomena in Bakhtin’s novel. In the case of the *munāẓirah*, however, polyphony is not only linguistically reflected, but also, quite literally, a narrative strategy. For more on dialogism and its realization in the novel, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Dialogical Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), especially pages 261-365.

\(^{82}\) Bakhtin’s term for this state is “dialogized heteroglossia,” *Dialogical Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 272.
munāzirah, Persian, which not only represents but also is itself represented by them. The languages of different literary styles and of different epochs and of different classes and ideologies singly or in combination take the field and speak through the munāzirah. Embedded narratives (notes, petitions, letters, royal speeches, sermons) occupy space on the page and populate the polyphonic world of the munāzirah. These languages of past and future, of ideologies, of science and religion, of others’ voices, of different styles and genres, speaking in and through the munāzirah are, finally, contemporaneous. Simultaneously perceiving and perceived by others, they converge in the present, albeit an unresolved, evolving and incomplete moment in the making.  

Achronocity is another defining feature of the munāzirah. It is of course possible to establish a specific chronology for an individual munāzirah in many cases, but it is not possible to wholly impose narrative time, in the sense of a completed plot, on it, for as a genre the munāzirah, though informed by and premised on modern temporal categories, has its own internal temporal logic. The time of the munāzirah is anchored in a present that is fragmented and inconclusive. This present is the meeting place of the past and future epochs which, though summoned as temporal spans, are deployed as contemporaneous conditions. Their contemporaneity is mediated through the universal time of Islam. In this temporal orientation, the wretched present is a time teeming with idealized past memories and equally idealized future possibilities whose realization is possible through resorting to the timeless teachings of Islam. The time (and setting) of the munāzirah is liminal in the sense of framing an in-between state, but as was mentioned earlier this is a liminality of a particular kind. The munāzirah functions as a narrative space where parallel discourses are engaged in a polemic for redefinition and re-articulation. The liminal setting of the munāzirah still encompasses a transitional time and space, but one which involves the synthesis of the pre- and post-liminal states of being. The participation of a myriad of rival texts is to be understood in this capacity.

83 It is important to note, again, that whereas for Bakhtin these are largely the linguistic features of the novel, in the case of the munāzirah they find quite literally narrative (as well as linguistic) manifestations.

84 Though in later generations the mediating role of Islam is increasingly attributed to national time, specifically Persia’s pre-Islamic “golden” age.
The *munāzirah* is thus intertextual.\(^{85}\) It is a text that, informed by other texts, is continuously being produced.\(^{86}\) It is, much like the present with which it is concerned, incomplete, still in the making. It does not really have an independent meaning or even identity without the many texts that surround it, populate it, act as influences, are appropriated, approved or rejected. It is a semiotic unit insofar as it does not have a single point of reference; it does not represent a stable or a single meaning. It stands in a metonymic relation to the social text, a locus operandi for the coalescence of texts and synthesis of ideas. It is a narrative public sphere. It should be emphasized at this point that by positing the *munāzirah* as an intertextual practice, I do not mean to reduce it to an elite intellectual exercise in semiotics, cut off from the difficult and tangible realities of daily struggle. The very material of the *munāzirah* is taken from a society in conversation. Therefore, much in the *munāzirah* as an intertextual narrative has to do with conflict, sometimes over very mundane affairs, and much in it has to do with the conditions of its reception, also a contested process. The *munāzirah* was not a textual ivory tower for elite literary experimentation. And although it was sometimes, though not always, written by intellectuals, it was very much meant for public consumption. The *munāzirah* was a means of direct address, to the Shah, the masses, the clergy, the intellectual, and the merchant alike. This is a fact attested to not only by the character types that partake in the debate within the text of a given *munāzirah* (characters which, as we will see, are representatives of social types) but also by the ferocity with which *munāzirahs* were disseminated and consumed.\(^{87}\) As such, the *munāzirah* is not an

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\(^{85}\) Here I am making a distinction between interdiscursivity and intertextuality. This distinction, however, is again purely theoretical. Though there is considerable overlap between the two notions, interdiscursivity is taken to mean the intermingling of discourses as systems of thought and ideological schools engaged in rivalry. Intertextuality is taken to refer to the “relationality” of texts through which meaning is produced such as the relation of signified to signifier or of a text to the literary system out of which it comes or to the relation of a text to the cultural text or to another text. The former involves the production of meaning as a contested process while the latter points out the plurality of meaning. The former, following Bakhtin, involves social agency engaged in the concrete process of meaning making. The latter, a la Kristeva, is a more abstract formulation of text as the playground of signs. For more on this interpretation of intertextuality, see Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 5-6.

\(^{86}\) The text viewed not as a product but in a state of perpetual production is an insight provided by French semiotics, particularly by Kristeva and Barthes. Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 34-74.

independent semantic unit that can be analyzed in isolation. It is understandable only in relation to the social text out of the fragments of which it is constructed.

With this in mind, we can still speak of a distinctive topos in the munāzirah. At the level of fabula, for example, there is considerable character abstraction and spatial thematization. Setting in the munāzirah does not function as the place of action in the traditional dramatic sense, for in many cases setting in this sense is either non-existent or at best ambiguous and implicit. Instead, setting is thematized in such a way as to function as a narrative agent. Highly ambiguous, setting corresponds with the ambivalence of the debate. It has a synecdochic relation to the theme. The characters, as well, are not necessarily of the dramatic type. There is intense conflict and negotiation among conflicting ideologies, made more complex by virtue of each ideological statement itself being “double-voiced.” Neither are the characters psychic entities such that we witness in the modern novel. They are ideological units representing a social type. These character types stand in synecdochic relation to the pertinent social class. These have a close relation to narrative events. Narrative events, the way they are conceived of by the modern reader of novels, are almost non-existent. What constitutes “event” in the munāzirah is verbal confrontation. And therein lies the dialogic, and by extension dialectic, orientation of the munāzirah, for the characters do not act but ideate. They are, in Bakhtin’s words, ideologues.88 Finally, the relationship between these ideologues is ironic in the sense that their ideological positions are not simply and exclusively opposite. Rather, they engage in a continual process of opposing, complementing, contradicting, confirming, challenging and supporting each other such that at the end of a munāzirah no single ideology emerges as authoritative, superior, or

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triumphant. These verbal-ideological confrontations are ongoing, unsettled, and incomplete, both at the end of the text of a specific munāzirah and in the munāzirah as a genre. In fact, this epistemic condition is also played out on quite a literal level whereby many munāzirahs are abandoned unfinished. They are fragments of an incomplete narrative still in the making. Finally, the absence of a completed and authoritative account of a final “truth” accompanied by the subsequent inter-narrative contestation makes this brand of irony, dialectic irony, a major narrative principle of the munāzirah, a principle at work on another level, namely, the meta-narrative ironic relation of commentary between the text of the munāzirah and other embedded texts.

The narrative features described above do not constitute a system for the aesthetic assessment of a genre created by a cadre of literary elites. While it is still possible to study the munāzirah as literary genre (and in many respects it is), it is important to note that in the final analysis it draws from, and in turn reflects, the elements of social dialogue. Its historicity, therefore, must be foregrounded in any analysis of it, whether historical or literary. The employment of theoretical tools in its analysis must also be attentive to its historical groundedness.

In my analysis of the munāzirah I have made selective use of some theoretical concepts. By selective I mean that I have not approached theory, however one might define it, as a heuristic given with universal applicability to the object of analysis. In other words, I have not used a single theoretical framework within which to read the munāzirah. Rather, my analysis has been informed by certain aspects of a number of theoretical insights insofar as they could be used as analytical tools. In engaging with the textual aspects of the munāzirah, for example, I used narrative theory from various theoretical schools of thought such as structuralism (Gerard

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89 We shall see plenty of examples. It suffices to say at this point that many a munāzirah was written as part of (or the first volume of) future installments, either in the periodicals or in independently published monographs, so much so that the promise of future installments or of future volumes became a discernible feature of the genre. Some examples among many are Shaykh u Shukh [The Clergy and the Saucy] ca. 1860s, Muqīm u Musāfir [The Resident and the Traveller] in 1909, and Mukālimah-i Sayyāh-i Īrānī bā Shakhsh-i Hindi [The Conversation between an Iranian Traveller and an Indian Person]. The latter was first serialized in the influential periodical Habil al-Matīn starting in 1898 and later published in 1907.

90 Kenneth Burke makes a distinction between dramatic irony “where the ideas are in action” and dialectical irony “where the agents are in ideation,” A Grammar of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 511-12. I owe this insight to him.

91 This, according to Mieke Bal, is another feature of the postmodern novel. Narratology Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 71.
Genette, Roland Barthes), cultural and literary theory (Mieke Bal) and deconstructive structuralism with poststructuralist leanings (Jonathan Culler). While structuralist narratological theory isolates the narrative elements – such as plot and point of view among others – which participate in (and are therefore prior to) the production of meaning, the poststructuralist approach to narrative heeds the possibility that meaning (that is, culturally driven expectations of meaning) might influence the deployment and ordering of those same narrative elements. Literary theory sits somewhere in between the two and uses narrative theory to formulate certain culturally specific conventions and to assess stories as cultural products. I have made eclectic use of all these insights in order not to determine what the text of the munāzirah ultimately means but how its constituent elements might partake in the production of a hitherto unacknowledged meaning. I have approached other theoretical perspectives in a similar fashion. These include dialogism, intertextuality, discourse, and liminality.

In my use of dialogism as an analytical tool, I have drawn largely on Bakhtinian insights in his seminal work *The Dialogical Imagination* – albeit with some important qualifications. For Bakhtin, dialogism is first and foremost a linguistic phenomenon best exemplified in the novel. The central problem in the novel, says Bakhtin, is the problem of representing another’s speech. Unlike the ancient genres (such as the epic and poetry) in which one authoritative voice or ideology overrides all others, the novel is a hybrid genre, “an artistically organized system for bringing different languages in contact with one another, a system having as its goal the illumination of one language by means of another.” This has at least two implications. First, the novel in this capacity is perceived as an idealized, artistic form that is essentially dialogic, which is why Bakhtin deems it necessary to repeatedly speak of the “authentic novel” as the only vehicle for the expression of dialogism. Therefore, much in Bakhtin’s analysis of the novel is in

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93 For an example of this latter orientation, see Johnathan Culler, “Fabula and Sjuzhet in the Analysis of Narrative.” *Poetics* 1:3 (Spring 1980), 29-35.


95 Ibid., 361. Emphasis in original.

96 Ibid., 264, 356.
formally descriptive terms but also informed by a platonic vision of a pure form. Second, for Bakhtin dialogism is as much a linguistic-artistic phenomenon as it is an implicit political statement reacting to the very monologic soviet milieu in which he wrote.97 These are the two points at which my use of the concept of dialogism departs from Bakhtin’s. I do not conceive of the munāzirah as an established genre or a sublime paradigm for artistic or democratic expression. In fact, a defining feature of the munāzirah, as we will amply see, is incoherence and inconclusiveness. And while the modern munāzirah derived from an established classical genre, its modern employment shifted from the dialectic polemic between right and wrong in its classical sense to the discursive plurality of contenders. As to dialogism as a political statement, my use of the term may be considered political to the extent that it challenges stock readings of the history of Iranian modernity as an opposition between the allegedly well-defined and mutually exclusive forces of “progress” and “tradition.” As we saw above, such conceptions derive from a linear understanding of progress and impose a singular reading on heterogeneous histories. I have therefore used Bakhtinian insights merely for analyzing the ways in which competing discourses of Iranian modernity rivalled, informed, appropriated, and overlapped one another. It is in this capacity that concepts such as “heteroglossia,” “polyphony,” and “dialogism” are employed in this study.

While heteroglossia and polyphony refer to the plurality of voices that may or may not oppose while appropriating each other, dialogism signifies “the contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies.”98 For Bakhtin, these embattled tendencies are linguistic: the “centrifugal” and “centripetal” tendencies of language. In the context of the munāzirah, however, these tendencies are ideological: the synthesis of two embattled but complimentary ideologies. Therefore, though articulated through the voices partaking in dialogue, these tendencies are not limited to linguistic expression but arise “directly out of a social dialogue of ‘languages.’”99 The opponents in such dialogic interaction not only oppose but also animate each other.100 The important implications of this process include the simultaneity of opposing viewpoints, the

99 Ibid., 284-5.
100 Ibid., 354.
double-voiced representation of an apparently well-defined intention, the hybridization of discourse, the dispersion of agency in multiple ideologies, and the “unresolved contemporaneity” of rival discourses.\footnote{These notions are explicated in detail, respectively, in Mikhail Bakhtin, \textit{Dialogical Imaginaiton} (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 323-4, 358, 269, 346.} The narrative representation of this discursive plurality is inevitably a compendium of “incorporated genres”\footnote{Mikhail Bakhtin, \textit{Dialogical Imaginaiton} (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 320-21.} in which each discourse both expresses itself partly in the language of the rival discourse and comes to recognize its own language as it is perceived in the speech of the contending discourse.\footnote{Ibid., 347, 365.} These are the features of a dialogic interaction as it is deployed in the \textit{munāzirah}, not, significantly, as artistic or linguistic strategies but as the narrative manifestation of a social dialogue. Compositionally, the \textit{munāzirah} is the dialogue of two voices; discursively, it is the dialogue of multiple narratives.

Having thus determined the uses and limits of Bakhtin’s notions in this study, one might ask to what extent does the \textit{munāzirah} correspond to the Bakhtinian novel? As Bakhtin’s translator and scholar Michael Holquist rightly points out, the novel “is the name Bakhtin gives to whatever force is at work within a given literary system to reveal the limits, the artificial constraints of that system. Literary systems are comprised of canons, and ‘novelization is fundamentally anticanonical.’”\footnote{Mikhail Bakhtin, \textit{Dialogical Imaginaiton} (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), xxi.} This observation aptly summarizes Bakhtin’s approach to the novel as a discursive formation rather than a completed genre. This should not, however, preclude Bakhtin’s vacillation throughout \textit{The Dialogic Imagination} between the novel as an established genre or alternatively as a discourse. When he approaches the novel as a genre, he perceives a break between the novel and other ancient genres (such as poetry and the epic): “We have already said that the novel gets on poorly with other genres. There can be no talk of a harmony deriving from mutual limitation and complementariness.”\footnote{Ibid., 5.} As a double-voiced genre, the novel is contrasted with classical genres such as poetry which are “single-language and single-styled.”\footnote{Ibid., 266.} However, when he treats the novel as a discourse, Bakhtin speaks of “novelization” as a process through which any given literary system accommodates a hybrid admixture comprising
various genres, voices, and languages set in motion against and in relation to each other. Through novelization any genre can “become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the ‘novelistic’ layers of literary language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody and finally – this is the most important thing – the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the opened present).” Following this approach a whole array of compositional forms can be incorporated under the rubric of “novelistic” genres or undergoing the process of novelization. It is in this latter sense that I deploy munāzirah in this study, not in its classical capacity as a genre, but as a discourse in the process of becoming.

As mentioned earlier, the classical munāzirah has an established history along with a set of conventional criteria. However, in its modern capacity the munāzirah gradually became “novelized” in the sense that it accommodated the dialogue of a wide range of ideologies, genres (literary or otherwise), languages, and epistemologies. This “internal dialogization,” according Bakhtin, is to be distinguished from mere dialogue. Dialogue as a compositional form involves the conversation between two persons. It is limited to their speech and to a pair of orientations represented by each speech. Dialogism, on the other hand, involves the coexistence of various social languages which do not only engage in conversation but which also inform and represent each other even as they are being represented. As Bakhtin puts it, dialogue “itself, as a compositional form, is … inextricably bound up with a dialogue of languages … First and foremost (as we have already said) it can never be exhausted in pragmatically motivated dialogues of characters. Novelistic dialogue is pregnant with an endless multitude of dialogic confrontations.” These dialogic confrontations are not merely semantic, expressed through the neutral vehicle of language. They become the very characteristic of the representing language.

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107 Ibid., 7.
108 Bakhtin views the pre-history of the novel as discourse as “the novel’s special relationship with extraliterary genres, with the genres of everyday life and with ideological genres” involving “substantial use of letters, diaries, confessions, the forms and methods of rhetoric … the novel often crosses the boundary of what we strictly call fictional literature – making use first of a moral confession, then a philosophical tract, then of manifestos that are openly political.” Mikhail Bakhtin, *Dialogical Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 33.
109 Ibid., 49.
110 Ibid., 364-5.
itself, so that every word, every utterance, becomes double-voiced, simultaneously representing the worldviews of itself and of the alien speech incorporated within it.\footnote{Ibid., 279, 284-5.} Heteroglossia is the term Bakhtin uses to describe this state. It “is another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author.”\footnote{Ibid., 324. Emphases in original.} Therefore, these “languages do not exclude each other, but rather intersect with each other.”\footnote{Ibid., 291.} Because language is not merely an abstract system of a priori rules of communication but whose communicative aspect is socio-culturally grounded, it would be more accurate to refer to dialogism as a discursive practice rather than as an inherently linguistic feature.

It is in this capacity that we can speak of a “dialogized monologue”\footnote{Ibid., 345.} or a “dialogized story.”\footnote{Ibid., 25.} Both the monologue and the story are not formally written in accordance with the generic requirements of \textit{munāẓirah} as genre: in dialogue form. They can, however, certainly be dialogic following the orientation of \textit{munāẓirah} as discursive practice. As outlined in Chapter 1 below, Mustashar al-Dawlah’s \textit{Yak Kalima} (One Word, 1871), for example, is compositionally written as a monologic treatise. Upon a close narrative analysis, however, it turns out that its approach to the concept of law is dialogically oriented such that throughout the treatise the novel concept of law is simultaneously populated with the discourses of sharia and the French codes, each represented in the language of the other (As is well-known, Mustashar al-Dawlah tried to equate every clause in the French codes with a Quranic verse or an adage out of prophetic traditions). Similarly, while Muhammad ‘Ali Jamalzadeh’s “Fārsī Shikar Ast” (Persian is Sugar, 1921) is written in the form of a modern short story, its exploration of the theme of national language is dialogically grounded in three representations of Persian (once in the Arabicized speech of the cleric, once in the Francophonized speech of the dandy, and finally in the normative speeches of the narrator and of the youth Ramazan) so much so that the language of the story itself becomes
represented by the speeches of the characters and the ideal Persian intended by the story remains a contested and multi-voiced language. Both Yak Kalimah and “Fārsī Shikar Ast” are categorized as examples of munāzirah in this study not because they are in any way similar to the classical munāzirah, nor, significantly, in that they contain substantial (or any) dialogue, but because they encompass the dialogic rivalry of competing discourses. Along the same lines, discussion of contemporaneous munāzirahs written after the classical model (such as those of Parvin E’tesami or Bahar) has been curtailed in this study for two reasons. First, while they are written in the form of dialogue, their purpose, after the classical paradigm, is didactic. The dialogue in this capacity is a mere rhetorical device, the moral of the story a foregone conclusion. Second, they often do not deal with contemporary issues, nor – on the rare occasion that they do deal with contemporary issues such as in Parvin E’tesami’s “Zan dar Īrān” – do they capture the contested nature of such issues through enacting the intense dialogic rivalry among competing discourses. This does not necessarily mean that all poetic munāzirahs have been excluded from this study. The post-constitutional Ā‘īnah-yi Mashrūtah (Mirror of Constitutionalism, 1925), for instance, is written entirely in verse. It was however included in my analysis because its narrative includes the elements of the dialogic munāzirah. It is therefore important to reiterate that inclusion or exclusion of texts in this study is not determined by genre restrictions since the munāzirah here is deployed as “novelized” discursive practice.

A novelized discursive practice involves “the incorporation of various genres, both artistic (inserted short stories, lyrical songs, poems, dramatic scenes, etc.) and extra-artistic (everyday, rhetorical, scholarly, religious genres and others” like “confession, the diary, travel notes, biography, the personal letter and several others.” The nature of the interaction in munāzirah as discursive practice is such that within “the arena of almost every utterance an intense interaction and struggle between one’s own and another’s word is being waged, a process in which they oppose or dialogically interanimate each other.” This may be achieved not only through formal dialogue, but also through hybridization and dialogization of discourse.  

116 Ibid., 320-21.
117 Ibid., 354.
118 Ibid., 358.
As such, the *munāzirah* is composed of an assortment of texts. I have therefore used the concept of intertextuality throughout this study in order to identify participating texts and analyze their thematic and historical function. Since it was coined by Julia Kristeva, the term intertextuality has been employed in a myriad of usages, nuances, and interpretations so much so that it is difficult today to give one ultimate definition of it. As it was meant by Kristeva, the term denotes the fact that meaning does not reside in the text itself but is derived from the network of texts that informed its creation and that inform its interpretation.\(^{119}\) More broadly, intertextuality is used to mean influence or allusion.\(^{120}\) Others have offered more nuanced definitions, stating that intertextuality refers to the relation between different texts not only in the creation but also in the interpretation of an intended text (which could here mean a narrative, utterance, statement, or ideology) through quotation, allusion, plagiarism, translation, imitation, or parody.\(^{121}\) Yet others have defined intertextuality as “recontextualization” with important political and ideological implications in propaganda and media campaigns.\(^{122}\) Finally, some scholars have warned that too much aesthetic or philosophical attention to intertextuality suppresses the agency of the author and imposes an abstract theoretical concept on the real relation between authorship and readership.\(^{123}\) My employment of intertextuality is in part informed by all these theoretical insights, though intertextuality as it is deployed here diverges significantly from the laudatory tone in which the lack of an authoritative text is celebrated in modern theory. For the search for an authoritative “text,” an ultimate authoritative account, lies at the heart of the *munāzirah*. The term intertextuality is thus employed in this study in the very opposite sense of what were taken as authoritative texts (the text of the Quran, the idealized corpus of European laws, as well as the myriad of associated peripheral texts) which were then brought to bear upon each other for a final and definitive synthesis. When reference is made, in the study of the *munāzirah*, to ambiguity, the coexistence of opposites, hybrid entities, to a threshold state, it is not in celebration of some supreme form of artistic creation or of a unique product of Iranian modernity.

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(though in some ways it is). Liminality was the very space within which the munāzirah of competing ideologies attempted to reconcile rival discourses and carve out a modern Iranian identity.

Similar to intertextuality, the notion of liminality has been theorized in different capacities. The anthropologist Victor Turner first used the idea of liminality in his study of tribal and religious rituals during which an initiate experiences a liminal stage when he belongs neither to the old order nor yet accepted into his new designation. Turner’s insight has been expanded to investigate the general question of status in society. Jungian psychology has shifted the focus from liminality as a stage in social movement to a step in an individual’s progress in the process of individuation. Others have used liminality to describe cultural and political change, have prescribed its application to historical analysis, or have made reference to “permanent liminality” to describe the condition in which a society is frozen in the final stage of a ritual passage. Finally, the notion of liminality has been applied to the analysis of mimetic behaviour and to the emergence of tricksters as charismatic leaders, given the association of the figure of the trickster with imitation. This latter sense seems to apply to the history of Iranian modernity, for the anxiety of imitation was indeed one of its central concerns, and influential figures such as Mirza Malkum Khan (1833-1908) were sometimes perceived (though this was not universally the case) as saviours or tricksters alternatively by different people. Having said

125 See, for example, Caroline Walker Bynam, *Fragmentation and Redemption* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 27-51. Bynam applies Turner’s notion of liminality to the lives of Medieval female saints, arguing that Turner’s liminal passage applies more readily to the male initiate but does not in most cases reflect the experience of female initiates in Medieval times.
132 Fereydun Adamiyat notes how different people had different views of Malkum. The “despotic prince Zill al-Sultan” considered him to be of equal status to Plato and Aristotle. Aqa Ibrahim Badayi’ Nigar thought he was
that, my use of the notion of liminality, though informed by the theoretical perspectives cited above, diverges from them in one important aspect: liminality as perceived by contemporary theory seems to be based on a pre-/post- understanding of non-liminal statuses accompanied by a desire on the part of the subject to emerge from the liminal state. This approach does not explain liminality as a site for the synthesis of coexisting identities. The munāzirah is precisely the account of such a process. In the context of Iranian modernity, the discourse of tradition was not perceived as prior to the discourse of modernity, as we shall amply see. In fact, European civilizational progress was deemed to have resulted from the successful implementation of Islamic principles. Therefore, while the history of Iranian modernity can still be analyzed as a liminal stage where a weakened old order meets the promise of a new order, it must be understood in terms of the encounter of simultaneous and parallel discourses. It is in this sense that liminality is employed in this study. Taking into account the theoretical framework described above, the munāzirah can be defined in the following terms.

Contemporary narratological theory divides a narrative into three layers: text, story, and fabula. According to this taxonomy, the text is the medium through which a story is related. This medium can be language, images, sound bytes or a combination. A story is the way in which a story is told, a particular mould in which the story is framed (such would be tragedy or romance). A fabula is what we might commonly refer to as plot involving characters, events and setting. With slight modifications, these same narrative layers can be applied to the analysis of the munāzirah, though it is important to note that none of these categories are taken as its “inherent” features, neither do any of these “narrative layers” precede or supersede another in time or in

devoid of “the fineries of knowledge and literature (latifah-i dânish va adab). Minister of Sciences and chief minister Mukhbirul Saltanah Hidayat thought “whatever Malkum wrote has been said in other ways in [Sa’di’s] Gulistan and Bustan.” Fikr-i Azâdî (Tehran: Sukhan, 1340/1961), 99. Mehdi Quli Khan Hedayat’s view of Malkum Khan was summed up in these words: “This Malkum knew some things in magic and trickstery and finally did some dishonorable things and gave the dar al-funûn a bad reputation,” Khâirât va Khatarât (Tehran: Zavvar, 1389/2010), 58.


significance. These categories are merely analytical tools utilized for a better understanding of the extent to which the munāzirah was employed in various narrative as well as meta-narrative capacities. For the purposes of this study, then, the text of the munāzirah refers to the language in which it is related (the langue or signifying system: the principle of the commensurability of the traditional and the modern); the story signifies its generically dialogical disposition; and the fabula denotes the political, economic, cultural or other such issues discussed in the form of a dialogized tale. To the latter category belong numerous fictional munāzirahs which were widely produced and consumed and of which some will be analysed in this study. The other two layers, text and story, will be utilized to examine the role of the munāzirah as the reflection of the social text. In the case of story, the evolving generic features of the munāzirah as the genre of the Constitutional movement will be examined, leading to its role as the movement’s narrative manifestation, or language. For, as we shall sufficiently see, the language of the Constitutional movement, whether it spoke in munāzirah or not, was dialogic. There is of course considerable overlap among these layers in many cases such as when passages included as part of the fabula do not refer to an element within the plot but rather make reference to the social text, sometimes involving real events and characters. Such textual manoeuvres do not pose a threat to our loose theoretical categories but rather point to the munāzirah as a hybrid narrative.

The first three chapters utilize the narratological and cultural theories discussed above to lay bare the deep structure of the munāzirah. Chapters one, two, and three engage chiefly with the text of various munāzirahs. Through a close reading of these texts, I analyze their narrative structure, focusing on such elements as plot, character, setting, and narrative time. By conducting a structural analysis of the text of the munāzirah, however, I do not intend to dictate on its narrative a structuralis poetics. This means that I do not take for granted narrative elements as a priori givens that are deployed in a process of narrative meaning making. It is possible, as some narratologists have observed, that cultural expectations of meaning might in fact precede, even determine, narrative elements such as character and plot as well as the manner in which they are

135 In fact, Bal deploys these narratological distinctions as categories “of a theoretical nature” as well Narratology (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 75.

136 By meta-narrative here I do not mean the position of commentary which in postmodern poetics is said to be taken by one narrative towards another. Meta-narrative in the sense employed here is a narrative of a higher order than its textual manifestation.
deployed in the narrative. Such indeed is the case in a majority of munāzirahs in which belief in the commensurability of tradition and modernity is prior to the fielding of the fabula. Structural analysis of the munāzirah in this study is therefore undertaken simply for the purpose of identifying narrative elements peculiar to the genre as well as commonalities in their employment. By doing so I intend to chart any possible shifts in the genre that might reflect the changing sensibilities of their historical epoch. To this end, I have divided these chapters into three distinct periods: pre-constitutional, constitutional, and post-constitutional.

These are posthumous periodizations taking as their point of departure the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-7 during which increasing popular demand for social justice finally led to the granting of a constitution and the establishment of a nascent parliament, the Majlis. As such these periods do not constitute disparate historical epochs marked by a distinct “zeitgeist.” In fact, as we shall see there are several continuities, or else ruptures, that would disrupt such convenient “historical” taxonomies. Therefore, by using the three periods in this chronological order, I am not taking their historicity for granted. This chronological arrangement has simply been adopted for analytical convenience, allowing me to divide my materials into three temporal groups: from circa 1850s to 1906 as the pre-constitutional period; from 1906 to 1909 as the constitutional period; and from 1909, which witnessed the bombardment of the first Majlis, to 1925, which marks the end of the Qajar dynasty, as the post-constitutional period. As mentioned earlier, however, I am aware of the subjective nature of this division, for placing the discursive practices of these three “periods” in their historical context exposes the arbitrary nature of such chronological classifications. This is the task undertaken in chapter four. While the first three chapters engage with the munāzirah as text, chapter four heeds its significance as social text. In that chapter I show how the discursive rivalry characteristic of the munāzirah played itself out in social, cultural, and political praxis. A historical analysis of the socio-political events in the periods prior to and following the Constitutional Revolution reveals that the Iranian adaptation of modernity is too heterogeneous to accommodate binaristic accounts that reduce its multi-faceted history to a simple showdown between “traditionalists” and “modernists.”

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My selection of the texts of the *munāzirahs* to include in this study reflects my approach to its history. My decision to include certain texts has not been based on some preconceived system of valuation determining their literary or historical value, on any posthumous assumption about their significance, or on any benchmark defining “representative” text. Rather, the choice to include certain texts and exclude others has been affected by practical as well as methodological reasons. For simple space limitations, it was impossible to include each and every *munāzirah* produced during the period under study in this study. Including the sheer number of *munāzirahs* produced in this timeframe would require a dedicated multivolume anthology. Therefore, my primary methodological concern was to include texts that would reflect the cultural diversity, as well as the geopolitical reach, of the *munāzirah*. To this end, I have incorporated *munāzirahs* from different parts of the country (such as Tabriz, Isfahan, and Tehran) as well as some from the now Russian-controlled Caucasus. A similar approach has been employed in regards to authorship. Thus, I have tried to reflect the diversity of competing views and ideologies by selecting *munāzirahs* written by individuals across a diverse spectrum of backgrounds and with varying degrees of popularity. These include well-known figures such as Mirza Malkum Khan (a non-clerical, Western-educated reformer and statesman), Haj Aqa Nurallah Najafi Isfahani (a clerical constitutionalist), Mirza Hasan Khan Ansari (a journalist), Mirza Sulayman Khan Adib al-Hukama (a physician), and even anonymously authored *munāzirahs*.

The simple methodological reason behind my selection of texts, therefore, has been the attempt to show in the text of the *munāzirahs* included the disparate yet simultaneous ideologies and discourses that characterize its history. This discursive plurality was paralleled by an ideological liminality discernible in the discourses Iranian modernity, perhaps best captured in this observation by contemporary historian Ahmad Kasravi: “I saw in one of the issues of *Habl al-Matīn* two essays from the same person (Yusuf Zadeh Hamedani) published therein: one was in praise of ‘unity of Islam’ and encouraging people to it, and the other in praise of ‘socialism’ and enumerating the benefits of such a system, which neither the author has realized the irreconcilability of the two nor the publisher has fathomed it.”

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Chapter 1

1 The Pre-Consitutional Munāzirah

Naser al-Din Shah was the first monarch in the annals of Iranian monarchy to pay visits to Europe. He visited there in 1873, 1878, and 1889. He had reformist tendencies but not, it seems, so much as to endanger his absolute power. His reign witnessed the granting of numerous concessions to European powers (some of which were simply granted to raise money for his European tours), including, in 1872, an unsuccessful concession for the building of railways and irrigation works, the granting of control over and revenues from Persian customs to Paul Julius Reuter and finally, in 1890, the Tobacco Concession granted to the British Major Gerald F. Talbot which provoked popular resistance that would later mature into a nascent constitutional movement.

He introduced many reforms, including establishing telegraph offices and postal services, building roads, and establishing the first modern college, the Dār al-Funūn, and the first official newspaper. However, he refused reforms that would curb his own powers as absolute monarch. Since the dismissal and subsequent execution of his mentor and reformist Prime Minister, Amīr Kabīr (1220-1267/1805-1851), this dualism characterized his reign whereby he admired the progress of the West, sanctioning the modernization of infrastructure but disallowing political reform. It is this dualism also that shaped the core of the arguments of the advocates of change around the issue of real, as opposed to superficial, reform.

Perhaps no one more clearly personifies this latter stance than Mirza Malkum Khan Nāzim al-Dowlah (1833-1908) whose life, career, and writings span the turbulent yet formative decades of Naser al-Din Shah’s long reign, reflecting its changes and concerns. Malkum Khan was arguably

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139 Mostowfī observes, “It is not clear what Naser al-Din Shah had seen in his last visit to Europe which caused him to vehemently bar the entry of any new knowledge or insight into Iran, unlike during the premiership of Mirza Husayn Khan Sipahsalar,” ‘Abdullah Mostowfī, Shahr-i Zindagānī-yi Man (Tehran: Hermes, 1386/2007), Vol. 2, 18.


one of the most influential thinkers of the pre-constitutional era. Besides holding several important diplomatic and governmental posts, Malkum Khan is considered as one of the pioneers of the modernist reform movement in Iran. His most recognized contribution is the introduction and promotion of the concept of law (qānūn) among Iranians, and his sometimes sensationalist and widely popular writings partially inspired the reform movement that would lead to the Constitutional Revolution in Iran. Most of Malkum Khan’s writings revolve around the ordering of the affairs of the state through the implementation of law, and consequently much in his writing deals with teaching the principles of law. For our purposes, however, it is important to note that his writings are almost entirely written in the question and answer form, including both his independently published booklets and his newspaper Qānūn. Given this formal choice by, arguably, the founder of the discourse of law and order in Iran and the immense popularity and influence of his writings, it would be safe to view the munāzirah as the

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142 Malkum Khan started his career as a teacher at the Dūr al-Funūn college in 1270/1854. In 1272 (1856) he served as official translator of the Foreign Ministry, and in 1273 (1857) founded Fārāmūshkhānāh (House of Oblivion), a missionary society with reformist leanings. Suspecting these tendencies, Naser al-Din Shah ordered its closure in 1278 (1862) and exiled Malkum. He became Persian Consul in Cairo from 1280 to 1284 (1864-1868) and again advisor to Ambassador Mirza Husayn Khan Mushir al-Dowlah Sipahsalar in Ottoman Turkey from 1284 to 1288 (1868-1872). He became advisor to the then Prime Minister Mirza Husayn Khan Mushir al-Dowlah in 1873, given the title Nāzim al-Mulk (Regulator of Empire) and appointed Persian Ambassador in London in which post he served until 1307 (1890). At this time because of a dispute over the lottery concession with the Prime Minister, he was stripped of his post by the Shah. He stayed in London and published his newspaper Qānūn from 1307 to 1315 (1890-1898). After the assassination of Naser al-Din Shah, he met his successor Muzaffar al-Din Shah in Paris in 1317 (1899), pardoned, given his title again and appointed as Persian Ambassador in Italy from 1899 to 1908 (1317-1326). For more on Malkum’s life and legacy, see, among others, Hojjatullah Asil, Zindagī va Andīshah-yi Mīrzā Malkum Khān-i Nāzim al-Dowlah (Tehran: Ney, 1376/1997); and Hojjatullah Asil, Rasālahā-yi Mīrzā Malkum Khān (Tehran: Nashr-i Ney, 1388/2009), 7-9. For more on Fārāmūshkhānāh, see Ismail Ra’īn, Fārāmūshkhānāh va Frānāsunārār dar Irān. 3 Vol. (Tehran: Amir Kabri, 1357/1978).

143 About Malkum’s influential role in inspiring the reform movement in Iran, Nazim al-Islam Kirmani, the contemporary historian, goes as far as calling him the “agent of the awakening of Iranians” and the first one to “sow the seeds of law in this land,” comparing the significance of Malkum to Iran to that of Voltaire and Jean Jacques Rousseau to France. Tārīkh-i Bīdārī-yi Irānī (Tehran: Bonyad-i Farhang-i Iran, 1357/1978), Vol. 1, 117, 121. Another contemporary and the editor of Malkum’s collected treatises, refers to Malkum as the “God incarnate of civility” and “the founder of the basis of order and salvation in Iran.” Hashim Rabi’ Zadeh, Kulliyāt-i Malkum (Tehran: Matba’ah Majlis, 1325/1907). Fereydun Adamiyat also has praised Malkum for his astonishing knowledge of the “spirit” of the different classes in law: “king and beggar [shah u gadā], clergy and minister [shaykh u vazīr], the learned and the commoner [‘ārif u ‘āmīr], progressive and reactionary [mutijaddid u muti ‘assīb], western emulator and superstitious [farangī ma’āb u uhām parast], inspector and hangman [sardamdār u mīr ghazab], he had the pulse of all of these in his hand and has described them,” Fikr-i Āzādī (Tehran: Sukhan, 1340/1961), 100.

144 Also the title of the newspaper he published in London starting from February 21, 1890.

145 Malkum himself gives a brief account of how the sight of his newspaper Qānūn brings shivers to the courtiers (See his treatise, Usūl-i Mazhab-i Divānīyān, 2, 302 in Asil). Others have noted that his writings were shared among common people and read widely. Mehdi Malekzadeh believes that Malkum had a bigger role than anyone in familiarizing the masses with civilization and law, Tārīkh-i Inqilāb-i Mashruṭīyāt-i Irān (Tehran: Elmi, 1371/1992), 180.
narrative of Iranian modernity. It was through these writings, dialogized in the form of question and answer, that questions of law and order, meritocracy, fundamental reform and constitutionalism were, literally, put to national debate.

1.1 The Friend and the Vizier

Written by Malkum Khan circa 1860, Rafīq u Vazīr (The Friend and the Minister) is a conversation between a concerned enquirer (the Friend) and a corrupt minister. The former is personified as the Rafīq (Friend) and the latter as Vazīr (vizier). These character archetypes are in fact anthropomorphized social ideologues, one propagating fundamental reform and the other intent on prolonging the status quo for, mainly, personal gain. Their engagement in the debate, however, is far from conclusive, neither are their ideological positions mutually exclusive. Their opposition cannot be conveniently compartmentalized into an easy dichotomy, for their voices overlap, their ideologies intersect, and their views oscillate within and across the hybrid boundaries of the munāzirah.

The exchange in this munāzirah revolves around the booklet containing the proposed constitution which the minister has previously presented to the Shah but has since abandoned its implementation. When the inquisitor asks about the reason, the vizier responds that all ministers and courtiers, including himself, only have the furthering of their own interests in mind, and the proposition of a constitution to the Shah is just “some senseless talk to keep the Shah busy for a few days.” The vizier continues to justify his action by reasoning that the implementation of the law and order would be an obstacle to the current conditions in which courtiers can manipulate the disorder to secure ever higher positions for themselves and their line. Though the main issue in this munāzirah is the implementation of law, there are peripheral concerns discussed that would be possible within a stable frame of a strong and all encompassing law. Such issues include a strong national army, the building of railroads, the repatriation of territories lost to the Russians such as Afghanistan and the Caucasus, the establishment of tax revenue (66), the establishment of a consultative assembly, a senate and ministries (71). In response to these issues, the vizier impersonates shifting ideologies and perspectives. For example, upon being

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146 Hojjatullah Asil, Rasālah hāi Mīrzā Malkūm Khān (Tehran: Nashr-i Nay, 1388/2009), 60. This and all subsequent quotations in this study are taken from this volume edited by Hojjatullah Asil, Tehran: 2009.
prompted to answer the question as to what qualification makes him deserving of the post of minister (“which scientific book have you written? What industrial inventions have you produced? … Where is Prussia? How do you eat a parliament?” and so on, p. 64), the vizier turns into a proponent and agrees with the questioner, the Friend. In an honest gesture of curiosity, he even asks the Friend for a solution. When the Friend introduces the vizier to the book of law (the kitābchah-i ghaybī, the “unseen book” which Malkum himself had written circa 1275-1277/1858-1860), the vizier changes positions and turns into an opponent again. His main line of argument the defense of the old order when the likes of Nadir Shah (r. 1736-47) extended the frontiers of Iran to the Indian subcontinent: “What was wrong [with that order] that we now have to imitate the Farangīs [i.e. Europeans]?” (67). This shifting of positions characterizes the vizier’s speech throughout the debate. Elsewhere, when the Friend states that the reforms undertaken by the law-embracing and order-loving shah have not been successful because they have focused on peripheral issues rather than on “principles of order” (69), the vizier-turned-curious again asks for the aforementioned principles of order and what is to be done. The Friend’s response – the necessity of a consultative assembly together with a senate and ministries – meets with a yet again transformed vizier who now remembers a bribe someone was supposed to give him. The vizier also knows deep inside that he is no “Peter the Great [nor] the great Napoleon” (65), yet he cannot bring himself to let go of all the pomp and the flattery warranted by his status. Oscillating between the grandiosity of the old order and the misery of current conditions, between the necessity for a novel solution and the antagonism to emulating the West, between the ancient régime of Nadir Shah and Jamshīd147 (68) and the reality of Peter and Napoleon, the vizier becomes the mouthpiece for the shifting loyalties of the critics of an ailing monarchy as well as its advocates.

The Friend also personifies shifting alignments. It is he who defends the monarchy and absolves the monarch of any responsibility. Time and again, the shah is exempted from having any responsibility regarding the corruption and disorder crippling the country. He is wiser, more knowledgeable and more reform minded than the vizier would have it. With statements such as “the shah is undoubtedly eager for order” and “the king has enough wits and experience to

147 The mythical Persian prophet-king said to be the fourth king of the world and to have had mastery over all angels and demons, according to the Persian epic of Shāhnāmah.
counter all the viziers” (60-3), the Friend paints the shah as an enlightened monarch who has restlessly worked for the progress of his kingdom (69). There is not the faintest suggestion in the Friend’s pronouncements that the monarchy is oppressive, ineffective, or even responsible. There is only the suggestion that the progressive monarch’s reforms have overlooked the “principles of order” (usūl-i nazm, 69). At once an advocate of fundamental reform and a supporter of royal patronage, the Friend becomes not only the vizier’s diametrically opposed position but also his ideological doppelganger.

These ever-unstable positions are also reflected through the use of parody in which echoing the voice of the opposition within the speech of the opposed acts as the internal dialogization of speech.\(^{148}\) Instances of such stylistic maneuvers abound here and elsewhere with the result that embedded within the representing voice is its own counter voice. This happens time and again through the vizier’s speech where the official discourse of the centuries old tradition of monarchy is undermined through a latent ironic commentary on its own claims. As the vizier puts it, “we have three things in Iran which will always inspire fear and agitation in foreign governments: first: curved swords, second: alchemy, third: wise ministers” (62). In this way, the speaker, the vizier, is turned into a mouthpiece not only for the established order but also a voice for the critics of such an apparently senseless claim. This is repeated in the narrative in another instance where the minister, while attacking the Friend on the uselessness of the “unseen notebook,” turns into a voice mocking his own role as an element of the old regime and its ineffectiveness: “We have become so inadequate and wretched that after serving under three monarchs, after several missions to [the province of] Khurāsān, where the Turkmens\(^{149}\) mastered the roads and created chaos and not a peep came out of our camp, now I should submit my powers to the hands of a few ignoramuses to set up laws as they please?” (67). The Friend, in turn, closes with a similar stylistic doubling: “It is true what your excellency said; that type of blabbing on my part is utter madness and today I repent in your presence not to ever be so presumptuous again” (71). These stylistic and ideological reversals attest to the uneasy and

\(^{148}\) I am borrowing this insight from Bakhtin’s concept of “parodic stylization.” For more on this notion, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Dialogical Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 364.

\(^{149}\) The Turkmen tribes of northeastern Iran created much anxiety for the central government by their sporadic and explosive raids on neighbouring towns throughout the rule of the Qajar dynasty and even during the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi. For a history of the Turkmens’ role in the internal affairs of Iran and in the constitutional movement, see Asadullah Ma’tufi, *Inqilāb-i Mashrūtah dar Astarābād* (Tehran: Horufieh, 1384/2005).
ongoing debate whose ideological ambivalence is not only personified by the two characters and their speech but also reflected in other elements of the narrative.

The ambiguity persists at the level of narration as well. This is evident in two ways: the way the narrative is focalized and the multiplicity of addressees implied in the vizier’s personage. The munāzirah starts with the author/narrator claiming that the piece had been written for the perusal of one of the ministers but that now it is presented “for the amusement of the king” (60). From this point forward, the narrator’s narration is dialogized in the form of a conversation between the Friend and the vizier. Near the beginning of the discussion, the Friend sympathizes with the frustration of the “poor unseen author” (musannaf-i bīchārah-i ghaybi) in failing to convince the ministers to accept law and order (61). This same unseen author later turns out to be the author of the “unseen notebook” (kitābcha-i ghaybi) who, in real life, is Malkum Khan himself (67). Near the end of the conversation, the vizier suspects that the Friend is “of the same essence as the author of the unseen notebook” (70). Focalization in this munāzirah is thus three layered: the narrator focalizes the dialogized story through the character of the Friend who focalizes the “author of the unseen notebook” who, in turn, is synonymous with both the narrator and the Friend. Similarly, the vizier, as was mentioned above, impersonates different layers of response: at times the voice of a corrupt minister who will disrupt all attempts for the implementation of law for personal gain, at times a curious and even concerned agent, and at times a critic of the emulation of western values and a supporter of adherence to the indigenous order. The multi-layered narration signifies the multiplicity of voices, with no narratorial perspective as the authoritative one, with no single voice enjoying supremacy, either narrative or ideological. To the mix of voices embodied by the Friend and the minister is also added, time and again, other implied voices through the use of third person plural pronouns which extend the boundaries of the conversation to include national dialogue.\(^{150}\) The repetition of these plural pronouns invokes addressees and contenders who are absent from the narrative but present in the debate, implied in narrative text but active in the social text. In this way, the munāzirah becomes the linkage between the two.

\(^{150}\) One such example is the repetition of the third person plural pronoun, here and elsewhere, in phrases such as “muttasil migūyand” (they ceaselessly say/protest), 70.
The setting of this *munāzirah* is equally elusive and vague. Since the piece is reportedly written “for the amusement of the Shah” (60), and since it is exchanged with a minister, the conversation could be taking place at the court, on royal grounds, at the vizier’s house, at the Friend’s house, or anywhere else. Even this much is deducible only by heeding implicit clues in the text. However, the text itself provides no spatial coordinates that would count as setting. This, along with repetitive references to the invisible (*ghaybī*, p. 61, 67, 70), provides for an abstract space that accommodates the ancient and the modern, the physical and the ideational, the here and the there, the now and the then. We have seen that Malkum’s first and most influential work, the “Unseen Booklet” (*kitābchah-i ghaybī*), is also associated with the unseen while in this particular *munāzirah* the author himself is referred to as “unseen.” Partially drawing on the medieval image of the wise sage who knows the secrets of the metaphysical realm, the motif of the *ghaybī*, nevertheless, is employed in a novel capacity here. Temporarily it hearkens back to the mystical tradition of associating the prophet and his teachings with the unseen world, the attainment of which status is the final goal of Sufi ascetics. It also anticipates, in this context, a futural state when Iran will attain the status of the idealized and utopian *Farang*. Here and elsewhere, it can be seen that the idea of *Farang*, literally meaning Europe, represents more than its physical reality in the form of borders, peoples, or institutions. It is also deployed as a spatio-temporal category, an other-worldly chronotopia. It is in this capacity that references such as the “codes of Farang” (*tanzīmāt-i Farang*), the “sages of Farang” (*hukamā-yi Farang*), the “streets of Farang” (*kūchah hā-yi Farang*), the “painters of Farang” (*naqqāsh hā-yi Farang*) or simply *Farang* itself (62-8) are, referentially, not necessarily geographically bounded but also, in many cases, ideationally oriented. It is also in the same capacity that the future-oriented idea of Farang is consistently and repeatedly associated with the past-oriented idea of the true spirit of Islam: an

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151 The celebrated poet Khwājah Shams al-Din Muhammad Shirazi is alternatively known by two pennames: *Hāfiz* and *Lisān al-ghayb*. The former title (literally, “The Memorizer”) is given to him for having reportedly had the Quran in its entirety by heart while the latter (literally, “The Tongue of the Unseen”) refers to his knowledge of the unseen world. For more on Hafiz, his life, and legacy see Muhammad ‘Ali Islami Nodushan, *Mājirā-yi Pāvān Nāpazār-i Hāfiz* (Tehran: Shirkat-i Sahāmī-yi Intishār, 1388/2009).

152 Here and elsewhere, Malkum Khan and others use the word “Farangistān” (meaning “the land of the Franks”) to refer to Europe. This coinage from the Qajar era is a loaded term that invokes far more than what a geographical designation would signify. It is, in the context of early modern writings in Iran, associated with an imaginary utopian horizon of all that is good (law, order, peace, progress, freedom, humanity, etc.). I will consequently be using the words “Europe” and “Farangisān” alternatively from this point forward in order that this utopic sense of the word may be retained and conveyed. Likewise, the word “European” will sometimes be replaced by “Farangī,” meaning the people of Farangisān.
idealized state that has already been realized. The topos of setting as an unseen space, then, functions as a thematized space where the past and the future, Islam and Farang, accompanied by their relevant ideologies, converge. This spatio-temporal category is closely linked with the treatment of time.

Iran is temporalized in two ways in this munāzirah, once as backward (“How behind has the fortunes of Iran been!” 67) and once as having been the epicenter of order and justice, albeit centuries before the present, during the “reign of Jamshīd” (68). This, as was mentioned above, is a conception of the present as a time seething with past and future epochs. The invocation of the reign of a just king in the mythic past in association with an idyllic futural Farang unmistakably makes the two temporal phases, both ideologically and narratively, simultaneous in the present. The ideal futural state of Farang, therefore, already existed in ancient Iran until it was disrupted by the arrival of the “savage Arabs” (66) whose idea of kingly pleasure is eating camel meat and riding white horses. The Friend likens adherence among Iranian ministers to passing pleasures such as the number of escorts they display or the colour of their sons’ sash to the purportedly backward sense of royal pleasure among Arabs. The association of “savage Arabs” with an “infant like” (tifl) state refers to germinations of a naitonalist discourse that, as we will see, differentiated between Persians and Arabs while at the same time dissociated Islam from Arabs. In this way the allegedly past-present of the “savage Arabs” is differentiated from the future-past of the Persians. While the contemporary space of negative experience is associated with an alien race, the futural horizon of expectation is linked, here and elsewhere, to either Islam as the complete religion or Persia’s pre-Islamic past as a utopic space. The idea of Farangistān, as the external manifestation of a past-future, corresponds with the idea of ghaybī as the yet-unseen version of that state. In this way, numerous references to the idea of Farangistān as a utopian abstraction point to the anachronism of the Iranian present, one, however, that is populated simultaneously by the signs of a mythic past and an ideal future.

The convergence of incongruous temporal categories finds narrative parallel in the intertextual relation between different texts which intersect within the frame narrative of the munāzirah. These embedded texts are either physically present in the form of parallel texts or, as we will see

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153 Mythical Persian king of antiquity who is the epitome of a just ruler and whose model of governance was culturally upheld as paradigm of justice.
later, they are summoned to partake in the dialogue of genres. In Rafīq u Vazīr, the former strategy is at work whereby the text of the munāzirah provides the narrative frame for Malkum’s “Unseen Booklet” (kitābchah-i ghaybī) on which it is based and of which it becomes an extension. In the opening line of Rafīq u Vazīr, the author himself calls the piece a “mukālimah” or conversation (60) and it is indeed into this conversation that the different texts enter, for the kitābchah-i ghaybī is itself written in the form of direct address and overlaid with the texts of a letter and of a proposed constitution. The convergence of ideologies, of social classes, of times, of texts, and of genres creates a mélange of voices, narratives, styles and views that find simultaneity in the present-ness of the munāzirah. It is no wonder, then, that the in the munāzirah, as the narrative of the present, repeatedly ends, here and elsewhere, without any resolution. Like the present which it narrates, the munāzirah is unfinished, inconclusive, and in the making.

1.2 The Bureaucrat and the Commoner

These tentative endings make the munāzirahs of this period episodic chapters in the grand narrative of Iranian modernity and reemerge in other texts produced in this epoch. Tafsīl-i Guftigū-yi yak Mīrzā-yi ‘Ālim bā yak ’Avām-i Mustahzar (A Detailed Account of the Conversation between a Learned Clerk and an Informed Commoner) was written by an anonymous author circa 1860s. The table of contents lists thirty one scenes (Majlīs) but is abandoned shortly after the opening of the fourth scene, a practice common in Constitutional era writings, a narrative acting out of the lack of a consensus, the persistence of the debate, a future-oriented present, a hybrid moment in the making.

The characters involved in this munāzirah are a certain Bureaucrat of the royal treasury (Mīrzā) and a certain Commoner (‘Avām) who is well aware of the circumstances of his time. As we have already seen, the characters involved are social types rather than individualized

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154 No one seems to have dated this munāzirah. The text itself, however, gives indications of the time it was composed since most references are to the final years of Muhammad Shah’s reign (r. 1834-1848) and the first half of Nasser al-Din Shah’s rule (r. 1848-1896). See for example pages 21, 43, 51, 57, and 67 of the manuscript copy held at Tehran University’s Central Library and Archives, no. 7406.

155 See many newspaper pieces serialized in this way. The now well-known munāzirah, Muqīm u Musāfir (The Resident and the Traveller), written in 1909, purports to be “volume one of the book” on its last page. The texts of Shaykh u Shūkh and Musāhibah-i Sayyāh-i Irānī bā Shakh-i Hindi also purport to be the first volume in a series of volumes to follow. Numerous serialized munāzirahs were fragments of future instalments which never appeared.
personalities and would consequently be better described as actants.\textsuperscript{156} This is significant because whereas a character stands, as it were, for her “self” in the story, an actant in the sense described here stands, semantically, in a metonymic relation to the social type and the ideology it represents. Within the text of the \textit{munāzirah}, it also stands, structurally, in a synecdochic relation to social text.\textsuperscript{157} This is also significant because of the textual function the \textit{munāzirah} serves as the frame narrative for the fielding of social voices and ideologies. The issues invoked here and elsewhere, then, must be placed in the context of the \textit{munāzirah} as the synecdochic extension of the social text.

The issues discussed in \textit{Guftīgū-yi yak Mīrzā-yi ‘Ālam bā yak ‘Avām-i Mustahzar} pertain to the rampant corruption among the provincial, urban, and local governors who use their position as government officials to further their selfish interests, to gain illegal and forced access to others’ estates and sources of income, and to finally take possession of those sources of monetary value. Scene one is mainly concerned with descriptions of such wrongdoings at the hands of provincial government officials, a testimony to the fact that the central government of the time had little control beyond the capital. The question, then, does not revolve around any inherent or existential problems with the monarchy or around its overhaul. Rather, the issue is the presence of tyranny as a dangerous factor threatening the very existence of the kingdom; neither do the participants in the conversation diverge on this issue. What disagreement they do exhibit is about the causes and solutions for this state of affairs which they put to debate in parts of this and the second scene.

Lawlessness, oppression, and feudal tyranny have crippled the country. The solution, according to the Commoner, is the ordering of affairs through education and through adherence to a single strong law. It is only through education that persons with merit can and will attain appropriate

\textsuperscript{156} The distinction would become clearer if we considered the difference, according to Mieke Bal, between an actor and a character in relation to the fabula. An actor is a “structural position” whereas a character is a “semantic unit.” \textit{Narratology} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 113. I apply this narratological distinction to the \textit{munāzirah} in a slightly different way. For Bal, an actor is a part of the structure of the story without semantic function. In the case of the \textit{munāzirah}, however, the character types are not only structurally important as participants in the narrative but also semantically significant in that they represent social types, their views, practices, and ideological positions. Therefore, they “act out” segments of the social text.

\textsuperscript{157} I am adapting these insights from Kenneth Burke, who in his influential book \textit{The Grammar of Motives} purports that the very basis of human search for “truth” is informed by rhetorical interpretation. For more information, see pages 503-514.
official posts which will liberate the country from the fangs of bribery and flummery (pīsh kashī u taʿāruf: 13, 38, 65). The Commoner’s emphasis, however, is mainly on military training which, in his opinion, is the pillar of a country’s security and lawfulness, both internal and external. It is to this end that he continues to emphasize the need for a centralized and well-trained army corps through enlisting western trainers and technology. It is also to the same issue that the Bureaucrat shows resistance. These issues and the two characters’ positions towards them once again point to shifting alignments. As we saw earlier, for example, here too the Shah is continually exonerated from the ongoing and widespread coercion at the hands of local governors. This defense of the Shah originates predominantly from the Commoner, the proponent of reform, while the Bureaucrat who, as an official of the state, must traditionally support the clergy by whom the state is sanctioned as legitimate nevertheless cites the ‘ulamā (the clerical class) as the “problem” facing the implementation of law (qānūn) and modern education (19). In this way the trite equation reformer = secular republican and ancient regime = traditionalist is destabilized. Unsettling such equations of simple opposition is a characteristic of the munāzirah in which the dialogue of diametrically opposed equals gives way to the dialogic contestation of overlapping voices and ideologies. This double-voicedness is reflected not only in the shifting positions the actants take but also through the use of irony. Character nomenclature contributes to this duality where each character occupies a traditional as well as a novel textual position. The word ‘Avām denotes ignorant and vulgar common folk. Mīrzā conveys a person of noble birth or, when used as an epithet, an account holder or a scribe. This of course is reversed in this munāzirah. Both figures retain their traditional social positions (the Mīrzā for example is described as having servants in the opening pages) while at the same time they take on new roles, reversing their image in relation to knowledge, for it is the Bureaucrat, traditionally a man of letters and learning, who is much more ignorant than the Commoner about novel ideas, new discoveries and modern histories. Hard as he might try to retain his hold on knowledge and learning by repeatedly calling his counterpart a “commoner” in its pejorative sense (15, 32, 51, 66 and elsewhere), the Mīrzā still has to, and does, concede the truth of the ‘Avām’s arguments (39, 55 and elsewhere).

158 See pages 4, 8, 14, and 31, for example.
159 Both definitions are taken from Dehkhoda Lexicon.
This reversal of the traditional roles, however, does not translate into a consensus or a verbal or ideological mastery of one side over the other. There is no certainty or conclusive victory for either side (for lack of a better term) of the debate. For the use of the word “side” gives the impression of an easy dichotomy, a clear-cut opposition, mutually exclusive opposites, a final victory for one side or even a tie between the two. This in fact is noticeably not the case in the munāzirah where voices overlap, ideologies clash and complement each other, and ambiguity is the order of the day. It is perhaps no coincidence that many a munāzirah is abandoned or left unfinished with the promise of future installments, chapters, or volumes. This lack of closure and the resulting ambiguity is, as we have seen, played out through other narrative elements.

Ambiguity persists in the setting of this munāzirah as well. Firstly, the text gives an implicit clue that the conversation may be taking place either in the capital, Tehran, or in the crown prince’s capital, Tabriz (29). More specifically, the first two scenes take place at the Mīrzā’s house while the third one takes place at the ‘Avām’s residence. Beyond these vague textual clues there is no other indication as to a specific setting. Much like the ghaybī (unseen) motif, the ambiguous setting functions as the thematization of ambivalence. As the locus operandi for the intersection of disparate ideas and ideologies, ambivalent space opens up the possibility of former and future times, together with the accompanying abstractions, to converge in the present. This congregation of future and former times, of the attendant discourses, and of social types in the present-ness of the munāzirah enables the narrative, as well as the ideological, incorporation of Farangistān as a chronotopic category rather than as a mere physical reality. Spatially, the idea of Farangistān functions as the “there” of progress (qudrat u sarvat u nizām u sanāyʿ-i-i farangistān, 21) while temporally it is deployed as an ideally futural but inherently past time (recall the purported commensurability of Islamic teachings with European progress) which are both potentially existing in the present: “their actions and industries [sic] is possible here too” (56, emphasis added). Similar to the other munāzirahs we have seen, then, Farangistān is here also employed in this capacity (8-9, 19, 21, 39). And lest there were any doubts that the idea of Farangistān is a chronotopic idealization, the inhabitants of this ideal space, the Farangīs as concrete beings, are viewed by both the Mirza and the ‘Avām in this way: The Franks are mentally slow and have racial defects such as pale eyes and hair which is all due to their cold climes” (73). If they have reached this state of progress and civilization, it is because they have followed and employed Islamic teachings in their true essence.
It is in this capacity that Islam, once again, has the intermediary role of making the now and the then simultaneous: “The essence of order (nizām) is [to be found in the Quranic phrase] Amr-i bih ma’rūf va nahu az munkar” (8). Perceiving of Islam as the seal of all religions, Muslim tradition has already conferred a futural role on Islamic teachings: “Our religion is the seal of all religions [and] others followed the laws of our religion and employed them to increase their might and wealth at our expense” (30-31). If the Europeans have attained futuristic progress, therefore, it is because they have resorted to the Muslim past: “Our religion is the essence of all religions and our Quran comprises all books and records and law[s]” (32). They have recognized that understanding and applying the Muslim past is not a form of regress but in fact the key to progress: “The Farangīs have adapted our religious books and sciences in all their regulations and actions” (43-4). As we have seen in the munāzirahs thus far, this temporal feature of Islam (as a universal time containing all past and future times) is directly linked to the ambiguous space of the narrative which, in turn, is the locus of all discourses, from the future or from the past, from a bureaucrat or from a commoner, from traditional sciences (‘ilm-i Mīrzā’ī, 52-3) or from modern sciences (‘ilm-i nizām, 52-3), from the royalist or from the reformist, a heteroglot convergence of voices that simultaneously oppose, complement and overlap each other. It is in such a thematized setting that the character types alternate and shift their ideological, or even traditional, positions. We have already seen how the Bureaucrat both disparages and concedes to the Commoner. The Commoner himself, after having repeatedly emphasized the truth of Islam, submits that during the Russo-Persian wars, jihad, a Quranic concept, did not help the Iranians win the war (15, 33, 37), only to later declare that public military training in Prussia is like the law of jihad in Islamic Sharia (49). Similarly, the Bureaucrat who had earlier rejected the necessity of learning French on grounds of losing one’s religion (31) later betrays, in a gesture of surprise, that the Farangīs indeed surpass the jinn in knowledge (39). These shifting alliances and temporal maneuvers find their way to the great network of inter-texts summoned in the frame narrative of the munāzirah.

160 This catch phrase, in currency until today, is a shortened rendition of the original Quranic verse: “And there may spring from you a nation who invite to goodness, and enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency. Such are they who are successful” (Quran 3: 104).

161 The two rounds of military conflicts between Russia and Persia in 1804-1813 and 1826-1828 resulted in the signing of two humiliating treaties, the Treaty of Gulistan and the Treaty of Turkmenchay, respectively, as a result of which the Persian state lost much of the Caucasian territory to Russia and was stripped of all rights to navigate the Caspian Sea.
In discussing the importance of having a well-trained and well-fed army, for example, the ‘Avām invokes the chapter “thaghūr” from The Book of Sajjād (Sahīfah-i Sajjādiyyah) in which the well being of border troops is sought and recommended through the medium of supplication.162 The book, says the ‘Avām, is also to be found in a London Library (43-4), a testimony to its authority. He further purports that the Franks have adapted such wisdom from Islamic literature and have thus been able to order their affairs excellently (43-4). Upholding the authority of The Book of Sajjād, the Commoner nevertheless invokes the prestige of the London Library to legitimize his claim. The library as a space in the present for the accumulation of knowledge and for the collection of texts, languages, discourses, stories and histories from the past provides an apt metaphor for the frame narrative of the munāzirah as a collection of texts, genres, styles, and ideologies: the Sahīfah, Hafiz and Sa’di, written in liturgical style, in verse, or in prose (respectively) appear in Arabic, Persian, English and Russian (44). A similar strategy is at work through continual references made by the Commoner to the histories of Russia’s Peter the Great (51, 70) and France’s Napoleon (47, 70), both of whom are valorized as embodiments of wise, patriotic, and able emperors and also to Bismarck as the embodiment of a wise statesman (49). These histories are frequently presented in the form of hikāyat.163 When the Mīrzā objects to the teaching of French on grounds of such practice making pupils irreligious (31), the ‘Avām relates the learning of language to the knowledge of history. He then contributes, through a short hikāyat, the advances of the reign of Peter the Great to his promotion of education and languages (including Turkish, Arabic, Persian) and publications, citing Voltaire’s The History of Peter the Great, which is later compared to Lisān al-Mulk’s Nāsikh al-Tavārikh164 which, itself being based on ‘Abdul Razzāq Beyk’s History,165 fades in comparison (50-51). Neither are these texts always invoked approvingly since, interestingly, the Commoner calls the Shāhnāmah of

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162 The chapter referred to is a prayer in a collection of prayers, Sahīfah-yi Sajjādiyyah, reportedly authored by the fourth Shiite Imam, Zayn al-‘Abīdīn. The book is popularly known as the Bible of the Prophet’s family (ahl-i bayt).

163 The hikāyat is a traditional form of story telling where moral and ethical axioms are presented in the form of a short tale or allegory. See for example the hikāyats relating some events surrounding Napoleon’s concubine, Josephine, and Peter the Great’s visits to Europe on pages 47 and 72, respectively. For more information see note 127 below.

164 Nāsikh al-Tavārikh (lit. Abrogator of Histories) is a universal history written by Mirza Muhammad Taqi Sepehr in 9 volumes, composed on orders from Muhammad Shah Qajar (r. 1834-1848) and his Prime Minister Haji Mirza Aqasi. Its composition started in 1258 (1842) and ended in 1274 (1858).

Firdawsi\textsuperscript{166} a series of lies (77). Such dizzying network of intertexts points to the fielding of competing discourses from different epochs, disparate genres, various styles, and diverse ideologies taking the field and vying for expression. The *munāzirah* as such is a palimpsest where texts – a political treatise, a historical sketch, a dramatic piece and a story contained in a dialogized *munāzirah* – are cited, recited, and deployed as commensurate narratives.

1.3 The Clergy and the Vizier

Such narrative orientation is revisited in another work written by Malkum Khan. The dialogized piece *Shaykh u Vazīr* (The Clergy and the Minister), written in 1870, revolves around the issue of “Islamic alphabet,” its alleged insufficiency to accommodate modern concerns such as publishing and mass education, and the necessity of its reform, concerns which were also current with other intellectuals elsewhere in the Muslim world, especially in Iran and in the Ottoman empire.\textsuperscript{167} The main issue in this negotiation, enacted in three scenes, between the progressive vizier and the reactionary clergy is alphabet reform and whether it is in accordance with Islamic law. In scene one, the minister convinces the clergy that reforming the alphabet is as necessary to the existence of the nation as attaining new technology such as telegraph. In scene two, the minister, having prepared the cleric thus, lists the allegedly 24 principal problems with Islamic alphabets, and in scene three, the two debate how the changing of the alphabet might impact the nation’s progress. The characters involved in debating these novel issues are, as we have seen, actants representing social types, in this case a representative of the religious establishment (the Shaykh) and an agent of the ruling class (the vizier). What is different in the context of this *munāzirah*, however, is the shift in the role of the vizier. Whereas in Malkum’s earlier work, *Rafīq u Vazīr*, the vizier represented the ruling class’s resistance to the implantation of law, here he is cast in the role of a reform-minded official. And even though the Shaykh is apparently presented in his expected role as the voice of tradition, he is far from traditional-minded. We see throughout the *munāzirah* that the Shaykh is not against modernization and readily agrees with

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{166} Composed by the poet Firdawsi between circa 977 and 1010 CE, the *Shahnameh* is a lengthy epic poem and is considered the national epic of the Persian-speaking world including Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan.
\item \textsuperscript{167} For a comparative study of language reform in Iran and Turkey, see John Perry, “Language Reform in Turkey and Iran.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17 (1985), 295-311. For a devoted historical and linguistic study of the Turkish context, see Geoffrey Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), particularly chapters 2 to 4.
\end{itemize}
the minister about the necessity of attaining iron ships and telegraph and modern weaponry. The only condition, however, is that the government “does not make our nation emulators to the infidels” (Asil, 373), with which the minister could not agree more. In fact, the minister repeatedly asserts that “there is no faith in the world that encourages the attainment of knowledge” more than Islam (377) and that – in convincing the Shaykh that the simplification of the alphabet is not against Islam – “the basis of Islamic law is on simplification” (396). In doing so, the vizier, too, upsets the easy traditionalist-reformist dichotomy. We then witness characters as hybrid entities that act out not only the contestation but also the overlap of social ideologies. And even though the positions they represent are opposites, their synthesis is equally, if not more, important to the debate, a syncretic ambiguity that reemerges in other narrative elements.

The setting of this munāzirah is yet again ambiguous. There are no clues, not even implied ones, about where the conversation takes place. On the basis of the personalities involved in the conversation, it could be taking place in the royal palace, or at the grand mosque, or at either of the participants’ quarters. Such a setting as we have seen serves as a thematized space where ideas, nations, voices, social ideologies and types meet without being seen. Much like the ideas that are circulated, the unseen setting foregrounds ideation rather than plot action. It is in this vein that the idea of Farangistān as an abstract utopic locus is repeated here again (394), a space that includes “Farangīs and Greeks and Armenians,” a place, nevertheless, that is dissociated from “these rotten Christians” (376) as if to re-emphasize the deliberate abstraction of setting as an unseen space: a space for ideation, idealization, anticipation, and abstraction, all of which fit the requirement of being unseen (ghaybī) due to their abstract nature.

The motif of the unseen is also present in the multilayered narrative that hides its author who remains unseen yet again. This is accomplished through a two-layered narrative: a short prologue that, acting as the frame narrative, introduces the second narrative entitled “The Booklet Entitled the Clergy and the Vizier” (kitābchah-i mawsūm bih shaykh u vazīr). At the outset, the author/narrator makes reference to the Ottoman prime minister who, upon facing with opposition from the ‘ulamā against progressive measures, wrote this conversation (su’āl u javāb), which, according to the narrator, resulted in the silencing of the church (371). A third narrative layer is conceivable when both the prologue and the Booklet are couched in the dialogic language of the munāzirah. Within this multilayered narrative frame it is possible for a multiplicity of voices, languages, nations, ideologies and genres to enter into a simultaneous interaction. The narrator
writes that the prime minister writes a dialogue to silence the clergy, all written by the author, Malkum Khan. The narrator calls the piece “question and answer” (ṣuʿāl ʿu javāb) while the alleged writer of the dialogue, the Ottoman minister, refers to it as a “conversation” (guft ʿu gū, 382). The piece would have been written in Ottoman Turkish, but it is presented in Persian. Thus, there are three author/narrators, two nations (Ottoman empire and Persia), two overlapping genres, and the religious establishment involved in this conversation. Such multitudinous fusion creates a polyphonic space where ideas and genres and nations are not only dialogically engaged in debate but are also simultaneous. This is a condition in which no official statement, no consensus, no authoritative conclusions are possible, a condition which justifies the shifting alignments of the characters.

Yet again, the Shaykh vacillates between being a staunch opponent and a curious addressee and the vizier between a reformist and a traditionalist. At the beginning, for example, the Shaykh won’t hear anything to do with changing the alphabet, but once the vizier convinces him of the similarity between alphabet reform and telegraph technology, the former sincerely wants to learn the reasons and asks for clarification. At once an opponent and a curious student of novel ideas, the Shaykh personifies the conflicted process of adaptation. The same oscillation characterizes the reformist proposals of the vizier who, though promoting the supremacy of Latinized alphabets, emphasizes the difference between “the principles of the governments of Farangistān” (373) and a “national necessity” (375). The Shaykh views the adaptation of the former as an emulation of western values, whereas the vizier sees it as a matter of national interest. Both agree that Islam is the supreme code. The debate, therefore, is not between a traditionalist and a reformist (though it is structurally presented as such); it does not involve an easy conflict between diametrically opposed binaires. The debate, rather, is over the commensurability of the modern and the traditional. It is a dialectic of competing yet simultaneous ideologies, one that places Islam, Farangistān, “ancient custom” and “current traditions” (379) side by side. It is a dialectic however which, compounded by a complex network of voices and styles and ideologies and languages, is characterized by uncertainty, indecision, and lack of consensus. The munāẓirah dramatizes this inconclusiveness narratively.

We earlier saw that the piece starts with a prologue that optimistically reports how the Ottoman minister wrote the piece in question and answer form resulting in the silencing of all opposition from the clerics (371). This promise of a conclusive ending is, of course, left unfulfilled, both on
the narrative and on the ideological levels. The Ottoman minister’s achievement in silencing the opposition, presented as a *fait accompli* in the prologue, is unsettled parodically at the conclusion of the *munāzirah* where the Shaykh agrees that the vizier’s proposition is sound but that “we, on the basis of old habit, never intervene in our own affairs”, to which the minister responds, “or we can sit by idly and wait till god sends down a special angel to reform our alphabet the way we like” (401). Narratively, as well, the piece is abandoned unfinished. One might expect a narrative that opens with a prologue and proceeds to quote someone else’s writing in its entirety would then logically close with a conclusion put forth by the author of the prologue. Such, of course, is not the case because in the dialogic world of the *munāzirah* no single voice, no single style or language has author-ity. Such an ending clearly indicates a lack of resolution, an inconclusive and tentative end, in which the ambiguous “we” encompasses not only the speakers in the dialogue but also the nation. The *munāzirah*, thus, will be continuing.

### 1.4 One Word

The next episode in the ongoing debate is taken up by the author of *Yak Kalimah* (One Word), Mirza Yusof Khan Mustashar al-Dowlah Tabrizi (1823-1895/1239-1313). Mustashar al-Dowlah is considered to be among the pioneers of reform in modern Iran. He held several posts as an official of the Persian government at consulates overseas and was deposed or jailed repeatedly by the reigning monarch Nasser al-Din Shah (r. 1848-1896). The treatise *Yak Kalimah* is arguably his most influential work, not only widely popular in his own time but also inspiring to future generations of activists. It was completed in Paris in 1871 and was repeatedly published both during the author’s lifetime and in the heyday of the establishment of a constitutional government at the capital in 1906.

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169 Nazim-al-Islam Kermani (author of the *Awakening*) considered *Yak Kalimah* among the pioneers of the social movement calling for freedom and reform in Iran and an influential work in awakening the masses. It later served as the political manifesto of the *Anjoman-i Makhfī* (Secret Society) which was established circa 1322/1904. Yahya Aryanpour, *Az Sabāh tā Šimā* (Tehran: Zavvar, 1387/2008), Vol. 1, 30 and 280 onward. Also see, Fereydun Adamiyat, *Fikr-i Āzādi* (Tehran: Sukhan, 1340/1961), 194.

Yak Kalimah is a dialogized treatise written in the form of an imaginary conversation among three characters: the narrator who self identifies as the author himself (Mustashar al-Dowlah), the Hātif-i Ghaybī (Unseen Angel)\textsuperscript{171} and the Friend. The narrator first identifies himself as the author and gives a brief history of his official appointments where he witnessed the progresses of the advanced countries and wished for the same reforms to be implemented in his homeland. After setting the scene in this way, the narrator is taken by sleep during which he witnesses the Hātif-i Ghaybī rising from the west and facing the “lands of Islam” (7). The angel warns of the deep slumber of Muslims and how they are falling behind the other nations of the world in progress. When the author-narrator wakes up, he goes to a “Friend” who is reportedly well versed in the history of Islam and Islamic traditions in order to enquire about the reasons “other countries [have] achieved such progress, while we have remained in such a state of lethargy and disorder” (9).\textsuperscript{172} A conversation then ensues between the two whereby the Friend summarizes the secret to the progress of Europe in “one word” (yak kalimah): “the book of law” (10). At the end of the conversation, the Friend leaves the narrative and the author himself takes on the task of elaborating the nineteen codes of French law, equating each with Islamic teachings. From this point forward, a fourth layer of dialogic interaction is added to the narrative in which the narrator is addressing the reader.

Given the fact that this treatise was completed at Paris in 1871, it is safe to assume that the Hātif-i Ghaybī who looks eastward from the west is the same as the author-narrator, for Mustashār al-Dowleh would have been looking eastward from Paris at the time of writing his treatise. Likewise, the other character, the Friend, who is reportedly well versed in Islamic sciences and history, can be said to be the same as the author-narrator. The Friend concludes his section with these words: “You will see that while there are excellent codes in Europe and the people there have raised themselves to the highest degree of development by following them, your Prophet has determined and established this for the Islamic peoples 1280 years ago” (23). This is precisely what the author-narrator will do in the rest of the treatise: equating each and every section of the French codes with Quranic verses and other Islamic traditions. The fusion of

\textsuperscript{171} According to the Dehkhoda Lexicon, Hātif-i Ghaybī is an angel that calls out news of the invisible, metaphysical world to earthlings. The figure has a long-standing presence in Persian literary tradition.

\textsuperscript{172} This and all subsequent translations henceforth of excerpts from Yak Kalimah are from Seyed-Ghorab and McGlinn, Yak Kalimah. I have, however, made stylistic and lexical changes where I thought appropriate.
all characters in the narrator’s voice may or may not actually be the case; however, for the sake of our argument, these three characters are narratively synonymous as internal focalizers. They serve the same function: to warn Muslims of their alleged backwardness, to introduce them to the concept of law, and to prove that French constitutional laws are in strict accordance with Islamic laws and can therefore be adopted and implemented wholesale by Muslims. The fact that the Friend refers to the prophet of Islam as “your prophet” – as if he, the Friend, were not of the same ethnicity or religious orientation as the main author-narrator – reveals a simultaneous foreignness in the narrator’s indigenous speech. This is further reinforced through the image of the Hātaf-i Ghaybī, an Islamic angelic figure, rising from the west and facing the lands of Islam rather than rising from within it. The multi-voiced narrator, then, is a discursive formation anthropomorphizing the co-existence of competing discourses, namely, the French codes and the Islamic principles. Not surprisingly, neither one of the structurally distinct but narratively commensurate characters is in disagreement about the commensurability of the French Codes with Islamic teachings and about what is to be done to save Iran from its current state. The real dialogue, then, is between competing discourses to which Mustashar al-Dowlah the senior politician, his government, the religious establishment, and the nation are drawn. In a word, the structure of Yak Kalimah sets up a narrative framework in which one semantic unit (author-angel-narrator-Friend) personifies the dialogic interaction of voices and ideologies in contemplating the reasons for Iran’s miserable state and convincing the addressee(s) that the solution is in one word: the book of law. This narrative feature turns what is compositionally written in the form of a monologic treatise into a dialogic interaction.

This level of narrative abstraction is reinforced by the setting as well. The site of this dramatic dialogue is similarly vague. There are no indications in the text as to an actual place from which the author-narrator is speaking. There are only references to the places the author has served as an official of the Iranian government or has visited: Tiflis, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Paris, London, all included, geopolitically, in Farangistān, from which location the Hātaf-i Ghaybī also rises and speaks at the outset. Nevertheless, this type of setting is instrumental in constructing character types rather than individualized characters. The character type narrator-

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173 It has been suggested that the “Friend” referred to in this treatise is Mirza Malkum Khan, though there is no consensus on this proposition. See pages iii-iv in Seyed-Ghorab and McGlinn, Yak Kalima. See also Hamid Algar, Mirzā Malkum Khān (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 139-40.
angel-Friend is analogous to the setting in that they are both abstract and invisible (ghaybī). This literary-rhetorical device, as we have seen, activates several semantic functions: first, anonymity equates universality as opposed to individual opinion; second, the association of the term ghaybī with the unseen world signifies a divine message in the popular imagination; third, the association of the character type narrator-angel-Friend with the setting suggests that the speaker is the bearer of the divine message addressing the eastern people from the west (it will be remembered that the angel at the outset of the text rises from the West); fourth, that the west has comprehended the wisdom of the divine world, the divine word (law), which is exactly what the narrative intends to do: equating western law with Islamic Sharia; and consequently, fifth, that Western laws and Islamic principles, modernity and tradition, are simultaneous.

This process of abstraction is carried out in the text on yet another level closely linked with characterization and setting. As we have seen, the concept of Farang or Farangisān encompasses a utopic space whose locus is outside of Iran and which could alternatively refer to the Caucasus, Europe, or America. Farangisān is therefore conceived as an idea associated with civility (madanīyyat), progress (taraqīyyat-i Farangisān, 6), order (usūl-i nazm-i Farangisān, 8), industry (sanāyi′-i Farangisān, 10), civilization (Farānseh va sāyir-i duval-i mutimaddinah, 16), “virtues, peace, prosperity and security” (44), wise political policies (tadābūr-i sīyāsatīyah-i Farangisān, 60), justice through the use of special courts (mahkamah hāy-i makhsūs-i Farangisān, 68), and knowledge (asha′ah-i ulūm-i Farangī hā, 80; kitāb khānah hāy-i pāris va landan, 98). Perhaps nowhere is the imaginary space of Farangisān more visibly deployed than in this quote in which Farangisān encompasses countries and cities, whether located within the boundaries of Western Europe or not, under one heading: “It should be recognized that in the United States of America, England, France, Switzerland, Belgium and Greece, the press is

\[174\] The unseen world has a long-standing currency in Persian literary and philosophical imagination. However, at the time of Constitutional movement in Iran, it became distanced from metaphysics and increasingly associated with practical worldly affairs such as sociopolitical reform for which purpose most treatises similar to Yak Kalimah were written. Many examples of this novel approach to an age-old topos exist. Perhaps the most famous of these is Mirza Malkum Khan′s Kītābehkāh-i Ghaybī (The Unseen or Secret Booklet), written circa 1275 or 1276 (1858/1859). Another example is Mirza Abbas Nuri′s (Abdul-Baha) Asrūr al-Ghaybiyyah li Aṣbāb al-Madanīyyah or Risūlah-i Madanīyyah (The Unseen Secrets of the Principles of Civility or The Treatise on Civility) written in Acre, Palestine in 1875. Others made use of the association of the invisible with dreams and slumber in utilizing this rhetorical device. Haj Muhammad Hassan Tajir Kashani′s Ru′yā-yi Sādiqāh (A Vivid Dream, ca. 1898) and Iʿtimad al-Saltanah′s Khalsah yā Khāb Nāmah [Mystic] Trance or the Book of Dreams, ca. 1893). These are only a handful of examples among numerous works drawing on the motif of the invisible.
completely free. And today in Paris there are one hundred publishers and six hundred booksellers” (51). And once again, the abstract category Farangisān is clearly differentiated from the concrete reality of European populations, or Farangīs. In admiring the scientific and technological advances of Farangisān, for instance, the author-narrator makes reference to these advances as the cause of lifting “those ill-bred people of Europe” (ān milal-i bī tarbīyat-i Farangisān, 38) above the rest of humanity. Elsewhere, while discussing the progressive criminal codes of Farangisān, the narrator speaks approvingly of Europe’s “civilized societies” which are nevertheless inhabited by “licentious and neglectful people” (jamā’at-i mutimaddinah kah az ahl-i shahvat va ghaflat murakkab hastand, 73) who are conducive to crime, thus distinguishing between the idealized civilization of Europe and its population. What is encouraged, then, is not the emulation of European people (and by extension European culture) but the appreciation and implementation of their system of governance, which, in turn, is based on Islamic teachings. This has important implications for the author’s proposal for employing European systems in Iranian society.

The issues discussed in the treatise, then, encompass a wide range of social and political issues: common versus public laws (qavānīn-i ‘urfīyyah u ‘ādīyyah), the necessity to separate religious and civil laws (14), promotion of the vernacular (zabān-i āmmah, 16), meritocracy (34), freedom of speech and of newspapers (46-8), freedom of assembly (50), suffrage (52), taxes and tributes (56), accountability for government income and expenditure (58), the reform of the penal code (70), establishment of primary schools and teacher training colleges (76), orderliness, cleanliness and beautification of villages, roads and cities, standardization of the measurement and coinage systems (84), and exploitation of mines and attention to the well being of the military (86), among others. In addition to these matters of familiar experience, the author-narrator also introduces novel concepts from the French Codes (loi va kud hā, 12): The book of law (kitāb-i qānūn, 10), senate (sinā yā mashvirat khānah, 16), constitution (kunstīsīn or nizām nāmah-i hukūmat, 24), deputies (député) and legislative council (Corps Législatif, 53), senator (sināturī) and jurors (jurī hā, 66). These are achievements that have already been realized in Europe, issues that still need to be implemented in Iran. This temporal difference – between a state

175 French words in original.
already achieved and a state still to be realized – opens up another narrative layer in this treatise: the treatment of time.

There are at least two temporal indexes immediately identifiable in the treatment of time. First is the use of spatial metaphors in reference to temporal categories;176 the second axis involves the mediating role of Islam in rendering tradition and modernity simultaneous.

The first category is established early on in the narrative when the author-narrator sets up a clear distinction between the “there” of progress and order and the “here” of lack: “during my stay in that country [at Tiflis in Russia] I saw such good administration, military power, order and prosperity, that I continually wished it was possible for Iran, too, to have this good administration, power, peace and prosperity” (5). Later, when he is appointed as the chargé d’affaires of the Persian government at Paris in 1866/1283, he declares, “[d]uring my three years in Paris, I went on private visits to London four times. During this time I saw that in France and in England, the military order and prosperity of the country, the public services, the multitude of arts and sciences, and the peace and freedom of ordinary people were a hundred times greater than in Russia. It may sound exaggerated, but I can say that what I witnessed in Russia was only a foretaste of what I later saw in Europe” (5). Of particular interest is the use of the word “foretaste” (namūnah ... az ān keh ba’d dar Farangisān mīdīdam) which conveys a sense of futural anticipation. The association of future (ba’d) with Europe and the present state with Iran forms the temporal orientation of the narrative and is repeated implicitly or explicitly throughout the treatise: “Even more astonishing is that the situation in the East today is quite the opposite. ‘Behold the differences between here and there’” (75, emphasis added). This spatial approach to time signifies a process of ideation in which Iran (but not Iranians) is associated with a spatiotemporal present of lack while Europe (but not Europeans) is imagined as an ideal futural state of aspiration.177 We have already seen above how the text itself lays out this distinction quite clearly.


177 This distinction became in its evolved form, as we shall see amply, a distinctive feature of debates over adopting Western technology as opposed to acquiring Western behaviour or Farangī-Maʿābī.
Against this backdrop, the idea of Iran represents a “space of experience” that is characterized by absence of law and order, while the idea of Europe signifies a “horizon of expectation” that features progress and prosperity. Examples of these spatiotemporal categories abound in the text. The angel who appears to the narrator in his sleep describes the present status of Iran in these terms:

There are well-ordered hospitals and schools for both boys and girls in the smallest of the neighbouring territories, while there is not even one hospital or school in your largest city. The village streets in neighbouring countries are ordered, wide and clean but the streets in your great cities are so narrow, dirty, crooked and potholed that it is impossible to pass. In neighbouring countries, they build railways while you have not even started to use wagons. In neighbouring countries, all processes and affairs of the people are determined impartially in tribunals based on a code of law. Today your courtrooms do not contain a single book of codified law by which judges applying customary law could know their own duty. In neighbouring countries each person brings their taxes to government offices without any need for a tax-collector. In your country, [sic] ‘This negligence and lack of careful management destroys your estate and that of your children … Wake from the sleep of negligence. Take pity on yourself and the generations to come. (7-9)

This example perhaps most clearly illustrates the “space of experience” (as an extension of the past) and the “horizon of expectation” (connected with a yet-to-come future) conjoined in the present.

In another instance, the author-narrator compares the past-present of Iran with the future-present of Europe in respect to the issue of taxes and tax collection. “In Islamic countries,” he opines, tax collection policies encourage deception, fraud and lying because the taxpayers are not aware of the government’s expenditures and the uses their taxes are put to. Fear of punishment and imprisonment induces them to evade taxes at all cost, a situation which in Eastern lands leads to the disappearance of the “virtues of chivalrous behaviour, courage and noble ambition” (61). In England, on the other hand, taxpayers are informed of and are required to pay taxes based on their income, all in accordance with established codes. What is more, since tax money serves the interest of both the state and the people, the government does not investigate taxpayers’ claims

\[178\] As set forth by Koselleck, the “space of experience” and “horizon of expectation” are metahistorical categories that help the historian understand time in its modern sense. The space of experience “is present past, whose events have been incorporated and can be remembered,” while the horizon of expectation “is the future made present; it directs itself to the not-yet, to the nonexperienced, to that which is to be revealed.” Reinhart Koselleck, Futures Past (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pages 272 onward.
and simply relies on each individual’s word: “It is remarkable how much trust they put in individuals, and how much they have refined the people’s ethics” (61). The present of Iran is filled with the remnants of a past to be shunned, whereas the present of Europe is the promise of a future to aspire to. Having thus established a spatial (here-there) and a temporal (now-then) difference between Iran and Farangisān, the text nevertheless signals the simultaneity of the two, both spatially (as neighbouring, geographical realities) and temporally (as the anticipated future is said to be commensurate with a bygone past). Both simultaneous and commensurate, the past and the future meet in the present through the mediating role of Islam.

This spatiotemporal difference between Iran and Farangisān is therefore bridged by Islam. Time and again in this treatise, both the author-narrator and the “Friend” strive to find parallels between the principles of European progress and Islamic teachings. In fact, against each item in the French Code, which the author-narrator sets out to define and elaborate on, he cites several verses of the Quran or, alternatively, prophetic traditions. Early in the text, the Friend confirms that “if you glance at the contents of the codes of France and other civilised governments, you will see how the currents of opinion and the experience of the nations of the world affirm the religious laws of Islam. You will see that while there are excellent codes in Farangistān and the people there have raised themselves to the highest degree of development by following them, your Prophet has determined and established this for the Islamic peoples 1280 years ago” (23). In other words, the “Islamic religious law and the opinions of the learned men of Europe are in agreement” (83). The commensurability of the principles of European civilizational progress with Islamic teachings is iterated throughout the text with reference to verses from the Quran or traditions. In fact, if the East is lagging behind Europe, it is because “the maxims of Islamic law … are abandoned and forgotten in the Islamic world today, whereas the people of Farangistān have seized and understood them” (73). Worse yet, it is the Farangīs who “have realised the value of the bestowals and verses of God better than the people of the East, and they have taken great pains to implement the meaning of the word of truth in the Quran” (98).¹⁷⁹ The conceptual

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¹⁷⁹ Observations of this sort were common among both the “secular” and “traditional” intellectuals in the Constitutional era. Among an abundance of examples, see, as representatives of the allegedly “traditionalist” and “secularist” camps, respectively, Abulhasan Mirza Qajar’s (Shaykh al-Ra’īs) Ittiḥād-i Islām [The Union of Islam], (Bombay: Gulzar Hasani Press, 1312/1895), 15, 22 and Murtaza Quli Khan Sani’ al-Dowlah’s Rah-i Najāt [The Path to Deliverance] (Tehran: Matba’āh Fārūs, 1325/1907), 1. Sani’ al-Dowlah was the Speaker of the first National Assembly and would thus belong to the so-called “secular” intellectuals. The path to the deliverance of Iran in the author’s opinion is the building of roads and railways.
semblance (simultaneity and commensurability) of Iran and *Farangistān* is also deployed narratively.

Narratologically, the text is characterized by anachronistic maneuvers involving both analepses and prolepses. With the French Codes serving as the present subject of inquiry in the text, each time the narrator sets forth one of the codes in an anticipatory fashion, as an ideal to aspire toward, we have flash forwards, and each time one of the codes is equated with an Islamic axiom or a Quranic verse, we have flashbacks. In this way, three layers of text are narratively conjoined and exist on the plane of the present. Whereas the advent of modernity in Europe had reportedly disrupted the earlier boundedness of experience and expectation and set them on different trajectories, in the case of Iranian modernity the past and the future are reconciled through the mediating role of a religion that allegedly accommodates all future possibilities. In this way, the “space of experience” is not so much a present characterized by remnants of a past, but a plane where past and future are simultaneous; the “horizon of expectation” therefore is already a textual reality (embodied in the verses of the Quran).

It should be noted that these narrative maneuvers are not meant as clever textual games or techniques which the author may or may not have employed consciously. What is suggested, rather, is that the narrative of the *munāzirah* mirrors the rivalry of ideologies through a synthesis of epochs and voices and discourses. Just as the translation of foreign words are placed side by side their Persian renditions (e.g. *sinā yā mashvirat khānah*, 16; *kunstīsīn or nizām nāmah-i hukūmat*, 24), the codes of the French law become translations of Quranic verses. Translation as such bridges the temporal gap between the origin and its rendition. It is the ongoing dialogic interaction of these discourses, with their attendant languages, ideologies and styles, that populate the *munāzirah* in text after text.

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180 In later generations, especially during the Pahlavi era, Islam would increasingly be replaced by nationalist references to Persia’s glorious past as the mediator between the past and the future, the space of experience and the horizon of expectation.

181 Koselleck asserts that in Europe “until the mid-seventeenth century” the eschatological prophecies of the Christian doctrine had bound the future to the past. No matter how different experiences were and what novelties were experienced, this would not alter the outcome of the end of time. *Futures Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 277-8.
1.5 Court Intrigues

We now turn into a piece written in 1871 by an anonymous author. It is a collection of three separate dialogized stories revolving around the same theme: the premiership of Mirza Husayn Khan Mushir al-Dowlah (1243-1298/1827-1881). In the first part, written as a quasi stage play, a conversation takes place between the prime minister, Mushir al-Dowlah, and his deputy, a Mirza ‘Abbas Quli. In the conversation, the prime minister lays out the details of his plan to eliminate all competition at the court and among the clergy and governors and to keep the Shah’s mind occupied with irrelevant issues as he, the prime minister, will secure possessions and positions for himself. In the second part, also written as a stage play in four acts, the same criticism towards the prime minister and his corrupt policies is staged in the form of a popular court play known as baqqāl bāzī, a form of commedia dell’arte featuring a grocer often played by the famous court jester Karīm Shīrāhī. In the third part, the same attack on the prime minister and his policies is revisited, this time in the form of questions and answers.

The first and second sections of this collection, as mentioned above, are written in the form of a stage play, complete with stage directions and authorial interjections. Formally, they constitute a dialog about a foregone conclusion. It is only in the third section, not written as a play but as a munāzirah, that the participants engage in a dialogic discussion regarding the prime minister and the state of the country’s affairs during his premiership. It is here that the speakers put the reforms implemented by the prime minister and their efficacy to discussion. The questioner (the two participants are not characterized but appear under the headings “question” and “answer”)

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182 I gained privileged access to this valuable unpublished manuscript through the generosity of Mr. Hamid Amjad, who kindly gave me access to his private library in the Fall of 2012 in Tehran.

183 It is quite probable that this collection was written by a prince, a courtier, or a court official of some stature since the author is clearly familiar with many high ranking officials and court personalities and has had access as an attendee to the play staged before the Shah. Additionally, the text of the munāzirah and the author’s animosity towards the prime minister betrays the type of court intrigue that eventually led to the Shah’s dismissal of Mushir al-Dowlah in 1290/1873. For further information on the conspiracy against the prime minister, see Fereydun Adamiyat, Fikr-i Āzādī (Tehran: Sukhan, 1340/1961), 91-2.

184 Literally, “grocer’s play.” The characters involved in this play are a grocer and a couple of rascals who harass the former and continually distract him while robbing from his inventory. In the process, the trio exposes the corruption of officials and the miserable state of security in the country.

185 It is not clear who the author of this popular play is. Some scholars (Aryanpour, Az Sabā tā Nīmā, 326-7) have attributed it to Muhammad Hasan Khan I’timad al-Saltanah. Others believe the play was written by Amin al-Dowlah Kashi or by Mirza Muhammad Sa’id Lashkar. For a review of the literature on this topic, see J. M. “Namāyish Nāmah-i Baqāl Bāzī dar Huzūr.” Iran Nameh 26 (1367/1989), 286-290.
deems the fivefold reforms introduced by the prime minister – justice bureau, investigation bureau, monetary fines, police regiments, and military exercises (respectively, dīvān khānâh-i ‘adlıyyah, majlis-i tahqīq, jazāy-i naqdīyyah, fowj-i nazmīyyah, and jang-i haft lashkar) – as worthless. The answerer invites the questioner to fairness and points to many recent reforms and changes such as the invitation of Malkum Khan to the capital, the cleanliness of the streets, the installation of street names and house numbers, and the orderliness of uniforms and of the police, all of which the questioner brushes aside as emulation of the Franks and unnecessary when the priority is the feeding of the hungry and the healing of the ill, development of agriculture, and price control: “your government of civilization and our civilisé population, your excellent constructions and superb buildings, all decorated and stone walled and made a la franca, and the military uniforms of your politically savvy politicians … have led to a lot of prosperity” (no page numbers in original). This is all false emulation (taqlîd-i rîyā ṭī) and superficial civilization (sīvîlîzāsīyûn-i zâhirī). It is best to stop emulating and to refer to our own heritage, the supreme poets Hafiz and Sa’di, who centuries earlier laid out the requirements of civilization (takālîf-i sīvîlîzāsiyun).

The network of inter-texts in this collection, then, reproduces the same issues in various ways. In it, the same topic is focalized from four different perspectives: once through the eyes of the corrupt minister and his deputy, another time through the eyes of courtiers, witnesses to the royal stage play which also acts out the same issue, and finally through the dialogue between two advocates. Each text mirrors the other, effectively making the overall text the product of the conversation of texts and styles in which what is signified is not presented as a final product but constantly recycled in a process of ongoing production. Meaning is produced precisely through the interplay between texts rather than as a fixed and ultimate point of reference. The production of meaning in this munāzirah therefore is a contested process in which we witness the juxtaposition of several genres (direct address, dialogue, drama, munāzirah), languages (Persian,

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186 At the outset of Mushir al-Dowlah’s appointment as premier in 1288/1871, the outbreak of draught and cholera devastated the country. See Ferey�un Adamiyat, Fikr-i Āzādī (Tehran: Sukhan, 1340/1961), 75.

187 These insights follow the definition of intertextuality by Kristeva and Barthes. For Kristeva, intertextuality involves “a vision of texts as always in a state of production, rather than being products to be quickly consumed. Graham Allen, Intertextuality (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 34. Similarly for Barthes, “meaning occurs because of the play of signifiers, not because a signified can be found to stabilize a signifier” Graham Allen, Intertextuality (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 74.
Turkish, Arabic, French), styles (formal language, colloquial speech, obscenities, poetic language) and ideologies.

The first section opens with the narrator giving a brief historical account of the quick rise of Mushir al-Dowlah to premiership, including the date of his appointment. The narrator then proceeds to present a fictional account of the premier and his deputy’s secret meeting where they engage in “question and answer in this way [meaning in dramatic fashion].” From the outset, then, the narrator sets in motion parallel genres. Introducing what is to follow in words that signify an indigenous form (suʿāl u javāb) but which in actuality employs elements of western drama justifies the ending of this section in which the narrator resurfaces with an apologetic: “Even though the style of writing in this booklet is novel [sabk-i tahrīr-i īn daftār tāzah] and the appearance of its phrases are foolish and absurd but in essence the purpose [of this piece] is to describe the [current] conditions which has been written in this garb.” To the narrator and his audience, then, how the issues are relayed is as important as what they are, a fact that explains the narrator’s justification. A similar approach is employed in relation to the fielding of languages. The premier self parodies by referring to the foreign terms— and by extension the reforms – he has introduced into the country as “emulated words” (alfāz-i taqlīdī), signifying the rivalry between the two languages for currency. This, combined with citing a line of verse in Arabic from the classical poet Sa’di, compounds and at the same time expands the competition. This becomes more evident when the quoted verse is invoked in support of the deputy’s plot against other courtiers: the manipulation of discourse for personal gain. The summoning of extra-textual (hence non-fictional) figures who must be convinced or silenced in different ways (read: languages) reveals the sheer significance of speech manipulation (the manipulation of styles, social discourses, ideologies) in this munāzirah. As many as twenty real-life government and court officials are textually invoked,188 in addition to the Shah, the clergy, the nobles, court servants, and even court women who must all be won over using one of the multiple languages at the command of the reportedly conniving prime minister and his deputy.

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A similar narrative trajectory is employed in the second section. Scene one opens with a frame narrative where the author introduces the play to be shortly staged. On the threshold of that narrative and the text of the play, a third narrative ensues where the characters Nurūz Khan, Karam Khan and Baba Aqa Khan (all apparently court personalities) talk about the miserable state of the country, its economy, and its political corruption. Karam Khan refers to the “politically savvy and Farangistān-educated prime minister” (sadr-i a’zam-i pulitik dān-i farangistān raftah) in an ironic fashion, dismissing his reforms as “utter emulation” (taqlīd-i mahz). Approving of this evaluation, Baba Aqa Khan returns to the issue of language once again: “he constantly writes in newspapers bāb-i ‘ālī, nazmīyyah, zabtīyyah, jazā-yi naqd [the grand hall, police corps, confiscation bureau, cash fines respectively]. What is wrong with darbār-i humāyūn or jarīmah [royal court, penalty respectively] that he, out of his weakness of spirit, abandons his own people’s common language and holds on to the tails of others?” What seems to bother these personalities, both politically and linguistically, is the prime minister’s plan to dictate the supremacy of one discourse over others. What is at stake is the politics of adaptation so much so that it is not so much language use that is contested (for both the traditional terms and their translations are in Persian) but the discourse that a certain language represents, an indication of the munāzirah as field of discursive rivalry. At this point the “curtain falls” and scene two begins with the staging of the grocer’s play (baqqāl bāzī). This play is filled with colloquial and obscene language and acts out the fielding of popular discourse on the same issues discussed thus far.\(^{189}\) It includes biting criticism of status quo: the corrupt courtiers, corruption in the police force (nazmīyyah) and at the court. Here too real life personalities are invoked to be mercilessly criticized, including the prime minister for emulating and encouraging the use of foreign constructs in Persian such as “cash fines” (jazā-yi naqdīyyah) and “crime bureau” (utāq-i jurm u janāyat): “we must now leave our jobs and livelihood and go learn Islāmī [Ottoman Turkish] language.” Such shifting of the speech and actions of characters from vernacular foolery to solemn social commentary is a noticeable feature of this play. One character’s speech (Mirza Yushan Khan’s), for example, turns into social criticism and patriotic speech in the middle of scene four: “Alas, that today in Iran true service and honesty is cause for disgrace and

\(^{189}\) Abulqasim Jannati Ata’i considered this play as the only indigenously Iranian play in comparison with most contemporary plays which originated from the Caucasus. See J.M. “Namāyish Nāmah-i Baqāl Bāzī.” Iran Nameh 26 (1367/1989), 286.
tact and zealotry [is cause for] disdain while treachery and disloyalty is cause for glory.” In the end the narrator interjects with a direct address to the ancestors to rise from their graves and deliver Iranians from this state and this prime minister. A drama within drama, this play is embedded within the text of the previous play both of which are framed between authorial prologue and closure, all of which are lodged within the larger narrative of the munāzirah. Each representing a discourse, an ideology, a social language, a social class, these texts form a network of concentric circles revolving around the same issue. Into this dizzying arrangement of texts are injected other texts, languages, and citations (reference, for example, is made to the text of the Shah’s travelogue of his trip to the province of Mazandaran). These inter-texts, together with their attendant discourses and languages, enact the intense and ongoing social dialogue that characterized Iranian adaptation of modernity.

The third section starts, in a similar fashion, with a brief authorial foreword: a “description of the questions and answers between two acquaintances.” As mentioned earlier, the characters involved in this last section are not given names. They are called, so to speak, “question” and “answer.” If in the previous sections criticism of the state of affairs under the prime minister were universally acknowledged, here the same issue is put to debate, with the questioner seriously challenging the answerer’s claims. The answerer attacks the prime minister on the same grounds already invoked in the previous sections. But the questioner comes back with positive appraisals of the prime minister’s policies such as the ordering and cleanliness of the city, the establishment of modern institutions, and the implementation of the principles of civilization (sīvīlīzāsīyūn), all of which the answerer dismisses as “superficial civilization” (sīvīlīzāsīyūn-i zāhirī), stating that “your imitation is incomplete” (taqlīd-i shumā nā tamām ast). It is on such ground that the answerer is not impressed when the questioner upholds the prime minister’s merit on account of his being educated in Farangisān. On the issue of emulation (taqlīd), the answerer declares that the principles of continuity (pāydār) and validity (iʿtibār) are to follow indigenous traditions rather than emulating others, citing a line from Hafiz on the importance of self belief190 and another line from Saʿdi on the rejection of false emulation (taqlīd-i rīyāʿī).191

190 From one of Hafiz’s most popular poems, the exact line reads: “sālhā dil talab-i jām-i jām az mā mīkard / vānchah khud dāshht zi bīgānah tamānā mīkard” (For years my heart inquired of me / Where Jamshid’s sacred cup might be). The translation is Dick Davis’s, in Faces of Love: Hafez and the Poets of Shiraz (Washington: Mage Publishers, 2012), 42.
These, opines the answerer, are the principles of civilization, not superficial imitation of others. These verses in Persian and the foreign word “civilization” in French are placed side by side, thus textually enacting the simultaneity of these discourses and of their languages, a strategy that is mirrored in invoking the figure of Makum Khan. When, on the answerer’s prompt, the debaters agree that patriotism and chivalry (ghayrat-i millat va lūtī gārī) should be the guiding principles of their debate, both make implicit reference to Malkum Khan’s principles of humanity (ādamiyyat). As such, “humanity,” a universal value, becomes the meeting place of a modern (patriotism: ghayrat-i millat) and an indigenous (chivalry: lūtī gārī). The piece then closes with a line in verse. Significantly, it does not end with an authorial interjection as in the previous sections. Of the three sections, only the munāzirah is left open-ended. Whereas the first and second sections enacted completed events in the past (a conversation between the prime minister and his deputy, a staged play), the munāzirah enacts the incomplete present which, in the process of being produced, is pregnant with national heritage, novel concepts, indigenous genres (verse), foreign genres (prose drama), discourses, ideologies and voices, part fictional, part real. The next linkage in the inter-text of the munāzirah is Malkum Khan who, being the last person summoned textually here, employs a similar strategy (that of summoning real-life personalities in a fictional account) in another of his dialogic essays.

1.6 Establishment of a Bank

Written circa 1872, Muzākirah dar bārah-i Tashkīl-i Bānk (Negotiation on the Establishment of a Bank) is a fictional account of a ministerial meeting about the establishment of the first Persian bank at the ministerial assembly which forms the setting of this munāzirah. At this time, there was no parliamentary system in Iran, but there was a predecessor, the nascent consultative body

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191 The exact line, apparently on display at the UN as translated below, is this: “banī ādām a’zā-yi yak dīgarand / kīh dar āfarīnīsh zī yak guharand” (Of one essence is the human race / Thusly has creation put the base).

192 Itself the locus of several contending significations, the term lūtī refers to a social class that can alternatively signify tradition’s protective honour or vagabond rascality. For information on lūtīs and their role in the political history of this era, see Willem Floor, “The Lūtīs: A social phenomenon in qājār Persia.” *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, 12: ½ (1971), 103-120; and Asghar Fathi, “The Role of Lutis in the Constitutional Revolution.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 11 (1979).
known as the Supreme Assembly (Dār al-Shurā-yi Kubrā) established by Naser al-Din Shah. Repeated references, however, are made at the outset to the “majlis” or parliament (211) as the place where the meeting takes place. Given that the first official parliament in Iran would be inaugurated over three decades later, the narrative of this munāzirah acts as the space where present reality and future possibility coincide. Populating the fictionalized anticipatory future with contemporary figures further reinforces this spatio-temporal coincidence. Indeed, the participants in this debate are real court officials – among them the foreign minister, Mirza Sa‘id Khan Mu‘tamin al-Mulk (1231-1301/1816-1884), the finance minister, Dūst‘ali Khan Mu‘ayyir al-Mamālik (1236-1290/1821-1873) and even Malkum Khan himself – who as actants in this munāzirah embody both temporal aspects: their rather seamless participation in the debate casts them as seasoned parliamentarians while their concerns and the issue at hand are present-oriented. The same spatio-temporal simultaneity is employed regarding the issue of the bank itself. The first Persian bank was not established until some thirteen years after the writing of this piece by Malkum. However, its founding is treated as a matter of present reality. This is why this munāzirah is the only one among the texts presented here (and to my knowledge among other munāzirahs elsewhere) in which the text ends with a closure: the ratified bill for the establishment of a bank. The tentative closure is made possible when the temporal categories are not only simultaneous but also fictionally overlapping.

Indeed this temporal overlap is extended to the competing genres that make up the narrative of the munāzirah. The piece reads as the record of a typical parliamentary debate, with questions, objections, responses and corrections, but it also reads like a stage play, complete with characters, stage directions, and authorial interjections. The theatrical narrative is in turn stitched with embedded questions. These are shorter information questions that are nestled in the speeches of the characters in the larger debate (for example, “what is a bank?” 214). Next to these are embedded texts: the principles of European banks (bānk hā-yi farangistān), cited “verbatim” (bidūn-i kam u zīyād, 222), the actual text of the Ottoman bank’s constitution (read

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194 The first bank in Iran, The Imperial Bank of Persia, was established in 1885 through a concession given by Naser al-Din Shah to Baron Julius De Reuter. For details on the concession and the bank’s activities and success, see Frances Bostock, “State Bank or Agent of Empire?” Iran, 27 (1989), 103-113.
out verbatim off stage, 223, 225), and once again the Sharia law (“What is wrong with the laws of the Islamic Sharia that we have to follow such and such a monsieur or monsieur so and so?” 228). In a fascinating cautionary note to the deputies, Nazim al-Mulk (the honorific given to Malkum Khan who is both the author and a character in this munāzirahā) warns that mere discussions (mubāhisāt), dialogues (guft u gū hā) or speech (suḥbat) will not yield the desired results. It is only through consultation (mashvirat, 212-13) that issues will be resolved. And it is, in fact, through the dialogic narrative of the munāzirah that texts, voices, and genres engage in consultation, citation, dissention, contradiction and disputation. This munāzirah in essence acts out the way a parliamentary debate should proceed, a preoccupation that gathers momentum as we approach the decade prior to the establishment of the first Majlis in Iran.
Chapter 2

2 The Pre-constitutional Munāzirah 2

2.1 The Iranian and the Indian

Closer in time to the establishment of a nascent parliament in Iran, *Mukālimah-i Sayyāh-i Īrānī bā Shakhṣ-i Hindī* (The Dialogue between an Iranian Traveller and an Indian Person) is one of the well-known and influential *munāzirahs* of the pre-constitutional era. Written by Mirza Sayyid Hasan Kashani, it was first serialized in the influential journal *Habl al-Matín* of Calcutta between 1898 and 1899. It was shortly after published in book form at least twice in 1325/1907.

The setting of this dialogue is India, both a foreign land and at the same time a familiar one due to its proximity to and cultural affinity with Iran. Lying between Iran and *Farangistān* (both a British colony and an Asian land, the meeting place of Magna Carta and Asian “despotism”), India represents an in-between space for the convergence of temporalities, languages, and traditions. As an intermediary space, then, the setting becomes thematized as the spatial representation of the *munāzirah*. And in fact *Mukālimah-i Sayyāh-i Īrānī bā Shakhṣ-i Hindī* was first written and published in India. It is in this intermediary locus that the conversation takes place between the voice of change (the Indian person) and the voice apparently resisting it (the Iranian traveller). However, just like his country, the setting of this *munāzirah*, the Indian person is an in-between character. While the Iranian person acts as the ideological impersonation of the ruling class in Iran, the Indian participant impersonates the call for reform within Iran. Together, they form the fragments of the split subject of Iranian modernity. Far from being a clever application of (post)humorous theory, the motif of the split subject is a suggestion submitted by the text itself, for the Indian person is, in fact, “of Iranian race and a friend of the Iranian state and a co-religionist of the rulers of Iran” (42). The ethnic epithets “Indian” and “Iranian” therefore

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195 It started on 12 Rabī’ul Avval 1316 (2 August 1898) and continued until 5 Jamādī’ul Avval 1316 (11 September 1899). The author himself mentions in the prologue that the work was serialized “in 1894 … in one of the [foreign] newspapers” (25).

signify not so much an inter-national discussion but a national debate between competing ideologies.

In this context the issues put to debate are issues of national concern (where British-Indian laws and practices are invoked, they serve a comparative function): the necessity to separate civil and religious laws’ spheres of influence, taxes and tax collection, language simplification, customs, the legal system, matrimonial laws, journalism, and the publishing industry, among several other peripheral issues. All of these issues are discussed in the framework of the need for an all-incumbent law, the description of which is what the munāzirah ends with. While the debate revolves around a single all encompassing issue, the sheer range of related issues reflects the multiplicity of topics and embedded voices in the munāzirah. As will be observed amply, a single topic generates a multitude of responses whereby the two actants Indian and Iranian function as embodied clusters of shifting voices. We shall see this abundantly below. But an early example provides some context. Early on and in response to the Indian’s query about the nature of the legal system in Iran, the Iranian person reveals that other than connection to a powerful official or an influential clergy, the common people have no other recourse to justice than seeking asylum at holy shrines (imam zādaḥs), which, because of the prevalence of despotism, outnumber the mosques in the country (31-2). The Iranian, of course, discloses this information approvingly. However, he simultaneously (self) criticizes the status quo through the use of parody. At once the mouthpiece of the ruling class and its critic, at once upholding and condemning traditional practices, the Iranian impersonates the ambiguity that venerates Islam while at the same time questioning the usefulness of holy shrines and disparaging the clergy, that exonerates the Shah while at the same time criticizing despotism: the sultan does not know about such practices (sultān ... ittilā’ nadārad, 44), the spirit of the empire, the pure hearted monarch (pādshāh-i sāf zamīr-i pāk darūn, 196) is unaware of such incidences (rūh-i dowlat az īn vāqi’āt khabar dār nīst, 163, 196, 200). Such polyphonic shifting of positions has a bearing on the issue of time as well. The time of the munāzirah, as we have seen, is a conglomerate of temporalities.

At the outset, the Iranian person states that the laws of his land are “in accordance with Mohammedan commandments” (28) thereby making the grim conditions of the country’s present temporally synonymous with Islamic tradition, an equation which the Indian person immediately challenges: the current practices described by the Iranian traveller are in fact “destructive of the truthfulness of the ethics and beliefs of Islam” (33), with which the Iranian later agrees (147). In
this way the link between tradition and lack of progress is disrupted while in its place a new linkage is established whereby the ancient laws of Islam, in their true essence, encompass all times. The futural state of Farangistān, therefore, is the result of their embracing the true essence of Islam: “What virtuous laws are in currency in Farang these days are entirely pirated from the obeyed Sharia” (ānchih imrūzah qānūn-i mustahsinah dar farang murravij ast hamah masrūqah az shar‘-i mutā‘ ast, 158). As universal time, Islam has all times embedded within the text of its sharia. The idea of textual plagiarism aptly conveys the reference by Europeans to the text of the Sharia without attribution. In fact the metaphor reappears elsewhere in this munāzirah of texts: “The principles they enjoy in England is plagiarized (masrūqah) from the righteous Islamic faith” (usūlī keh imrūzah inglīsīyān dārand masrūqah az diyānat-i haqqah-i islām ast, 179).197

Just as a plagiarizer appropriates an anterior text and presents it as the product of present work without attribution, the present laws and principles of Farangistān have been adopted from the laws of Islam. A plagiarized text combines the past and present epochs, but since Farangistān is in a futural position in relation to Iran’s present, the text of the munāzirah embeds all three temporalities into its narrative which is a compendium of citations from past, present and future times. An anticipated ideal body of legal codes for Iran must accordingly be derived entirely from Islamic and Shiite traditions (225), the possibility of which is existent today. The text of the munāzirah makes these epochs commensurate and simultaneous. The dialogue of temporalities is mirrored through other narrative elements.

The condensation of disparate discourses in a single narrative element in the story reoccurs through the use of parody. Time and again throughout the munāzirah, the Iranian traveller’s speech opens with a statement which is meant to refute an argument put forth by the Indian person but which implicitly and parodically turns against the discourse of the elite which he (the Iranian speaker) is supposed to uphold. Instances abound in the text from start to finish, but a few examples will demonstrate this process. In response to the Indian’s question about the methods used to discipline breaches of law in Iran, the Iranian defends the efficiency of governance in Iran in these terms: the “incapable” (bī kafāyat) and “bastardly” (bī nāmūs) governors of Iran use the “millet club” to exact obeisance, a tried and true method (ā ‘in hā-yi

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197 The idea still has some currency today, as does the idea of temporal commensurability. See, for example, Samar Attar, Borrowed Imagination (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 20014).
bisyār muhkam u mottaqin) which is the necessity of “despotic governments” (hukūmāt-i mustabiddah, 33-4). The dismissive tone in which the Iranian addresses the Indian betrays the former’s support of such practices while his choice of words reveals criticizes the same. Elsewhere, in the discussion about the state of legal judgments in Iran, it turns out that no claim or counter claim put forward by the claimants is recorded in writing in the dual civil-religious courts in Iran. Upon the suggestion by the Indian person that establishing a registry in the courts will solve the problem of false claims, erroneous judgments, and hence corruption in the legal system, the Iranian returns: “This action takes effort and is furthermore a heretical innovation because it has not been customary in the past to make use of a registry in the courts. But the true reason is that if [by virtue of a registry] we remove these forms of corruption, both the prosperity of the courts and the revenue of the civil servants will decrease. Today, most major lawsuits that are referred to either the religious or the civil courts of Iran and [that] hold promises of gain are of this kind; otherwise simple and truthful cases will not make things easy” (83). In this textual maneuver, where the opening lines echo the views of the elite but the closing lines expose their real motifs, the representing discourse (the Iranian traveller’s) is in direct conflict with the represented discourse (that of the Iranian elites), thus creating a parodic effect in which two languages are set against each other within the same anthropomorphized discourse.

A similar type of polyphonic condensation occurs at the level of focalization. The Iranian traveller focalizes from at least three points of view throughout the munāzirah. At times he is the voice of the “the spiritual and corporeal chiefs of Iran” (ru’asāy-i rūhānī va jīsmānī-i Īrān, 180), representing the church and the court respectively, at times the voice of a harsh critic and a proponent of reform, and at other times the voice of a genuinely curious populace requesting further clarification on a novel concept (“In India, are all courts divided [into separate spheres]?” 187). This process of multi-layered and multi-voiced focalization is also prevalent throughout the text, sometimes the three voices even merging within the same short utterance. In a discussion about the status of newspapers and publication in Iran, for instance, the topic shifts to the Royal Bureau of Publications (idārah-i intibā’āt-i dowlātī) which, besides overseeing the publication of newspapers, embarks on publishing books for a fee. When the Indian person asks whether the state treasury is the recipient of this fee (to which the answer is negative) and, if not, why the staff at the Bureau are still on the government’s payroll despite their independent source of
income, the Iranian traveller’s response vocalizes the voices of the beneficiaries of this system, of the observant reformer, and of a harsh critic of the corrupt bureaucracy:

Indian: Why, despite all the sources of income, do they [the bureaucrats] still get a stipend from the government?
Iranian: [Well of course] they are not someone’s housemaids. As soon as they get a government position, they have the right to both receive a stipend and to impose all manners of extravagances on the nation, and because in our bureaucracy there is absolutely no accountability and service is in no way distinguished from disloyalty and also retribution and reward are not given on the basis of moral or immoral actions, whoever holds a position at whatever bureau perchance feels obliged to be deceitful and extravagant. Therefore, if the staff at the Royal Bureau of Publications do service to the country and the nation and do not cheat the government and [instead] take the path of honesty, they will be considered by the other bureaucratic lot to be inefficient and incompetent. Today in Iran, the meaning of greatness is extravagance, the meaning of ingenuity [is] cheating the state, the meaning of politics [is] compromising with the foreigners and gaining their support and selling the land and the people and the government [to them] filthy cheap, and the meaning of sagacity [is] amassing internal and external medals and attaining positions and duties that far surpass one’s ability. And if the staff of the Royal Bureau of Publications behave differently, it will of course tarnish their status before friend and foe. (216)

This split subject represents at once the wholeness that is designated “Iranian” and the fragmentation that characterizes its conflicting internal discourses; these discourse are then set in motion in relation to someone else’s language (the Indian person’s, the British Magna Carta, modern institutions and so on). It is no wonder then that, as the quote above indicates, “meaning” is a confused, contested and illusive signified.

This heteroglossia of competing voices, the polyphony of conflicting narratives, penetrates the work also at the level of the text. By “text,” here is meant the medium, the very language, through which a story is told.198 The polyphonic characteristic of the munāzirah finds manifestation at the level of text as well. It starts on the very first page. In the prologue to this work, the author proposes that now that in these new times most of the populations of the world have become literate, the best way to educate them is through “treatises … [in which] the ways of reform and such are expressed in the best way by using sweet words and palatable phrases and

198 I am deploying the concept of “text” in its narratological sense following Mieke Bal’s model where a narrative that relates a story is divided into three layers: text, story, and fabula. Mieke Bal, Narratology (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 5. Bal’s formulation is a reworking of the Russian Formalists’ division of narrative into syuzhet and fabula. While these notions have been at times used as a priori categories, I am, following Bal, not employing them as such here. Rather, they are used merely as analytical tools that enable the analysis of different aspects of the narrative, in this case the munāzirah.
exhilarating speeches by utilizing popular sayings and by following famous tales.” The Europeans have done this through “novels” (rumān u qisas), but “records of the habits and manners of the Europeans cannot be beneficial to the Asian.” A similar logic applies to the “translation” (tarjumah) of “others’ tales and stories” whose only utility is “to waste time and to ruin [national] habits,” which is why Iranian intellectuals must “adapt” (ta’līf) only certain foreign works “by observing national taste and indigenous morality.” That is why “this treatise known as Mukālimah-i Sayyāh-i Īrānī bā Shakhs-i Hindī encompasses all the points and affairs which the learned men of Europe consider in writings novels: shortcomings are mentioned with sweet words and palatable phrases, their improved alternatives are shown through simple terms, and display the ways to reform them [the shortcomings] in a simple language” (21-23). In a separate section entitled “Note” (tabsirah), the author mentions that the “articles of this treatise were serialized in one of the [foreign] newspapers in the style of a novel, and one of the Persian newspapers, too, translated excerpts from it” (25). This introduction succinctly puts into words the conflict among several texts competing, literally, for expression: the traditional tale (hikāyat), proverbs, translation, the article, English language, Persian language, the novel, and the treatise (risālah). Other texts not mentioned in the prologue but nevertheless partaking in the rivalry are the Quran, prophetic traditions (hadiths), historical accounts, texts of legal codes whether cited implicitly or explicitly (for example, the Sharia law, the Ottoman law, Russian law, and French and British laws), famous sayings, colloquial expressions, scribal expressions, the language of the educated and the language of the commoner, journalistic texts, travelogues, and poetry. This anthology of inter-texts unleashes mazelike networks of narratives, accompanied by their attendant discourses and ideologies, that articulate the language of the munāzirah: ambivalent, inconclusive, polyphonic dialects citing, reciting, deflecting and appropriating each other.

The opening line of the dramatic prose dialogue which purports to be written “in the style of a novel” (26) is in verse. It reads: “Grievance garbed as tale / T’s how thou shalt prevail.”\(^{199}\) The word used for “tale” in this line is “hikāyat” which in Persian is a well established genre dating back to at least the medieval times.\(^{200}\) At the very outset, then, four genres compete for relating

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199 My translation from the original: shikāyat dar hikāyat nāzanīn ast / shikāyat ar kunī rāhash chunīn ast.

200 The hikāyat is often a short tale, in prose or in verse, revolving around a moral. The great medieval poet Sa’di’s Gulistān (Rose Garden), considered the highest achievement in Persian prose, is a compendium of such hikāyats
the story that is to follow: dramatic prose dialogue, novel, the traditional hikāyat, and poetry. And indeed all four genres occupy space within the narrative of the munāzirah. Neither is this a simple word game, for each genre represents ideologies. Lines of verse, for example, are scattered throughout the narrative. What is important is the dual purpose that verse serves in the narrative. At times considered as the source of moral degeneration because of its empty witticism and its panegyric tendencies, the mark of tradition’s tired language, at others cited as the authority on the highest moral values, poetry functions both as signifier and signified, simultaneously representing and represented. Early on in the narrative, at the outset of scene two, the Iranian traveller calls on the Indian person to deliver his promise of explicating the taxation system in India. The Iranian’s request is verbalized through a line of verse (a traditional practice among literati) which translates roughly as “the speech of the beloved is sweeter than sugar, O darling” (45). The Indian person takes the poetic praise as a sexually suggestive comment, protesting that such perversion does not befit their relationship, which misconception the Iranian corrects by saying that the misunderstanding is a result of the poor educational system in India, finishing with another maxim, in verse, from the famed poet Sa’dī: “Do not speak without reflection” (46). The Indian person then attributes this misunderstanding to “the divans of Iranian poets which, being a reflection of the Iranian imagination, are all filled with superstition of this sort” (46). Ironically, however, the Indian person concludes his own speech about the adverse effects of poetry “on public morality” by citing a line of verse as the authority. This early interaction sets the tone in the rest of the munāzirah. At once a relic of a superstitious past and an authority for the judgment of the present, poetry simultaneity embodies several “languages:” superstition, empty praise, witticism, and moral authority on matters both anterior and posterior. Embedded within the physicality of the prose text of the munāzirah, it actualizes the presence of the language of tradition in unison, but also in collision, with the language of the present. And indeed, numerous citations of lines of poetry throughout the munāzirah play the dual role of an

which have served as a treasure house of wisdom and axioms for generations in both east and west. For more information, see Lewis (December 15, 2001), “Golestān-e Sa’dī,” in Encyclopedia Iranica.

201 At the time, Persian was still part of the school curriculum in India.

202 Considered the master of Persian language and a source of ethical authority, Sa’dī’s maxims were “known to all, from the king to the peasant.” John Malcolm, Sketches of Persia (London: Casselle, 1888), 86.
outdated mode of thought or the seal of approval on a notable statement. It is in its dual role that the Iranian traveller can cite poetry to justify the despotic indulgence of police agents in doling out arbitrary punishments (128) while the Indian person can use it to incite the Iranian rulers to check the growing influence of Farangīs in the country (138).203 It is also in this contestatory capacity that the Indian person can simultaneously enumerate the great Sa’dī alongside other poets whose empty witticism has been screened out of school curricula by the Indian officials but whose verse can still be used to provide the last word on the morality of European meritocracy: “The sons of the ignorant vizier / Went to the village to beg / Cultured villagers / Climbed to the vizierate of the Shah” (179). The Indian person cites these lines in tandem with the “principles of Islam” and with a saying of ‘Ali, the first Imam of Shiite Muslims, thus adding yet another layer to the bedazzling intertextual maze in this munāzirah.

In its current state of degeneration, suggests the Iranian, poets, devoid of the “principles of the masters of yore,” are divided into mystics, lyricists, panegyrists, lampoonists, and religious panegyrists (198-9). This introduction is used to launch into the discussion of another text: that of journalism as a genre and of newspapers as the representative narrative. According to the Iranian speaker, “Iranians believe that journalism is also a kind of poesy and [is thus] a tool for the praise of the elite and slander of base people” (201). After quoting from the text of two newspapers, Īrān and Ittilā’,204 the Iranian likens the quality of these papers to the Book of Augury of Imam Ja’far Sādiq (207-8).205 Augury and fortune telling scripts are ancient texts of prophecy, eschatological “readings” of one’s future which link the past to the future.206 Iranian newspapers are useless, according to the Iranian traveller, because they follow a similar

203 The exact line cited by Iranian traveller is “har kah gurīzad zi kharājāt-i shah / bār kash-i ghūl-i bīyābān shavad”. According to Dehkhoda lexicon, the source of this poem may be Muhammad Ali Dā‘ī al-Islam’s 5 volume dictionary of Persian, the Farhang-i Nizām, published in 1305/1888. The line cited by the Indian person reads “Man az mufassal in nukhtah mujmafi guftam / tu khud hadīs-i mufassal bikhān az in mujmal.” The original poem is by Mirza Nūrallah Umān Sāsānī (1258-1322/1842-1904).

204 These journals were the organs of the State and as such their reports and columns projected Persia as an idyllic kingdom. See, for example, Edward Browne, Persian Revolution (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1966), 242.

205 The Book of Augury is attributed to Imām Ja’far Sādiq (Fāl Nāmah-i Imām Ja’far-i Sādiq), the sixth Shiite Imam known for his intellectual vigour and considered the chief of the Shiite sect. The book was popularly used as a source of fortune telling. A simple internet search reveals its currency to this day. Interestingly, the Imam’s munāzirahs with members of other faiths are a part of his intellectual legacy.

trajectory by relying on the prior text and practice of poetry. This is why, concludes the Iranian narrator, “Persian journalism is poesy in prose” (209). What is missing is attention to the present. A similar situation infects the royal almanacs (sālnāmah): “our almanacs first include some historical accounts reminding us of the ancient land and nation and empire.” When the Indian person asks what is the meaning of including historical accounts in an almanac, the Iranian responds, in his usual parodic fashion: “if present conditions are included, it will be the cause of degradation and abjection, so we take pride in writing the history of our predecessors. These days history has become the pea in everyone’s pot [i.e. pervasive], even in the official gazette and almanac” (217). The Iranian, the voice of tradition and of the sharia, denounces the use of poetry (sometimes citing poetry as authority), dismisses religiously inspired augury, condemns the use of history in almanacs, and criticizes Iranian newspapers as extensions of such narratives while at the same time narrativizing in an Iranian newspaper which purports to be a translation of a foreign newspaper.\(^\text{207}\) Such multilayered and conflicting confluence of impulses finds simultaneous narrative expression through the munāzirah. Furthermore, concurrent with these texts and genres with the attendant discourses (newspaper, poetry, almanac, history and so on), their temporal orientations enter the dialogue as well. Although texts of the past are denigrated and rendered inferior for not being present-oriented, these texts nevertheless make their way into and occupy space side by side the texts of the present and in the present text of the munāzirah. They are also invoked alternatively as futural texts (the purported compatibility of sharia law with western principles, poetry as moral authority on novel concepts).

This spatial and temporal simultaneity characterizes the closing pages of this munāzirah, too, where the prologue to a future “comprehensive law” is projected in text, a text, nevertheless, composed of the dialogue of intertexts and of temporalities. It is a text that is addressed to the “sharia religionists” (mutasharriʿīn) and to “the ignorant” (juhhāl) and to “the statesmen” (dawlatīyān) and to “the commoners” (ʿavām), a fact that is also linguistically acted out in the text as the language constantly shifts among dialects (178), styles, languages – Persian, Arabic (throughout), Hindi (61, 91), English (76, 93, 175, 177, 184, 187) – colloquial expressions, proverbs, scribal speech through the use of bureaucratic language, clerical speech through the

\(^{207}\) As will be seen later on, the introduction to the serialized version of this munāzirah, published in the journal Habl al-Matīn, reports that the story to follow was taken and translated from a foreign journal.
use of Quranic verses and prophetic traditions, and even images (108, 133); a text that not only anticipates a “constitutional monarchy” (saltanat-i mashrūṭah, 219) but also anticipates its dialogic character (“if it is argued that … one can respond…” 227); a text that calls forth the texts of Sa’dī (222) and of the Ottoman and Russian constitutions (223) and of the monarchical constitutions of England, Germany and Japan (224) and of the Sharia law (225); a text that evokes the just Anūshīrvān209 and Prince Bismarck as textual contemporaries; a prose text, finally, that ends, as it had started, in a line of verse and that refers to itself as an intertext: “Of a thousand finished tales a single unfinished point / I drew; seek in this point unfinished tales” (az hizārān qissah-i kāmil bih nāqīs qissahī / iktiṣā kardam tu jū zīn nuktah kāmil qissahā, 231).210 And indeed the text of the munāzirah itself is abandoned incomplete, for the author had projected in the prologue that “this treatise has been composed on ten topics and in five volumes, of which this is the first” (23). There of course never followed any other volumes, as with many other munāzirahs anticipating future installments which never appeared.

Neither is the practice of invoking and then contesting the invoked text limited to the narratives of tradition (poetry, religious texts and so on). European travelogues are time and again summoned, at times as textual authority, at others as narratives of prejudice. A certain Mr. Meilleur’s The History of the Nineteenth Century is invoked, for example, to remind us of the merits of Mirza Muhammad Taqi Khan Amir Kabir (1220-1267/1805-1852),211 placing him next to other greats such as Prince Bismarck, William Gladstone and Ottoman prime minister Midhat Pasha (66-7). John Malcolm’s 1815 History of Persia (Tārīkh-i Malkum), James Morier’s Haji Bābā of Isfahan (1824), Siyāhat Nāmah-yi Lurd Milīyār (The Travelogue of Lord Millard, ?), Siyāhat Nāmah-i Lurd Garzan (possibly George Curzon’s 1892 Persia and the Persian

208 The first image portrays Nadir Shah (1688-1747), and the second portrays Amir Kabir (1805-1852). Both are invoked as exemplary and patriotic individuals, the former as a monarch who extended the borders of Iran to India and the latter as an able prime minister who tirelessly worked for the progress of the country.

209 Proverbial pre-Islamic Persian king known for his just government.

210 My translation of the original.

211 Mirza Muhammad Taqi Khan Farahani, known as Amīr Kabīr (the grand minister), occupies a unique space in the annals of the modern history of Iran. He is often credited as an able and patriotic minister who worked tirelessly to improve the miserable conditions of Iran. Among his many reforms are the establishment of the first modern polytechnic academy, known as the Dar al-Funūn, in 1851, the founding of one of the first newspapers, called Vagāyi’-i Ittīfāqīyah (News or Times) in Iran in the same year, the ordering of the country’s financial affairs, and the establishment of Iranian embassies in London and St. Petersburg. For more information, see the relevant entry in Encyclopedia Iranica.
Question), Tārikh-i Mūsīyu Mārtan (a certain Monsieur Martin’s History, possibly 1840) the American, are all evoked to attest to the defects within the country, though this does not preclude the observation that these texts are nevertheless written in an “insulting and humiliating and ridiculing” manner (157). The contested nature of the cited narratives is reinforced when sometimes the same text is called forth once to be rejected as biased and again to be cited as historical evidence. In their discussion of the state of legal judgments and subsequent punishments at the religious courts in Iran, the Indian person, in an attempt to show the arbitrariness and injustice of the system, cites a European traveller’s account of seventeenth century Iran where a passerby who had dared to pick a flower from the religious seminary’s garden meets with a severe punishment and eventually with his death. The Iranian speaker rejects such accounts as not “authoritative” and “biased” (104-5). The same traveller’s account is invoked again, however this time by the Iranian character himself, in support of the current state of religious courts (125). Neither is this type of narrative contestation limited to travelogues. The very text of the Quran is subjected to the same textual scrutiny. In discussing the civil courts and their lack of respect for an alleged wrongdoer’s privacy, the Indian person cites the Quranic phrase “lā tajassasū”212 to prove, here as elsewhere, that the current practices in Iran are un-Islamic (101). When the Indian character asks about what will happen to a government agent who commits a crime in his private dwellings, the Iranian person cites the very same verse to defend the status quo (107). The same verse is cited by the Iranian once again to justify the lack of religious notaries’ knowledge or sufficient investigation before certifying a marriage or a divorce (172). No narrative is spared the intense process of scrutiny and contestation. In this way, the network of inter-texts does not merely involve the fielding of parallel narratives side by side; it also entails the temporal and ideological interaction among them. A similar strategy is at work when a certain point is supported through anecdotal examples. The strategy works in this way: a certain issue is raised in support of which an anecdotal example or a folk tale is cited. These stories within stories produce an effect similar to the one employed in the One Thousand and One Nights, in which the frame story is composed of embedded fragments of stories.

212 Quran 49:12. The full phrase reads: “O believers, avoid much suspicion, for some suspicion is a grave sin, and do not spy [on each other], nor backbite [against one another].”
When these stories are taken from popular folk literature, they serve, much as the *hikāyat* does, the function of internal persuasive intertext, internal because of their textual nature and persuasive due to their function as tradition’s undisputed wisdom. When the stories are excerpts from the narrator’s memory of a personal experience or a real event related by another, they serve the function of external predicative intertext. They are fragments of the social text. Their source is extra textual but the event is brought in to impart a narrative point already made. The narrative effect produced by this interaction is the simultaneity of the present and the past, the applicability of past experience or of the present situation. Examples of both types abound in this *munāzirah*. When the conversation turns to the issue of settling civil conflicts by the civil courts in Iran, it becomes apparent that even if the parties involved settle the issue between them, the mere fact of a sergeant having spotted or heard about the dispute will translate into the latter’s intervention for the promise of bribe and booty. When the Indian person questions this practice, the Iranian character, in his usual parodic fashion, opines that these sorts of practices are necessary to ensure the income of the agents of law, and in order to demonstrate the actuality of such situations, he relates a story: “I remember I was in Shiraz once, passing through an alley which Āqā Jān, Qavām al-Mulk’s sergeant, was also making his way through. I noticed about 70 to 80 corporals following him. All of a sudden, the sergeant turned to them and said: ‘You useless bastards! Why are you following me? Go look for a prey and bring me my share’ (138-9). Hearing this incidence, the Indian person pities the sorry state of law enforcement in Iran, for which comment the Iranian traveller feels offended and threatens to stop the former from setting foot in his home again. The Indian person begs the latter’s attention to the fact that such comments are meant as sympathy for the people of Iran. “Because,” says the Indian person, “even if you stopped me from coming to your abodes, would it mend all the deficiencies and corruptions [aforementioned]?” And to persuade the Iranian of the truth of his view, the Indian person cites a *hikāyat*: “You must have heard the hikāyat of the Arab sheikh and the fig-eating bird. He told his son: uproot the fig tree so that the bird does not come [to eat the fruits]. What use is [is there] to kill the bird, for another bird will come the morrow and will sit on the tree [to eat the fruits]” (139-40). The first story is an external predicative intertext that brings a fragment of the social text to bear on the lack of law and order in present Iran. The second story is an internal persuasive intertext that is utilized to take the authority of traditional wisdom as witness for the folly of the present situation. The temporal semantics of these intertexts (one belonging to the past, the other to the present) are embedded in the text of the *munāzirah* which is itself
future-oriented. The simultaneity of these temporalities and their attendant ideological discourses makes the munāzirah simultaneously a narrative of commensurability and a chronicle of conflict, a historical account of contestation. Such unsettling of established modalities is rearticulated through the shifting of conventional roles in another munāzirah from this period.

2.2 Islam and the Clergy

Musāhibah-i Islāmiyyah: Islām, Ākhūnd va Hātaf al-Ghayb (Islamic Interview: Islam, the Priest, and the Invisible Angel) was first published in Turkish in Baku on 20 May 1902 and a year later, in 1903, was translated into Persian and published again in the same city. Both the Turkish original and the Persian translation are by the anonymous author self identifying as Khādim-i Millat (People’s Servant), but the Persian translator uses his or her initials at the end of the translated monograph as “Z. J. D.”214 The fact that this munāzirah was originally written in Turkish and published within the borders of Russian Azerbaijan and then translated into Persian and published in the same country points to the prevalence of this genre not only in Iran but also in the Caucasus. It also points to the hybridity of ideas and of ideologies cross newly established borders which nevertheless could not deter ideological border crossings. The linguistic crossing of borders (between Turkish and Persian, between Azerbaijan and Iran) parallels the narrative overlap of languages, genres and discourses within the hybrid boundaries of the munāzirah.

Upon attacking the Priest on encouraging the practice of taqīyah among Muslims, for example, Islam cites a string of short dialogues that would take place in a social context: “(for example) Mr. So and So why did you tell that certain lie? (I did taqīyah. Or Mr. Mirza! Why did you give false witness? (I did taqīyah). Or Highness! Why did you let others violate the rights of your religious brother [i.e. fellow citizen]? (I did taqīyah)” (34-5). The two texts, narrative and social, thus impinge upon each other’s territories, crossing national, linguistic, and narrative borders in the process.

213 The Turkish version was published by Sindah publishing house and the Persian translation by Matbaʿīyyah, both in Baku, Azerbaijan.

214 Musāhibah-i Islāmiyyah: Islām, Ākhūnd va Hātaf al-Ghayb (Baku: Matbaʿīyyah, 1903), 58.

215 Taqīyah is a practice purportedly common among medieval Muslims belonging to minority sects who would conceal their true belief for fear of persecution. Depending on where the translator’s religious bias, this term could signify different shadows of meaning anywhere along the continuum circumspection-dissimulation-deception-Machiavellianism. As it is deployed in this munāzirah, it leans towards the right of this continuum and is considered an unethical practice among Muslims and a cause of their backwardness.
Both renditions of the munāzirah are addressed and dedicated to Haji Zayn al-‘Abedin Taqiov of Baku. In the prologue, in fact, Taqiov is addressed directly as “your Haji’s excellency” (jināb-i hāji) himself bearing a name that includes traces of Islamic (Taqi, Haji) and Russian (-ov) influence. Early on, then, the element of direct speech establishes a dialogical link between the text of the munāzirah and the social text, between fictionality and reality. The author’s twofold aim, as stated in the prologue as well, confirms this link. The author’s aim is “to guide our priesthood, that is the mullahs and the ākhūnds to the highway of progress and civilization” (6) which would be possible, first, by establishing special “priestly” colleges for their education and, second, by describing their flaws. The former the author delegates to the generosity of Taqiov, while the latter he will present in his “humble work” (6). In other words, the paratext, the peripheral material surrounding the main text, already establishes an intertextual link between work and world. It also establishes the paradigms according to which the work is to be read. In other words, having thus stated its goal of amending social ills, the munāzirah as a fragment of the social text in turn incorporates fragments of the social text in its narrative.

Such hybrid border crossings feature also in characterization. While all three characters are discursive configurations, the character Islam is described and personalized via corporeal metaphors, complete with a “soul and [a] body” (8) whose “head lies at the tip of Africa and [whose] head [is] in the middle of China” (10). The anthropomorphized figure of Islam, then, is a figure that covers vast socio-linguistic ground, composed of many languages, cultures, and sects. Islam is therefore personified as a universal entity in whose spatio-temporal expanse disparate temporalities, dialects, and histories are in congruence. A further layer is added to this plurality through the realignment of conventional orientations when Islam – the embodiment of bygone tradition – is dramatically cast in a new role as the champion of reform, the voice critiquing tradition’s falsehood. In fact, the priest, as the representative of tradition, is blamed by the character Islam for dismembering Islam’s corporeal whole by establishing several sects, which

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216 Taqiov (1254-1342/1838-1924) was an influential and charitable man whose sudden and enormous wealth owed much to the discovery and extraction of oil in Baku. He is known to have dedicated large amounts of his wealth for the welfare of fellow Muslims and the betterment of life in Muslim countries, among which are donations to the journal Tarbiyat and the Islamic Company of Isfahan (Shirat-i Islāmīyyah-i Isfahan). For more information on Taqiov’s life and contributions, see ‘Adil Khan Ziyad Khan, Jumhūrī-i Azerbaijan (Tabriz: Akhtar, 1389/2010).

217 The paratext, according to Genette, is composed of “those elements which lie on the threshold of the text and which help to direct and control the reception of a text by its readers.” Graham Allen, Intertextuality (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 103.
has resulted in the disunity of Muslim nations. Islam even exempts the *Farangīs* and asks the priest, “did the Farangīs and Austrians, the Jews and Christians establish these branches or you priests [did]?” (11). A dialogical link is thus established between the narrative and social texts in reference to the calls, within the Islamic world of the time, to create one unified and strong Islamic caliphate under the tutelage of the Ottomans.  

The Invisible Angel (*Ḥātaf al-Ghayb*) does not really partake in the debate. His role is that of a commentator or a jester in dramatic asides. The angel’s interjections often induce laughter. For instance, when Islam criticizes the priest’s engagement in and encouragement of petty sectarian quarrels and asks him if this is the way to the truth, the angel comes in with, “Truth is not rice and gourmet stews to which the ākhūnd would dedicate his life ha! ha! ha!” (12). Ideologically in unison with the character Islam, the *Ḥātaf al-Ghayb* personifies the same type of discursive realignment we witnessed in Islam as character. Of a comical and witty nature, the character of *Ḥātaf al-Ghayb* is in stark contrast with his counterpart in Mustashar al-Dowlah’s *Yak Kalimah* (One Word) where the earlier version of the angel echoed the stern and somber voice of the divine. Here, the angel has descended to the earth and mixed with earthlings (much like Islam who appears in the opening scene as “a haggard, bony and decrepit person crouching in ragged and dirty clothes,” 7). His speech mimics colloquial speech. He acts out Islam’s promotion of “simple language in the style of colloquial speech” (*zabān-i sādah-i misl-i takallum*, 20). Besides the degradation of lofty figures to earthly materiality, such repositioning of abstract sacred figures as concrete material bodies creates narrative actants that act as condensed embodiments of disparate discourses. In fact, the priest participates in this process of polyphonic condensation. Even though the figure of the priest stands for a specific social type with its unique ideology, his double-voiced speech follows a similar trajectory to that of the other characters. The pardoic speech of the ākhūnd is reminiscent of the Iranian traveller in *Mukālimah-i Sayyāh-i Ḫrānī bā Shakhṣ-i Hindī* whereby some of his statements, intended to defend the practices of his class, in

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218 The main advocate of this unity was Sayyid Jamal al-Din Asad Abadi (known also as al-Afghani) who travelled throughout the Islamic world, from Constantinople to Egypt, India, Caucasia and Persia, to promote his vision. See Edward Browne, *Persian Revolution* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1966), 1-31.

219 The degradation of officialdom to the materiality of the carnival is referred to as “grotesque realism.” For Bakhtin this condition represents the rejection of bourgeois culture and is as such a political act. However, in the context of this *munāzirah*, this condition signifies the constant shifting and redefinition of discursive practices. For more details on grotesque realism, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 19-21.
fact parodically exposes them: “Of course, saying prayers and robbery, they both have their place!” (30), says the priest in response to Islam’s comment about why so many Muslims pray and fast and yet deceive and envy and rob each other. Yet another shift in the priest’s speech takes place on occasion when he abandons his role as the mouthpiece of his class, asks innocent questions about a proposition of which he is ignorant, and even agrees with his opponents. Just as the Iranian traveller did, the ākhūnd also sometimes turns into a curious audience, genuinely requesting clarification. Implicitly agreeing with Islam’s criticisms of his class as ignorant instruments of backwardness, curious about Islam’s promotion of true humanity, the priest asks, “What is true human?” (insān-i kāmil chīst, 28). We will see how this type of questioning—which frames the propagation of a concept in a question and a subsequent answer—was also a prevalent technique in the newspapers of the time. Quite simply, it involves the condensation of multitudes of voices, the verbalization of national questions, into one unit (narrative, generic, or symbolic), a multitudinous inclination that is also mirrored in the sheer scope of issues discussed within the framework of the munāzirah.

The main issue is the regressive role of the clerical class in corrupting the true religion and holding back Islamic countries and their populace for personal gain. Through the criticism of the priest, reference is also made to social issues such as the necessity to reform the alphabet (17) and the simplification of language (20, 54), the need to replace traditional forms of knowledge with modern science (25), promotion of ethical behaviour and condemnation of taqīyah as a form of hypocrisy (34), and the education of the priesthood, who are unable, with their regressive knowledge and behaviour, to build hospitals or write treatises or teach ethics (50-1). These issues are intertwined with accompanying discourses and styles. Once again, the narrative of the munāzirah conjures up other texts, persons, temporalities and textual practices: poetry (many of the angel’s comments are in verse), Quranic references (1), a footnote (16), and references to history and historical figures (3, 22) and to contemporary personalities (1, 4-5, 38-9, 42). Verse encircles prose. The work opens and closes with the same lines of poetry: “Speak O Servant all thou know’st / Do so while chance is at hand; Thou know’st the way and the people shall follow / Thou say’st the truth and the people shall listen.” Language incorporates language: the angel’s citations of poetry in the Turkish original are in Persian, Persian poetry is inserted in Turkish prose. Text embeds text: the several references to the “perfect human” (insān-i kāmil: 38-9, 42) invoke Malkum Khan’s propagation of the idea of “humanity” (ādamīyyat). They also summon
other personalities who, as we have seen, equated western attainment of the highest standards of humanity with Islam. It is in invoking these figures that the character Islam claims true “human means Muslim” (39). The reversal of “traditional” roles, the dramatization of discursive shifts, even the identification of the cleric as scapegoat (which owes much to the influence of its Bolshevik context in comparison to the Iranian munāzirah) create the effect best produced through the medium of the munāzirah: the coexistence of competing voices. The issue of “incomplete” modernity – which we are so often told represents the failure of communication between “secular intellectuals” and “religious reactionaries” – is clearly destabilized in the munāzirah, whose narrative is the field of contending voices, shifting alliances, overlapping discourses and conflicting ideologies. As the figure often intertextually summoned, Malkum Khan presents the final episode in this polyphonic rivalry shortly before the granting of a constitution by Muzaffar al-Din Shah (r. 1896-1907) in 1906.

2.3 Proclamation of Justice

Written in 1323/1905, Nidāy-i ʿAdālat (Proclamation of Justice) was presented to Muzaffar al-Din Shah on his third trip to Europe. The main issue presented in this piece is the necessity of establishing a parliamentary system as the only solution to the miseries of Iran. It starts with this sentence: “A petition which one of the ministers has presented to his majesty at Paris in the month of August in the year 1905” (136). We are then led to the purported minister’s prologue in which he explains why he has undertaken to write this petition, the text of which he assumes that the king will, on the following day, recite verbatim to his company. What follows is the text of the petition (to be read out by the Shah) followed by the text of a short letter addressed by the author-minister to the king urging him to ensure the implementation of the constitution. The final text is the text of the Proclamation, which is the draft of a nascent constitution. We are here faced with three layers of narration: the author who writes the piece, the minister who is reportedly the author of the text, and the king who will read out the text. We are also presented with several genres: a petition, a letter, a constitution, and a dialogue. Through the synthesis of voices, perspectives, readers, addressees, and genres, this polyglot piece animates the intense negotiation of perspectives which contributed to the buildup of a reform movement. A notable characteristic of Malkum’s writings, the negotiation of perspectives is foregrounded to such a degree that a

certain text, even if not formally written as such, still includes the dialogic features of the munāzirah. Here, for instance, even the text of the petition, which serves as the introduction to the text of the constitution, embeds an implied dialogue marked by the signposts “I say” (mīgūyam) and “you will respond” (khwāhīd guft) in which each opposition to what will follow is anticipated in the form of questions and answers.

The text of the constitution then sets out its terms under separate chapters and headings: security of life and of possession (141), a legislative assembly (143), an executive body, freedom of speech and of the pen (145), legal protection (‘adālat-i qānūnī, 149), compulsory education (150), and human rights (151). The dialogic question and answer form finds its way to the text of the constitution too. This is significant because a body of laws, which is supposedly a static and enclosed text, is nevertheless pried open to negotiation through this narrative act. The embedded questions and answers enact an internal debate in which not only the voices of the advocate and anticipated opponents but also those of the king and of the mediating discourse of Islam are included. Here as elsewhere the Shah is exempted of any blame for the state of affairs and is further admired for being an advocate of novel ideas (shah-i tāzagī talab, 142). In this way, royalist discourse finds a legitimate claim to representation among other discourses. Religious discourse, too, is as always incorporated. Islam once again emerges as the intermediary locus of temporalities. Anticipating opposition to the adoption of European ideas, for example, the author-minister-reformer storms back: “With what obscene infidelity can one assert that Islam is against progress? Which religion has promoted progress and incited worldly comfort more than Islam? Besides, what idiot has said that we must go and adopt all of the customs and habits of foreigners?” (138). Yet a third embedded discourse is that of “traditionalists,” who are clearly to be differentiated from (or characterized as merely) religionists as does the author-minister who also sets them apart from the learned and lawful ‘ulamā who are not viewed as reactionary (143), a narrative statement that mirrors the reality of the social text. In responding

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221 The phrase used is ālām-i kashī or acquired knowledge. The author speaks about the necessity of supplementing intellect with acquired knowledge because by itself the intellect cannot figure out the recent inventions and advances and needs to be accompanied by acquired knowledge. It is implied, therefore, that all officials must be educated in modern sciences.

222 Here reference is to Nasir al-Din Shah, the predecessor of the reigning Muzaffar al-Din Shah.

223 There were numerous such ‘ulama. Sayyid Jamal al-Din Va’iz Isfahani, Nurullah Najafi Isfahani are such influential figures from among the clerical rank. Others included clerics such as Mirza Sayyid Muhammad...
to Iranian reactionaries (kuhnah parastān-i Irān, 145) who will oppose freedom of speech, the author-minister equates the principle of freedom of speech with a famous Quranic verse and identifies European thinkers as true Muslims: “When we talk about this to the learned men of Europe, these famous men who know the principles of Islam much better than us, they say that the misery of Islamic nations is that they have lost the great principles of Islam. This same freedom of speech and of the pen which the civilized nations acknowledge as the basis of the order of the world, the leaders of Islam made imperative on all the world with two comprehensive phrases: calling others to goodness and preventing them from evil [amr-i bih ma’rūf va nayh az munkar]” (146). Given this and the preceding statements, the “Call to Justice” (Nidā-yi ‘Adālat), then, is a call echoing the many voices that penetrate its text.

Malkum Khan’s other works, though not always written as formal munāzirahs, are almost entirely dialogized, beginning with his seminal work to which more or less all his other writings are an addendum, The Unseen Notebook (kitābcha-i ghaybī) written circa 1275-7/1858-60. This treatise is written in the form of direct address to Mirza Ja’far Khan Mushīr al-Dowlah.224 The unmistakable heteroglossia in this book creates a mélange of voices, potential proponents and opponents. It further incorporates several genres: letter written to the chief minister, prologue to the constitution, and the text of the constitution itself. These dialogic elements – direct address, dialogized questions and answers, genre syncretism – singly (for example in Dastgāh-i Divān or The Administrative System, written ca. 1861-2 and Madanīyyat-i Irānī or Iranian Civility, written 1891) or in combination (for example in Pultikā-yi Dowlatī or Governmental Politics, n.d, and Miftāh or The Key written, n.d) feature in almost all the other dialogized works of Malkum Khan. In Imtīyāz-i Favāyid-i ‘Āmmah (Concession [granted] for Public Welfare), written in 1890, for example, the issue of forming national companies is framed in dialogized questions, and the frame narrative includes a draft contract and a royal decree, which in conjunction with the main

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Tabataba’i and Sayyid ‘Abdullah Bihbahani who were “two strong supporters and two significant forces of constitutionalism. The seminary students and ‘ulama of Najaf along with their leaders, Haji Mirza Husayn son of Haji Mirza Khalīl … and Mulla Kazim Khurasani who were the spiritual leaders of a majority of Iranians all supported the constitutional cause.” ‘Abdullah Mostowfi, Sharḥ-i Zindagānī-yi Man (Tehran: Hermes, 1386/2007), Vol. 2, 168.

224 He was then the head of the Supreme Council of Ministers set up by Nasser al-Din Shah.
narrative form a multi-generic work. Another work, *Usūlī Mazhab-i Dīvānīyān* (The Principles of the Ethics of Administrators), written in 1892 during the reign of the infamous prime minister Amīn al-Sultān, written entirely in the form of questions and answers, an angry Malkum yet again exempts the “Iran nourishing Shah” (*pādishāh-i Iran parvar*, 302) from any responsibility for the miserable state of affairs in the country but bitterly derides the corrupt ministers and makes ample use of parody and irony, mocking the language of the officials.

As one of the most influential thinkers of the constitutional era, Malkum’s writings span a topical as well as temporal period of almost five decades during which repeated calls for reform in Iran finally bore fruit in 1906. As mentioned above, almost the entire body of his works draws on the dialogical features of the *munāzirah* even if some texts are not formally written as *munāzirahs*. If Malkum Khan’s significance to Iranian modernity is comparable to Rousseau’s importance in France,\textsuperscript{225} then one can venture to claim that the *munāzirah* is Iranian modernity’s genre of choice. As we have seen, however, Malkum Khan was not the only one to write in and through the *munāzirah*. A host of important periodicals also made use of its generic features. A cursory look at close to half a century of some important journals covering the events leading to and following the Constitutional Revolution reveals the unmistakable prevalence of the genre in giving expression to the intense discursive competition that characterized this era. These include, in order of appearance: *Īrān* first published 2 April 1871, *Akhtar* (Star) first published in Istanbul in January 1876, *Qānūn* (Law) first published in London on 20 February 1890, *Hikmat* (Wisdom) as of 1892 in Cairo, *Habl al-Matīn* (Strong Cord)\textsuperscript{226} appearing on December 19, 1893 (first in Calcutta and later its sister publication in Tehran), *Tarbīyat* of Tabriz starting on 16 December 1896, *Surayyā* (Pleiades)\textsuperscript{227} on 29 October 1898 in Cairo, *Parvarish* (Education) in 1900 in Tehran, *Adab* (Manners) a weekly also appearing in 1900, *Nidā-yi Vatan* (Call of Homeland) first published in 1906, *Tamaddun* (Civilization) first published on 1 February 1907, *Sūr-i Isrāfīl* (Seraphim’s Trumpet) first published in 1907, *Amūzigār* (Educator) first published on 5 June 1911, and *Subh-i Sādiq* (Dawn) first published in Shiraz in 1926. A sampling of the pieces

\textsuperscript{225} See notes 142 and 143 above.

\textsuperscript{226} Reference to the Qur'ānic phrase (3:103) “*habl Allah*” (the cord of Allah)

\textsuperscript{227} In addition to signifying the constellation, the term *surayyā* also connotes the attainment of the highest status.
published in some of these periodicals reveals the widespread employment and popularity of the *munāzirah* in the Iranian context.

### 2.4 The *Munāzirah* in Pre-constitutional Periodicals

During its 20 years of publication, *Akhter* played a major role in revisiting age-old concepts that had existed in Iranian political philosophy for eons but which now seemed to be falling short of accommodating the shifts brought about by the new world order. By doing so, *Akhter* became an influential source of the familiarization of the public with the concepts that were recognizable but that had to be redefined if Iran were to join the bandwagon of modernity. It was this awareness that would lead to increasing demands of reform within the Iranian establishment and that would also result in repeated shutdowns of the paper by the Ottoman government as a result of Iranian government’s lobbying due to the perceived threat the periodical posed to its legitimacy. Figures who contributed to *Akhter* were among the leading intelligentsia of the time, including Māza Habib Isfahani the translator of Morier’s *Haji Baba of Isfahan* and Māza Yusof Khan Tabrizi, or Mustashar al-Dowlah, the author of the seminal treatise *Yak Kalimah* (One Word). Published in Ottoman Istanbul, *Akhter* is often credited with being the forerunner of the journals that played a significant role in informing Iranians of global transformations and novel concepts and inspiring socio-political engagement.228

Perhaps the most readily recognizable feature of the articles in *Akhter*, particularly in its initial years, is the prevalence of a mode of writing in which the piece, in the majority of cases, starts with one or several questions. The rest of the article then goes on to provide a response to those questions through illustration and exposition. A cursory look at the titles or opening lines of these articles indicates the unmistakable preponderance of this technique. The editorial in issue 11 of the first year, for example, is a piece entitled “The Foundation of Salvation and Reputation” (*bunyād-i sa'ādat u nīknāmī*) opening with these questions: “What is the basis of the

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228 Contemporary historian Ahmad Kasravi notes that it was because of an editorial published in *Akhter* on the Tobacco Concession that the public was awakened to its ills, *Tārīkh-i Mashrūtah-i Īrān* (Tehran: Seda-yi Mo‘aser, 1380/2001), 77. Haji Mirza Hasan Roshdiyeh, credited with having established the first modern school in Iran, said that it was an article in *Akhter* which caused him to go and learn modern pedagogy in Beirut before establishing his modern school in Tabriz, Ibid, 94.
prosperity of a dominion? What are the underpinnings of a nation’s wealth and order? How do peoples achieve welfare? How do nations gain access to secure livelihood? Efficiency in organizing the affairs of nations rests on what basis? What of equilibrium in the state of the universe? How is true humanity achieved? How is eternal salvation made possible? In short what is the benefit of happiness in both worlds? And how is it earned?” The author goes on to provide detailed answers to these questions, which culminates in the answer “science and philosophy” (‘ilm u hikmat). Notwithstanding the innocent idealism of this response, it can clearly be seen that the authors of Akhtar were borrowing the basic element employed in the familiar munāzirah, that of questions and answers, as the appropriate tool within the Iranian context for the fielding of contentious issues.

Going through the pages of Akhtar, it is indeed rare to come by a single issue that does not include a piece in the question and answer form. A myriad of topics and concerns are presented, discussed, defined or redefined in this vein: “newspaper and gazette,” “humanity and urbanity,” “children’s education,” “balance and resistance,” “honesty and prosperity,” “discord and misery,” “knowledge and awareness,” “freedom of speech,” “freedom and liberty,” “responsibility and humanity,” “oppression and tyranny,” “law and sharia,” “honesty and liberty,” “love of homeland,” “understanding the homeland and the responsibilities associated with it,” “association of rights,” “justice and benevolence,” “responsibilities-agents,” “rights-sharias,” “competition on world stage,” “spiritual management versus worldly government,” “female education (tarbīyat-i dukhtarān),” “prosperity of people and the nation,” “education of children and statesmen,” “foundation of Muslimhood-constitutional law,” “equality and egalitarianism,” “the science of civil politics,” “freedom of the press,” “the benefits of the railway,” and “what is reform?” These verbatim headings represent only a handful among many of the issues posed first as a question and later responded to within the pages of this periodical. Given the status of Akhtar among early influential periodicals, one can argue with a good degree of certainty that the question and answer form served as the principal vehicle for a national dialogue on issues of public concern as well as a means of public education. An article entitled “translation” (tarjumah), for instance, starts with the question “What does Asia mean?” followed some paragraphs later with the question “What does Europe mean?”229 The article is written

229 Akhtar, No. 14, 23 March 1881.
principally in the question-and-answer form and runs across several issues. One might be tempted to think that these pieces were a one-way traffic of intelligentsia addressing the masses. But the form in which these ideas were disseminated and consumed indeed initiated a dialogue following its formal attribute of question and answer, for readers would sometimes ask for clarification on certain topics in the form of letters to the paper, would criticize certain positions taken by the paper, or would simply request reruns of certain past articles. In another piece, for instance, the author prefaces an article with an encounter with a reader who complains why the paper has stopped the useful practice of starting with those informative editorials (which were almost invariably written in the question and answer form). In fact, demand for these articles was so pressing that the editorial board of Akhtar announced, on 17 October 1882, that from that point forward the newspaper would publish reruns of those articles and editorials. It can therefore clearly be seen that the question and answer form contributed to the building of a vibrant public sphere. The fact that articles and pieces written in the question and answer form would sometimes use the plural first person pronoun attests to this perception of the nation as a collective participating in the discussion. The 27 July 1887 issue of Akhtar, for example, includes an article entitled “What is our temporal state and what are we doing?” The author opens with these questions: “What are we busy with at this time of the progress of our neighbours whose novelties of discovery and technical invention defy our understanding? Of the means of prosperity, what have we gathered as a legacy to our future generations? … What are the causes of others’ progress? Why can’t we reach them in the issue of progress? Strange, we don’t have the aptitude? Our inventive faculties are inferior to theirs? Never! The Absolute Creator has placed the same aptitude in our nature too. We are consumed with laziness and indolence; we don’t have the zeal to make the effort to achieve the goal.” The article’s opening is all in the plural first person pronoun. The combination of the question form and the first person plural pronoun opens up a plain of negotiation and participation in which every question is by “us” and directed to “us,” a practice that set in motion intense discussions about the state of Iran and Iranian identity in the new world order. One can perhaps explain the repeated shutdowns that the periodical endured in reference to this role of the question and answer form in creating an

230 Akhtar, No. 8, 28 February 1877.
231 Akhtar, Year 9, 4 Zi Hajjah 1299.
232 Akhtar, No. 43.
active and vibrant national negotiation and the subsequent and increasing demands on the establishment for reform. Akhtar was repeatedly shut down in 1885, twice in 1889, 1891, 1892, and finally 1896 for good.\textsuperscript{233}

For at least part of its publication, Akhtar was not really a “news” paper in the contemporary sense but a serialized compendium of articles on old and novel concepts. It was only in its final years that the periodical included sections on news. This important characteristic made it a means of conversation between Iranian expatriates from Constantinople and their national brethren inside the borders of Iran. And although the dominant style of writing in Akhtar was the question and answer form, this did not preclude the inclusion of pieces or articles written in the more formally recognizable munāzirah. An article dated 19 March 1879 and entitled “Question and Answer,” for instance, is written entirely in dialogue format between an Indian statesman and an Iranian bureaucrat.\textsuperscript{234} The fact that the piece is entitled “Question and Answer” but is in fact written in the form of a munāzirah is significant. It reveals the contemporary perception of conducting munāzirah not as a formal attribute but as a dialogical practice. This particular article anticipates the publication of a similar dialogue between an Iranian traveller and an Indian person which would appear in Habl ol-Matīn and later published in book form (as we saw above). A similar article entitled “Expression” (bayān) appeared on December 30, 1885 in which the participants put the question of “Islamic script” to debate, concluding that Islam has no deficiencies and that the deficiency lies in the script of Muslim nations.\textsuperscript{235} This article, too, follows a similar pattern to the one cited above in that it is written principally in the question and answer form but takes on the formal quality of munāzirah. In general, Akhtar’s employment of questions and answers created an open forum in which questions were posed directly to the audience. The paper served as an agora for public education and opinion. Given the experience of Akhtar and the government’s increasing crackdown on journalistic dissent, the munāzirah began to increasingly supplant the question and answer form (which however still continued its


\textsuperscript{234} \textit{Akhtar}, No. 13, Year 5.

\textsuperscript{235} \textit{Akhtar}, No. 24.
existence in different capacities), thanks to the fictional mask it put on debate, in successive
generations of periodicals.

Inaugurated in the turbulent final years of Naser al-Din Shah’s reign (r. 1848-1896), the weekly 
Habl al-Matīn started its comparatively long career from 19 December 1893 to 9 December 1930
under the tutelage of Jalal al-Din Hosseini Kashani (nicknamed Mo’ayyid al-Islam or “helper of
Islam”). By virtue of its place of publication in Calcutta, and in contrast to Akhtar, this periodical
tended to be, at least initially, conservative in approach. There was a second Habl al-Matīn
which started publishing as a daily on 28 April 1907 under the editorship of Mo’ayid al-Islam’s
younger brother.

Similar to its predecessor Akhtar, Habl al-Matīn, too, in its initial years was comprised mostly of
articles discussing conceptual or practical issues rather than news. Habl al-Matīn continued the
tradition of question and answer – albeit on shifting issues that reflected the evolving
preoccupations of its time as well as its political orientation – in which an article opens with a
series of questions to which the author attempts answers. Headings, often of editorials or opening
articles, reflect a similar trajectory to that of Akhtar: “Is Iran ill?” “What is Iran’s illness?” “Who
owns the world?” “What is despotism and who is a despot?” “The principles of humanity,” “The
organization of constitutionalism,” “The reasons for the weakening of Islam,” “Prosperity is the
basis of liberty,” “Four principles of civility and religiosity,” “Overcoming oppression,”
“The most important duties of the cabinet,” “Soldiers as national volunteers (national guards),”
“What is the reason that Iran’s affairs cannot be organized?” “What is a constitutional
monarchy?” “What are the benefits of an assembly for the people?” “In reality what is
leadership?” “What is ethnicity?” “The fall and rise of a people,” “Love of homeland,” “Trade
and monarchy,” “What is governance and who is this term applicable to?” “What is [the rule of]
law?” “What is the remedy for our distress?” In a periodical that is dominantly written in the
question and answer form, these headings are but a small sampling to illustrate the sheer range of
issues that were put to public debate by being posed as questions. As the preponderance of such
pieces in Akhtar and Habl al-Matīn illustrate, the adaptation of modernity in Iran was, in effect, a
dialogical practice.
The nature of the topical issues listed thus far might lead to the assumption that these questions and answers revolved merely around such grand concepts. In reality, matters of a purely practical concern would also be publicly announced or discussed in the question and answer form. An article in the Cairo based periodical Surayyā, for instance, discussed one such issue in the question and answer form regarding the southern ports of the country. Entitled “Political considerations regarding the affairs of the ports of the Gulf,” the twelfth issue of the paper initiated a series of studies on the state of the southern ports of Iran which appeared in successive issues until 28 April 1900. Another article entitled “Who is Palkunik and what is his job?” in the Tehran Habl al-Matīn brought up the issue of the government’s enlisting of Russian generals and soldiers in the Iranian army corps. This piece is filled with questions and answers that criticize the government’s use of foreign agents for suppressing dissent rather than for training purposes. Yet another example of discussing practical day to day concerns through the question and answer form can be seen in an opening piece entitled “An article by one of the respectable scholars.” In it, the author, Muhammad Ali Tehrani, discusses the contentious issue of the system of governance in Iran in a series of questions and answers that read like a dialogue: “Is Iran not constitutional? No. Is it autocratic? No. Is it a republic? No.” The textual conversation in this piece acts out the intense social dialogue that was taking place at the time around the issue of governance in Iran, which, following the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 and the imposition of a general assembly, was still engineered by courtiers and the Shah. Yet another piece discusses the very urgent issue of mending the sorry state of the country in an article entitled “What is the reason that Iran’s affairs cannot be ordered?” and performs the dialogue about an issue that was already being hotly debated in society.

236 Surayyā. No. 12, 20 January 1900 to No. 24, 28 April 1900.  
237 Apparently, this refers to general Doumendovich who is to be replaced by a general major Charkovsky. According to E.G. Browne, the Palkonik in question is general Liakhoff. See Edward Browne, Persian Revolution (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1966), 228.  
240 See Edward Browne, Persian Revolution (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1966), 133-72, on how the Shah and his courtiers tried to manipulate the relations between deputies, clerics, as well as public sentiment.  
Neither did these pieces revolve around thematic issues of this nature. Sometimes a piece would be written simply to complain or lament the loss of something. In an article entitled “An elegy and lamentation for the nation and the heart-rending screams of the homeland,” the author laments the miserable conditions of the country and the lack of concern among the leaders. Similar pieces would take issue with on-going day to day problems such as questions as to “Who is the obstacle to progress,” “What is the relation between the king and the subject; what is the relation between the subject and the king,” and “What does constitutionalism mean?” In another serialized article entitled “An article by one of the learned men: the causes of lack of great men in the East,” the author discusses the issue of founding modern schools in a series of questions and answers, complaining “why don’t they shut down the traditional schools [maktabs] that have occupied people with razzmatazz and thousands of superstitions and falsities in the manner of nine hundred years ago, preventing them to attend to serious and significant worldly affairs, and instead open modern sites of education [dār al-tarbiyah]?” In another serialized article, the author conducts a comparative analysis of the reasons of Iran’s backwardness and Japan’s progress by posing questions and providing answers. In another article entitled “In conversation with soldiery” (musāhibat-i ʿaskarī), the author, a certain A. ʿA. M, starts with these questions: “What is the meaning of a soldier? What does being a soldier involve? What are the principles of recruiting soldiers in civilized states?” The sheer range of topics is unmistakable testimony to the prevalence of the dialogic form in addressing questions of practical, topical, and conceptual concern.

There were also pieces in this category that went beyond the sequencing of questions and answers in a factual language by instead dramatizing the concept or concepts being fielded, using quasi dramatic elements such as fictive characters, a fictive setting, a dramatic tone, or a combination of these elements. In an article in the Calcutta edition of Habl al-Matīn entitled “Oh

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247 Habl al-Matīn (Calcutta edition). No. 2, 12 September 1904. The first part of this article appears in No. 1.
God of patriotism favour us too,” for instance, the author evokes the patriotism of the British as the model to follow for Iranians. Part of the article which is written in the question and answer form reads in this way:

Question: Oh poet of the homeland, nightingale, oh sprout of the garden of patriotism, what ordained you to make your benevolent bosom the target of the calamitous arrows of the battlefield and subjugate yourself to torture and trouble?
Answer: Freedom of the homeland and liberation of the nation and the joy of effective governorship and national supremacy enlisted me to soldiery.
Question: You are still an infant, your mouth smelling of milk. Whence did you acquire for such patriotism?
Answer: Because like a lion I have drunk from the breast of freedom and the relish of liberty, I have judged the quality of the state of Africa’s enchainment and have preferred to sacrifice life and the life of my kind to mine own.249

While the references to nightingale and lion as well as the language style are reminiscent of the imagery and literary style of classical literature, the novel concept of patriotism is not. In this way, the conflation of classical style with modern concepts, as well as the fusion of the question and answer form with dramatic elements, creates a textual space in which the old and the new are textually simultaneous and commensurate. There were of course pieces that were written entirely in the classical style and wholly in a simple language using everyday situations or contemporary concerns. As an example, a conversation between a European and Iranian person about progress reads this way:

Iranian: I ask you as a human, what is the source of the Europeans’ progress, power and wealth and what have they done to achieve this degree of dominance and supremacy over others?
European: The progress of governments and nations depends on knowledge, effective management and systematization of the government.
Iranian: Our government is organized and our king’s justice and generosity is indisputable. So why we Iranians cannot achieve progress?
European: The cause of your lack of progress is that you still don’t know the meaning of systematized government.

This short but serialized article250 points to a direction that similar pieces were increasingly taking: adding a fictive element to the conversation. This specific article in which the lack of progress is sarcastically blamed on Iranians’ hard-headed resistance to change anticipates the

249 Habl al-Matīn (Calcutta edition). No. 7, 18 December 1899. In rendering this translation, I have tried as much as possible to convey the ornate literary style of in the original.

250 Habl al-Matīn (Calcutta edition). No. 26, 6 June 1898. This article starts with number 25 of the journal and continues to No. 29, 27 June 1898.
lengthy and fully-fledged munāzirah that would appear in Habl al-Matīn shortly after and would later be published in book form: Mukālimah-i Sayyāh-i Ŭrānī bā Shakhs-i Hindī (The Dialogue between an Iranian Traveller and an Indian Person). It ran in instalments from 2 August 1898 to 11 September 1899.

We have already seen the issues, topoi, and dialogical features of this important text as it appeared in book form. In addition to the intertextual network of such “articles” effectively quoting each other in ever longer and evolving forms, the peripheral material, the paratext, in the newspaper incarnation of this munāzirah adds another dialogic element to the text. The inauguration of the munāzirah in Habl al-Matīn is prefaced by an editorial note that reads as follows: “‘The conversation between an Iranian traveller and an Indian statesman.’ This very appealing dialogue [mukālimah] is similar to the tale of the chihil tūtī [Forty Parrots] which has appeared in a certain periodical for the consideration of our esteemed subscribers in the same way as the tale of husayn kurd [Husayn the Kurd] or the story of shīrīn u farhād [Shīrīn and Farhād]. We also found it appropriate to translate [tarjumah] and gradually post it in Habl al-Matīn so that it becomes apparent to our esteemed compatriots that the actions of us Iranians is akin to others’ tales and stories and proverbs. We think the world does not know about us because we ourselves are unaware of the universe. This conversation has taken place over several days so we will post each day [of the conversation] weekly.”

Reference to these indigenous tales, taken from folk or classical literature, activates a textual space in which the novel concepts to be shortly relayed are told through traditional narratives, “in the same way as” they were. Introducing the text that is to follow as a “translation” (tarjumah) endows it with foreignness while simultaneously presenting it through traditional forms of storytelling legitimizes it as indigenous. As well, ambiguity of setting, the vague reference to “a certain periodical” where the story reportedly appeared, functions, as we have seen, as a thematized site where disparate discourses, languages, styles, and ideologies can converge, interact, and compete

251 Habl al-Matīn (Calcutta edition). No. 34, 2 August 1898.

252 Chihīl Tūtī is a series of anonymous tales based on ancient Indian legends. Part of the oral literature from the end of the Safavid era (1501-1722), Husayn Kurd covers the reign of the Safavid king Shah ‘Abbas (r. 1588-1629) and recounts the battles of Iranian pahlavans against the Uzbek and Ottoman enemies of Iran. Shīrīn and Farhād, a romance in verse, was written by the Persian poet Nizami (1141-1209) and revolves around the tragic story of the love of the Sasanian King Khusraw for the Armenian princess Shirin. These folktales were often recited in teahouses. See Edward Browne, Persian Revolution (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1966), 143.
for expression. Given that, as we saw, the preface to the book version of this munāzirah drops the traditional tales and instead compares the text to a novel testifies to this intense and ever shifting competition of genres and styles. It is also important to note that the traditional tales mentioned in the preface (and others like them such as Iskandar Nāmah and Rumūz-i Hamzah) were meant for public presentation and were often recited in coffee houses or teashops. The fact that this munāzirah is compared to these traditional forms of storytelling speaks volumes about its significance as a means of disseminating information. It also says much about the public nature of its dissemination as well as its relational approach to fictivity versus reality, that all-encompassing, omnipresent western code that places “fact” and “fiction” in a perpetual and antithetical bind. In the Iranian imaginary, then, there seemed to be no clear or strict line between fictivity and “real” events.

This becomes more evident when we recall that early periodicals were not “news” papers in the modern sense of the word and much of the materials in them comprised expository pieces, editorials, or letters. The designations vagāyi’ (chronicles) or akhbār (news), therefore, did not necessarily distinguish fact from fiction. The emphasis was, perhaps, on the public circulation, daily, of “new” concepts. The journal Iran, the official state gazette, for instance, published a piece under the title “Various domestic news” (Akhbār-i mukhtalifah-i dākhilah) in which a staff member is said to have found a piece of paper while taking a walk which contains a conversation in the form of question and answer between a master and his servants. The “conversation” is in fact a popular play, an indigenous form of commedia dell’arte, known as siyāh bāzī (literally, “black playing”) during which the master’s repeated requests from his servants for dinner is frustrated. The fact that this piece is presented as “news” is of particular interest here. It is a piece that vacillates between the narrative identities “conversation” and “siyāh bāzī,” a piece of paper narratively summoned in a newspaper. Akhtar and Qānūn are also outstanding representatives of this phenomenon, especially the latter. Generally speaking, Qānūn cannot be


254 Iran. No. 91, 5 May 1872, 3-4.

255 Similar to the popular play baqāl bāzī dar huzūr, this play also involves the comic staging of a confrontation between a representative of power and several agents representing the populace. Much of this type of popular drama involved the parody and criticism of the status quo. For more information refer to note number 184 above.
considered a “news” paper. It is a combination of articles, monologues, and dialogues mostly centring on the issues of law (qānūn) and humanity (ādāmiyyat), the name of Malkum’s secret society. Almost the entire periodical is written in the form of dialogues, such as the eleventh issue of the first year (n.d.) in which the entire paper is comprised of an imaginary dialogue between a “sayyid” (a descendent of prophet Muhammad) who “has just entered this city” and the audience about the issue of humanity. Malkum’s “news” paper seamlessly embodies the contemporary periodical as a hybrid space, which, next to the presentation of concepts and some news, is open to various stylistic practices, expressional strategies, formal manoeuvres, and thematic rehearsals.

In the periodical Tarībyat, which is considered the first daily in the history of Iranian journals, a similar approach is employed. A modern issue, the Hague Conference, is presented in the dialogue form and in verse in the piece entitled “The verse [rendition] of the Hague conference.” Presenting the proceedings of a Hague conference is as much news oriented as it is a discursive practice. Here again, the dialogue form accommodates the allegedly “traditional” genre of poetry as the vehicle to discuss a modern issue. Thus presenting the proceedings of a Hague conference in verse is the narrative enactment of the fielding of parallel discourses. It is also an enactment of their simultaneity. This type of cross-generic synthesis is a common practice in the periodicals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At times this synthesis would be embedded in the formal attributes of a piece, in its employment of different rhetorical devices concurrently or successively, in its headings, in its title and so on. At others, it would consciously be reflected upon in an article or a combination of the two.

Neither, along the same lines, is there a definitive line in this dialogic give and take dividing “traditionalists” and “modernists” as is so often the case in readings of the history of non-European modernities. Time and again, the parties involved in a dialogue or munāzirah upset our prefabricated contemporary presuppositions about the allegedly oppositional binary relationship between them. There are “secular” modernists who vehemently oppose a constitutional

256 Tarībyat. No. 238, 19 September 1901.

257 See, for example, Parvarish, No. 2, 15 June 1900. The title of an article in this issue reads, literally, “The article of interview” (maqālah-i musāhibah) which in English would be best rendered as “The interview article.” This and other similar titles point to the simultaneity and textual rivalry between genres and rhetorical strategies.
monarchy, just as there are “traditionalists” who strongly support constitutionalism. There are clergy who espouse the cause of establishing modern schools and courtiers who do their best to frustrate these attempts. This uneasy relation (to the contemporary mind) of allegedly reversed roles is staged continuously in Qajar era dialogism. In an article entitled “Distressed correspondence: they need to be asked” (maktūb-i parīshān: bāyad porsīd az īshān), the narrator observes “the discussion between a despotic and a constitutional mullah” the former of whom considers constitutionalists having “no other intent than the disappearance of religion and the destruction of Sharia and [its] rituals” while the latter opposes this view.258

Such maneuvers were not only stylistic; neither were these cross generic imbrications merely or exclusively formal, thematic, or rhetorical. In fact, separating them in this formative period based on a posteriori gradations would be imposing superficial taxonomies on a hybrid site of dialogicality.259 It is, therefore, not surprising to see articles that would make use of poetry, prose, the question and answer form, dialogue or a host of other elements.260 The lines between poetry and prose, fiction and reality, newspaper and book, question-answer and dialogue are in this way blurred. A long article, serialized over some twenty two issues of Habl al-Matīn, entitled “In defense of homeland: the truth must be told – and it must not be hidden” starts with a long poem followed by an apologia for the compatibility of Arab-Islamic culture with civilization (p. 12).261 In its fifteenth installments (11 December 1905), the discussion is presented in the form of a dialogue while in the twenty second installment (26 January 1906), the author returns to the question and answer form. Such examples attest to the hybridity, both ideological and formal, of the site of contestation for which the munāzirah is the narrative enactment. They refer to the in-between spaces of sociability in which disparate elements (the Islamists, modernists, prose, poetry, dialogue and direct address) converge and contribute to an inclusive though uncomfortable site of negotiation that is far too multifarious and complex to accommodate clear-

259 I use this term to signify the state of the convergence of various voices and practices within the same space. The term refers to more than the act of verbal exchange between two or more persons.
260 “Maktūb az Iskandarīyyah: for the consideration of the esteemed foreign ministry.” Habl al-Matīn (Calcutta edition). No. 26, 6 June 1898. In an open letter addressed to the foreign ministry, Muhammad Sadiq Tabrīzī condemns the inaction of the ministry in regards to the miserable condition of Iranian émigrés. This piece, like numerous others, is presented only partially in the form of question and answer.
261 The article commences in No. 2 on 4 September 1905, 10.
cut binaries. The *munāzirah* is the enactment of these in-between spaces. It is a hybrid genre comprising of a collage of themes, styles, and forms. It is a mélange of poetry, prose, questions and answers, dialogues, direct address, essays, sermons, précis, proverbs, and letters drawing on theatrical, dramatic, ficitive and realistic elements. Its formal diversity mirrors the ideological plurality of the social text on which it draws.
Chapter 3

3 The Constitutional Munāzirah

On August 5, 1906, after months of sporadic civil unrest over the mismanagement of the country and the alarming encroachment of foreign powers upon Iranian affairs, the reigning monarch Muzaffar al-Din Shah finally issued a royal proclamation agreeing to a constitutional monarchy followed by the granting of a national assembly in 1907. The triumph of the popular movement and the establishment of a national assembly brought with it unprecedented unity, jubilation and aspirations.262 Within the space of a year, however, the perceived inability of constitutional government to implement sweeping reforms, the persistence of the old problems, increasing rivalry between moderate and extremist deputies, the political intrigues of the anti-constitutional Muhammad ‘Ali Shah and his main clerical ally in the person of Shaykh Fazlullah Nuri, as well as growing suspicion that the Majlis had brought about no real change except the spread of Western values led to public disillusionment followed by the bombardment and subsequent abolition of the National Assembly with some degree of popular support.263 The munāzirahs of this period echo this shifting attitude. Europe and its civilizational values began to be no longer viewed as uncontested ideals to aspire to, though a pragmatic adaptation of Europe and its scientific and technological advances was deemed necessary. The first munāzirah that explicitly took this new position was Shaykh u Shūkh.

262 An eyewitness account describes the public joy at the granting of the constitution in these words: “On New Year’s Day, 1907, the constitution, signed at last by the dying Shāh, under the strong suasion of the clergy … was taken to the National Assembly by the Prime Minister Mushīr-u’d-Dawla … The Bahāristān … [and] … all its approaches and gardens surrounding it were thronged with an enthusiastic concourse of spectators, many of whom wept with joy as they exchanged embraces.” Edward Browne, Persian Revolution (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1966), 133.

263 The contemporary historian Nazerm al-Islam Kermani reports that following the bombardment of the Majlis, “the majority of people speak ill of constitutionalism” ['umūm-i mardum az mashrūtah bad mīgīyand], Tārīkh-i Bīdāri-yī Īrānīān (Tehran: Bonyad-i Farhang-i Iran, 1357/1978), Vol 4, 197.
3.1 The Clergy and the Saucy

*Shaykh u Shūkh* (The Clergy and The Saucy)\(^{264}\) was most likely written during the final years of Naser al-Din Shah's reign (1848-1896) and perhaps the early part of Muzaffar al-Din Shah's rule (1896-1907) by an anonymous author.\(^{265}\) No one seems to have been able to provide a precise date for this *munāzirah*,\(^{266}\) but temporal clues within the text help us situate it in approximately the timeframe specified above. It is unlikely that this *munāzirah* was written after the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 since there are no explicit or implicit references to any of the major events in this period: the assassination of Naser al-Din Shah,\(^{267}\) the unrest that led to the granting of the constitution by Muzaffar al-Din Shah, to his death and the succession of Muhammad Ali Shah (r. 1907-1909), to the subsequent suppression of the first Majlis (1907), or to the overthrow of this monarch and the establishment of the second Majlis (1909). Even though some vague references to dates could entail the time of any of these events, it is more likely that this *munāzirah* was written in the final years of Naser al-Din Shah's reign.\(^{268}\) The issue of precise

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\(^{264}\) The word “shūkh” literally translates into “jester.” I have, however, chosen to translate it as “the saucy” here for the following reasons. First, in the text the word “shūkh” refers to the body of students and teachers representing the modern educational system in Iran; as such, the augmentative “the” in “the saucy” carries this collective sense. Second, as will be seen later, the nuances of the word “shūkh” as it is deployed in this text convey the sense of impudence, smart appearance as well of sexual suggestiveness, all of which are also present in the word “saucy.”

\(^{265}\) At the conclusion of the narrative in one of the extant manuscripts (at the Malek Archives in Tehran), the author self identifies as “Muhammad Taqi son of the late Aqa ‘Ali Naqi known as Mirza Hidayat Allah Shirazi.” However, this appears next to the clearly fictive date given “at the forty fifth hour of the tenth day of the week [dah shanbah] in the month of Žī panbah [a fictive month] … in the year 15764 before Hijrah.” See Ahmad Mujahid, *Shaykh u Shūkh* (Tehran: Rowzanah, 1373/1994), 82. The author’s self-identification as the person named above, therefore, could be equally fictive.

\(^{266}\) One of the extant manuscripts held at Ayatollah Mar'ashi Najafi Library (No. 4379) in Qum, Iran, is dated “twenty fourth December 1885.” No other source specifies a date for this *munāzirah*.

\(^{267}\) The Shah was assassinated on 1 May 1896 by Mirza Reza Kermani, a disciple of Sayyid Jamal al-Din Afghani. On the life of Kermani, his acquaintance wit Jamal Al-Din, the latter’s influence, and the details of the assassination, see Edward Browne, *Persian Revolution* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1966), 59-98.

\(^{268}\) There are several such clues. Both the Shaykh and the students, for example, refer to the text of Mustashar al-Dowlah’s *Yak Kalimah* (completed in 1288/1871). Reference is also made to the “late” (p. 24) Riza Quli Khan Hidayat (1215-1288/1800-1871), the renowned scholar. These references are clearly made to the past in relation to the timeframe of the *munāzirah*. However, later reference is also made to Fabius Boital who established the first gas lamp factory in Iran on October 5, 1881 (p. 9) and to Count Antoine De Monte Forte who was hired by Naser al-Din Shah in 1295/1878 as the chief of police and served in that post until 1307/1890. For more on these personalities see Mansureh Ittihadiyah, *Injā Tihānān Ast* (Tehran: Nashr-i Tārīkh-i Iran, 1377/1998), 123-4. The former event (the establishment of gas lamp factory) is referred to in the past tense while the latter person is referred to in the present tense (“Count De Monte Forte is the chief of police,” 9). Elsewhere, the Shaykh reminds the students of “the [current] tumultuous military campaigns between the two great neighbouring states” (13). The two states in question are Russia and the Ottoman Empire whose territorial wars extended from the 16th to the 20th centuries. In the approximate timeframe of this *munāzirah* this reference could mean either the Russo-Turkish wars of 1877-1878 or
dating aside, the main reason this munāzirah is included in this chapter under the munāzirahs of the Constitutional period is its outright rejection, for the first time, of the alleged supremacy of Western civilizational discourse, a discursive move that gathered increasing momentum after the establishment of the first parliament and the persistence of the problems that had crippled the country during the reign of “despotism (this of course finds it parallel in the rejection of Islam as the supreme code). Unlike the munāzirahs of the first period where Western codes were viewed as the ideal form of governance and in strict accordance with the teachings of Islam, in this munāzirah the issue of adaptation is seriously scrutinized, and rejected, while indigenous traditions are upheld, a view that will be adopted by other texts in the Constitutional and post-Constitutional periods. The same attitude applies to the discourse toward Islam. Again, unlike the munāzirahs of the earlier period, Islam is not viewed as the source of western law or as its equivalent (even if parodically). This is not to say, however, that Shaykh u Shūkh exists in an ideological or textual vacuum, for it draws extensively on its predecessors.

There are two internal narrators here, the main narrator (N1) who starts the story by describing himself in the starting scene and his "friend" who then proceeds to relate the meeting of the Shaykh with the graduates which took place at someone’s house. The views of the two narrators regarding the saucy students display unmistakable affinity, so once again we witness a "Friend" who focalizes for the main author-narrator. The figure of the Friend, already featured in Mustashar al-Dowlah's Yak Kalimah and Malkum Khan's Rafīq u Vazīr, is once again intertextually summoned to focalize yet another episode of the debate. Unlike the earlier Friend, however, this new incarnation befriends the nation by emphasizing adherence to indigenous tradition, rather than mimicry, as the solution to the problems that plague the country. This shift

the Caucasus Campaign during World War I (1914-1918). The manuscript editor believes the latter is the case. See footnote 2 on page 13 in Ahmad Mujahid, Shaykh u Shūkh (Tehran: Rowzanah, 1373/1994). But it is more likely that the former date is accurate. This is because the text makes reference to “mūsūrī fīsīr” (monsieur Richard) as the “current” (33) instructor teaching French and geography at the Dār al-Funūn (Polytechnic College, first modern school in Iran). This refers to Jules Richard who taught at the College since it opened in 1851 until his death in 1891 (see the entry “Dār al-Funūn” in Encyclopedia Iranica for more information). The text also invokes “ja’far qulī khan ra’īs” (66), also known as Nayyīr al-Mulk, who served in different administrative positions at the College and was later promoted to director (ra’īs), a position he held until 1895-6. Finally, reference is also made to Muhammad Hasan Khan I’timad al-Saltanah (1259-1313/1843-1896) as the head of the Royal Bureau of Publications and Translation (idārah-i intibā’i va dār al-tarjumah-i shāhī), a position he held from 1883 to 1896.
in the Friend's ideological orientation thus marks the shift in interpretation. The Friend in this way impersonates the multi-voiced narrator of Iranian modernity. This shift is reflected in the setting of the munāzirah as well. Besides the narrators, the Shaykh and the graduates, there is one more character whose house is the meeting place of the latter group. Whereas setting in earlier munāzirahs had been a thematized dreamlike space characterized by invisibility and ambivalence, the setting of this drama is represented by a concrete house, located in the capital (1). Concretization of space is paralleled by a similar process in characterization.

Thus far we have seen characters as anthropomorphized social types, but now we witness character personalities who, though still representing their social type, come to life with vivid descriptions of their physical appearance and the nuances of their personality such as emotional states, temper and beliefs. The Shaykh, for example, is described as having an "average height, venerated beard, a radiant forehead, a shabby but clean garb, an unpretentious turban, with an air of seriousness and respect" (2). The students are described in fragments several times throughout the text. Initially, they are referred to as "apes" (būzinah), in sarcastic reference to their apish imitation of foreigners (2). Fragmented descriptions of the students are also scattered throughout the text with portrayals such as these: delicate voice (bārīk kardan-i sidā, 2), effeminate (zan sifatān, 9), delicate body (badan-i nāzuk), done up locks (zulf-i makush), wearing gold rimmed hats and scarves (23), buttocks-revealing pants (shalvār-i kūn namā) and testicle revealing frocks (sardārī-i khāyah namā, 26), delicate hands and made up face and styled hair (dasthā-yi latīf va sūrat-i ārāstah va mūhā-yi pūrāstah, 29). Besides having the narrative effect of dispersion by populating the text (and by extension the social text) with many chunks of this character type, what stands out in these dispersed and fragmentary descriptions is the students' hybrid and split identities: at once human and ape, male and female, Muslim and non-Muslim, Iranian and non-Iranian, the Shūkh becomes the anthropomorphized locus of competing discourses. Indeed, the text projects the students at times as Iranian and at others as foreign subjects, occasionally even on the same page.

Upon entering the host's house, for example, the Shaykh protests that affinity of invitees is a precondition for invitation, complaining that "if these [the graduates] were Muslim subjects and merchants," it would still be acceptable despite their western appearance. The host then ensures the Shaykh that these are indeed Muslim subjects and are considered the learned (ulamā u shuyūkh) of the land (2). Conferring on the graduates of a western inspired institution the
designations “*ulamā u shuyūkh*,” reserved for the members of the clerical establishment, itself speaks to such identity traversals. A few lines down the page, a student objects to the Shaykh's inhibition in these words: "Are you Muslims not instructed to socialize, befriend and attract the hearts of non-Muslims?" Addressing the Shaykh in the nominative “you” (also expressed as “you Muslims” or “you Iranians” or “they”) confirms the split character of the Šūkh: "One of the deficiencies of Islam is that one cannot wrap his head around what they [Muslims, clerics, Iranians] are saying" (4). Indeed, this fragmented identity of the graduates reappears throughout the narrative: the figure of the Šūkh is alternatively cast as *Farangī* (24, 56, 65), as Russian (28), as Iranian (38, 44, 47, 75), as Muslim (2, 29), as a transsexual colonel (*ham sālū ‘ī ham kulunil*, 27), and as a mixed breed whose Persian is incomprehensible (26, 35-38, 46), a crossbreed that is best captured by the expression “*ushturgāvpalang*” (camel-cow-leopard, 25). Extending this metaphor to the population at large, the Shaykh expands the scope of this metonymic hybrid to the social text upon which these fragmented discourses are also written. In today’s Iran, decræles the Shaykh:

There is neither piety nor abstinence. Christian [is] worse than Jew, Muslim worse than Christian. The mujtahid [religious juror] is a habitual drunkard. The preacher is a gambler. The prayer leader [is] irreligious. The pope [*shaykh al-Islam*] [is] the enemy of piety, he recognizes neither God nor the prophet, the length of this unjust [pope’s] turban is two hundred meters [one hundred zar’s], [yet] at nights he drinks alcohol. At nights [busy with] prostitutes, in daytime he is an Imam… During the fasting month [Ramadan] they [the clergy or Muslims in general] go to the mosque, but they say their prayers while drunk. They take the pilgrimage albeit in Paris. They pay their religious dues [*khums*] but to the dancer at the tambourine. They go to [religious] mourning ceremonies for fun. They recite sermons [*rowzah*] for publicity. They perform ta’zīyah [Shiite passion play] for pleasure. They pay alms for fame… O poor Iran, poor Iran, poor Iran! … [this] is [a state of] topsy-turvy [khar tū khar] (70-71).

This chaotic state, says the Shaykh, has resulted “because there is no distinguishing principle on hand” [*mahak dar dast nīst*, 73], an unmistakable reference to the entangled web of competing discourses and ideologies and to their lack of consensus. The Shaykh himself is not immune from this in-between state of perplexity.

Throughout the narrative, the Shaykh seems to have a more sophisticated understanding of modern European sciences and their application than the graduates (he, for instance, beats the graduates in a subtraction competition held at the house, 47), even as he continually rejects the usefulness of modern science, upholds the indigenous sciences and industries, and concludes that
the greatest form of knowledge is gnosis (*ma’rifat*, 67). Elsewhere, however, he approves of science and bitterly decries the Iranian government for its lack of support for science and for the learned of the land while admiring European nations for their support of the same (54-56), with which the graduates agree. The Shaykh also approvingly invokes the invention of a prototype of telegraph technology by Iranian children (68) and denounces the government’s lack of encouragement for such activities (69). These statements come from the same person who repeatedly admires the Shah for supporting reform (8, 10, 23, 25) and in fact comes across as a royalist (30). Elsewhere, the Shaykh first scathingly scorns the Shūkh for even suggesting that diplomacy is a science only to concede that it is within the space of a few paragraphs (43-4). A similar trajectory, the shifting of positions and of attitudes, emerges when the two parties put the issue of language to debate. Reminiscent of the Mirza’s comment in *Tafsil-i Guftigiy-i yak Mirzāy-i ‘Ālim bā yak ‘Avām-i Mustahzār* (A Detailed Account of the Conversation between a Learned Clerk and an Informed Commoner), the Shaykh argues against the usefulness of learning French, “the language of the Christian and the Jew” (29), and upholds the supremacy of Arabic as the language of Islam and Muslim laws. It turns out shortly after, however, that the Shaykh himself knows French (34). And even though the two parties stubbornly challenge each other throughout the narrative, their dispute is inherently characterized by curiosity and a genuine attempt to communicate through mutual understanding. This is evident through dispersed but continuous shifts in alliance, as we saw above. When the Shaykh wants to convincingly emphasize a point to the graduates, for example, he transforms the traditional act of swearing on holy scripture or on saints and instead swears on *Times*, on Sayyid Jamal al-Din’s *Maqālāt-i Jamāliyyah*, on the “sly” Malkum (33) and on Prosky, Allumette, Richard (34) and Vauvillier (41). The graduates in turn concede to the Shaykh on several issues or genuinely ask for more clarification where it is lacking (31, 33, 72, 73, 75, for example). This is taken to its dramatic extreme where at the conclusion of the munāzirah several Shūkhs repent for emulating

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270 These were all European instructors who were employed by the Iranian government to teach at the *Dār al-Funūn*, the first modern college established in Iran in 1268/1851. One of these instructors, Jules Richard, had lived in Iran since 1260/1844 and had assumed the name Mirza Reza Khan. For more information on the instructors at the *Dār al-Funūn*, see the entry “Dār al-fonūn” in *Encyclopedia Iranica*. 
the *Farangīs* (76) and (re)convert to indigenous roots (78-80). But this dream of an ultimate consensus turns out to be just that: a dream. For we immediately find out, through an ironic reversal, that all this had been a dream from which the narrator wakes up on the final page (81).

The narrator then lists some thirteen other works written by the same author, a certain Bahāsikrā Chārkh Daknī, during his tour of the Iranian capital.

The promise of existing or future installments, as we have seen, is a narrative acting out of lack of closure rather than having a necessary basis in reality. This is in tandem with the issue of authorship, or more precisely, the lack of authorship. The text designates Bahāsikrā Chārkh Daknī, a fictive Indian traveller, as the author. One of the manuscripts attributes the text to Mirza Hidayat Allah Shirazi which may or may not refer to Mirza Muhammad Taqi Shirazi (1258-1338/1842-1920). Or the text could have been written by Mirza Hasan Jaber Ansari. A foreign traveller, a prominent cleric, and a distinguished physician, respectively, the purported author(s) of this text aptly captures the plurality of discourses, approaches, professions and ideologies that constitute the act of authorship in the munāzirah, a multiplicity that finds its parallel in its readership. This is duly enacted in the narrative. In the middle of the debate between the Shaykh and the Shūkh, the host presents the text of a telegraph to the attendants in the hopes that the graduates can help him figure out the message which is written in some foreign language. The graduates take turns to examine the text and decode the message. This symbolic act of reading only produces a lack of consensus on meaning, for one graduate thinks the text is in English, another deems it to be in French, and yet another judges it to be in Russian. The interpretation of the text follows a similar course where political commentary, historical account and personal message are all said to be the meaning embedded within the text of the telegraph. To make matters worse, all these interpretations are presented in a half nonsensical Persian which only serves to further confound the host (35-8). At the end, of course, no single

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271 Interestingly, the manuscript editor recognizes that this might have been “in the author’s imagination” but at the same time hopes that someday these lost manuscript may be found. Ahmad Mujahid, *Shaykh u Shūkh* (Tehran: Rowzanah, 1373/1994), viii.

272 See note 265 above.

273 See note 266 above.

274 This, following the insights of Kristeva and Barthes, points to the intertextual composition of the munāzirah, a text that is perpetually reproduced. For more on these insights, see Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 34-74.
interpretation is agreed upon, nor a single consensus reached. The act of reading and of interpretation thus mirrors the act of ambiguous authorship. The evasive signified is so prevalent that all the issues discussed in this munāzirah are filtered through its plurality of meanings, of origins, and of attributions.

When the Shaykh and the Shūkhs discuss the issue of the interaction of Muslims with foreigners, they both cite Quranic verses in support. The graduates make reference to Quran 13:49 (as well as to Mustashar al-Dowlah’s *Yak Kalima*) to show that Muslims are free to mix with other people. In response, the Shaykh also invokes Quran 54:5 and 118:3 in which the opposite is seemingly commanded (2-3). The two, in other words, present their own interpretations of an origin. Having first cited the authority of the Quran to prove their point, the Shūkhs then singly or in unison openly announce their outright rejection of Islam on several issues: the seminal *Qānūn* (Dictum or Law) of Avicenna cannot hold a light to modern physics, they proclaim, “so Islam is inadequate” (*pas dīn-i Islām sust ast*, 5). Fine European matches, telegraph, watches garments, cigarettes, candles, carriages and articles have made life easier, “so Islam is void” (*pas dīn-i Islām bātil ast*, 7). On the issue of alphabet reform (11-16), as well, the graduates have a similar judgment: “Islamic alphabet is deficient” (*pas khatt-i Islāmi nāqīs ast*, 11). In comparison to the discoveries of Newton and Kepler (42), because of the discovery of thermometer and of the chemical elements of oxygen (64-5), and due to the discovery of electricity (66-7) also Islam is void, according to the graduates. These same graduates who reject the Quran and even Allah (33) later cite a prophetic tradition in support of the claim that the science of medicine is the mother of all sciences (50).

The issue of science and of the scientific advances of the west is put to debate in a similar vein. Whereas the Shaykh has earlier declared that “science is neither eastern nor western, neither Iranian nor Turkish [tūrānī]” (4), he proclaims in the rest of the narrative, through numerous intertextual references, that there is nothing in the modern sciences that had not been discovered by Muslim scientists of yore and that in fact western science is inferior to traditional sciences because it is not “speculative” (*nazarī*, 52). On the science of medicine the Shaykh suggests that modern medicine is inferior because if medication is prescribed mistakenly it can lead to adverse effects whereas traditional remedies involve no such risks (5, 50-53). A similar analogy is made between modern European and traditional Iranian industries (7). When the Shūkhs boast of the modern military sciences (*‘Ilm-i nizām*, 24), the Shaykh invokes the ninth/fifteenth century
history *Rowzat al-Safā* (Garden of Serenity), a compendium of the conduct of kings and prophets of yore, as the true source of military science.\(^{275}\) Other sciences – politics (24), linguistics (28), geology (39-40), geography (49), geometry (56-8), electricity (60), law (French *loi* in original, 72)\(^{276}\) – are intermittently fielded, upheld, and contested. When the discussion turns to history (49), the Shaykh once again cites *Nāsikh al-Tavārīkh* (Histories) as a sufficient source of world history.\(^{277}\) Here and elsewhere, however, the Shaykh’s rejection of modern sciences is not limited to the citation of a parallel traditional text. The generic orientations and methodological approaches of different sciences are also scrutinized. Drawing an analogy between history and *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), for instance, the Shaykh considers the former a “craft” (*fann*) which, unlike the latter, does not involve speculation and is thus an inferior form of knowledge.\(^{278}\) He further criticizes modern history as Eurocentric (50), drawing attention to its exclusion of non-European histories. Such observations on the philosophy of science present the discourse of the Shaykh not as the unitary voice of “tradition” but as an embodiment of rival discourses and their attendant methodologies.

It is in this way that in their discussion of physics the Shaykh’s rejection of a basic principle in modern physics (that of the three forms matter can take: solid, liquid, vapour) with reference to traditional science (*samʿul kīyān*, 63-5) does not constitute the rejection of science per se but refusal to acknowledge the methodological discourse emplotting knowledge production. Indeed, the Shaykh questions the efficacy of the empirical approach in the production of knowledge on several occasions (41, 44, 53) and criticizes the inductive method (*ʿilm bih juzʿ ʿtyāt*, 49) associated with this mode of knowledge production. Therefore, when the Shaykh invokes a

\(^{275}\) *Rowzat al-Safā fi Sīrat al-Anbīyāʾ va Mulk va Khulāfāʾ* (The Garden of Serenity in the Conduct of Prophets, Monarchs and Caliphs) is a universal history written in the ninth/fifteenth century by Muhammad ibn Khāvand Shah known as Khwāndamīr. During Qajar times, it gained popularity when Reza Quli Hidayat wrote an addendum to it known as *Rowzat al-Safā-yi Nāṣirī*. For information on the original work, see Khāvand Shah. For information on the later version, see Ali Asghar Shamim, *Irān dar Dawrah-i Saltanat-i Qājār* (Tehran: Behzad, 1387/2008), 663.

\(^{276}\) The Shaykh invokes indigenous textual parallels for some of these sciences as well. On the science of geography, for example, he cites *Mīrʿ āt al-Boladān va Muʿajam va Gharāʾib al-Boladān* written by Muhammad Hasan Khan Iʿtimad al-Saltanah, head of the Royal Bureau of Publications and Translations during Naser al-Din Shah’s reign. For a brief introduction on this work, see Ruhani, *Nigāḥi bih Mīrʿ āt al-Baladān*.

\(^{277}\) *Nāsikh al-Tavārīkh* (Histories) was written between the years 1258/1842 and 1263/1847 by Muhammad Taqi Sepehr (bearer of the title Lisān al-Mulk or Tongue of Empire) in nine volumes culminating in Naser al-Din Shah’s reign. For more information, see Muhamad Taqi Sepehr, *Nāsikh al-Tavārīk* (Tehran: Asatir, 1377/1998). Also see note 164 above.

\(^{278}\) The Shaykh makes a similar comment about the science of geography (49).
single book, *Khulāsat al-Hisāb* (Treatise on Arithmetic), as inclusive of all the mathematical “sciences” listed by the Shūkh (45-6), his comment cannot, given this context, be seen as an easy opposition of mutually exclusive discourses. Rather than the opposition of binaries, what is foregrounded is the overlap of texts. As was pointed out earlier, the Shaykh is not against modern science or against adaptation, for he has himself written a book inspired by a European work (78). What seems to inform the Shaykh’s attitude, instead, is his resentment of a lack of consensus and of ambiguity. It is through such copulation of discourses and of texts that “bastard conclusions” (*natījah hā-yi harām zādah*, 59) plague the debate.

The convergence of languages (Hindi, Chinese, Turkish, Persian, Arabic, Russian, French, English, 29), of places (Britain, Ireland, London, Eiffel tower, Champs Elysees, 47-8), of modes of representation (painting vis-à-vis photography, 59), of genres (journalism, travelogues, 17), of numerous invoked texts, of historical and contemporary figures (8, 9, 42, and elsewhere), and of discourses makes the *munāzirah* a narrative of citations composed of fragments of texts where the very act of writing (*inshā’,* 16) itself and its methods, forms, and approaches become a subject of contestation (16-19). This “anxiety of influence” plagues the split subject of Iranian modernity and is time and again mirrored in the narrative of the *munāzirah*, its natural genre of choice.

### 3.2 The Treasury of Helpers

Less than a year after the establishment of the first *Majlis*, the figures of Shaykh and Shūkh reemerge in Mirza Hasan Ansari’s *Ganjīnah-i Ansār yā Rumān-i Shaykh u Shūkh* (*The Treasury of Helpers or Shaykh and Shūkh: A Novel*). Published on 16 Shawwal 1325/22 November 1907, this hybrid narrative was meant to be the first issue of a periodical by the same name (The

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279 *Treatise on Arithmetic* was written by Baha’ al-Din Amili, also known as Shaykh Baha’i (953-1031/1547-1621). He wrote several books in politics, ethics, Islamic jurisprudence, physics, and astronomy, among others. His *Treatise on Arithmetic* was a standard text until the late 19th century. For more information, see Iskandar Bayk Turkaman, *Tārīkh-i ‘Ālam Ārā-yi ‘Abbāsī* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1350/1971); Zabihullah Safa, *Tārīkh-i Adabīyāt dar Irān* (Tehran: Qoqnus, 1381/2002); and Edward Browne: *Literary History of Persia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929).

280 The force of this familial metaphor becomes evident when we heed the fact that the word “*natījah*” can signify both “conclusion” and “great grandchildren” in Persian.

Treasury of Helpers, which the author had meant to found. It also purports to be a "novel." At the same time, its writing style is a blend of the verbose and rhythmic language of traditional scribes, the convoluted parlance of traditional accountants, the heavily allusive, Arabicized and academic style of traditional seminary curricula, and the simplified, foreign accented expression of the modern journalist, reflecting the professional and educational background of the author.

Ganjīnah-i Ansār yā Rumān-i Shaykh u Shākh, then, is an anthology of parallel texts, genres, and styles focalized through the figures of Shaykh and Shākh and addressed to the nation. The subtitle of the magazine reads: “For the progress of the state and the nation and public welfare.” The rapid consumption of the published copies of this text is testimony to the enormous appeal of the munāzirah for the readership of the time. It is also testimony to the plurality of competing discourses that collectively populated the narrative of Iranian modernity and that resonated with the public.

The sheer number of parallel texts in this relatively short narrative is so conspicuous that it becomes difficult, even visually, to excavate the issues being discussed. These are, nonetheless, centred around the urgent tasks that lie before the nascent parliament: establishment of a national bank (bānk-i millī-yi Irān, Najafi: 436), reform of the country's finances through foreign loans, establishment of a legal apparatus, improvement of the military, and development of trade and industries (424), among others. The mere tabling of these issues, however, does not constitute the elemental objective of the narrative. The plurality of the means of signification is as important, if not more so, in order to reach the widest audience possible. This is why the fragmentary text(s)

282 It is possible that the word “ Helpers” (Ansār) alludes to the inhabitants of Medina who accepted Muhammad when he had fled Mecca for fear of execution at the beginning of his career as the prophet of Islam. The Medinans later came to be known as “Helpers” in Islamic tradition. One of the main issues in this this munāzirah is the unity of the people, king, clergy and parliamentarians in helping to guard the interests of the country through the nascent Majlis, hence the term “ Helpers.”


284 A clerical polymath, Ansari wrote social, political, and ethical treatises. Ansari had undergone seminary education and was trained as a cleric. He also founded a journal and subtitled his Shaykh u Shākh as a “novel.”

285 We have already seen the connotations of the term " Helpers" in the title. See note 282 above.


287 Apparently, copies of the magazine were swept up at such a fast rate that the author himself later would pay a considerable sum to get a copy of his own. See Musa Najafi, Bunyād-i Falsafah-i Siyāsī dar Irān (Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Daneshgahi, 1376/1997), 27-8.
of this *munāzirah* employs a myriad of styles and genres. It starts, for instance, with supplication
in the style of an oration given at the beginning of a religious sermon. This narrative is followed,
immediately, by a line in verse, which is itself followed by an autobiographical paragraph in
which the author mentions his purpose for writing. This section also ends with a line of verse.
We are then introduced to the text of the *munāzirah* through a subtitle that reads: *Hazl-i Vajd.*
Given the grammatical functions of the *izāfah* construct (used as an attributive/causative or a
possessive) in Persian, this title could be translated as “a jest on ecstasy” or, alternatively, as
“ecstasy’s witticism.” This ambiguity and plurality of meaning is indeed reflected in the rest of
the text(s) through the employment of various genres, styles, and accents.

The opening exchange between the two figures, for instance, contains three languages, all
embedded in Persian. The Shaykh’s greeting is in Arabic,\footnote{It reads: *Salām 'alaykum, bih hukmullāh bilkhayr wal 'āfiyah wal surūr*, meaning “peace upon you, at the
command of Allah, as well as welfare, prosperity and happiness.”} to which the Shūkh responds: “I beg
your *pardon*, I don’t know Arabic but for your kindness I am thankful and grateful, *thank you,
merci merci*” (emphasis added to words that appear as such in the original, albeit transliterated
into Persian, 411-12). The same message is thus repeated five times, twice in Persian, once in
English, and twice in French. The coexistence of languages is paralleled by the simultaneity of
genres in the rest of the *munāzirah*. In addition to numerous intertextual allusions to the Quran,
traditions, folk tales, proverbs (both in Persian and in Arabic), verse (both in Persian and in
Arabic), and quotations from historical figures, the conversation of the Shaykh and the Shūkh is
interrupted with another meta-narrative subtitled “Fiddle-faddle (*shirr u vir*, 429)\footnote{According to Dehkhoda lexicon, the term *shirr u vir* itself is a Persianized loan word from the French *charivari* meaning “ruckus.”} in which the
editor (*ra'īs*), director (*mudīr*), deputy (*mu'āvin*) and secretary (*daftar dār*) of the hybrid
newspaper-*munāzirah*-novel discuss the usefulness of the author’s intention to launch a
magazine (430). We are then presented with another subtitle, “issue two” (*numrah-i duvvum*),
under which the author interjects to justify his intention, addressing the readers directly and
citing both Persian and Arabic verses in support. Yet another subtitle follows, “Educating
Minds” (*parvarīsh-i afkār*), which mirrors the titles of editorial articles in contemporary
newspapers and in which the author speaks about the necessity of promoting education and
exchange of ideas as an important step in mending the country’s problems (431-3). This is
followed by another article of similar orientation subtitled “Explanation of the Freedom of Speech and of Pen” (tashrīḥī āzādī-yi zabān va qalam, 433). The next subtitle (“The rest of the debate from issue one after the introductory comments”) takes us back to the rest of the conversation between the two figures (434). The conversation, and with it the munāzirah, ends when the Shaykh, the fictive character, closes by introducing issue three of the newspaper-munāzirah-novel entitled “Poetry Moetry” (shi‘r u mi‘r)290 which is entirely in verse (440-42) and in which the author-poet-journalist laments the persisting problems in Iran and invites the nation and the state to unite through the Majlis. In the final section, titled “Novelty” (badī‘ah), the author’s family genealogy and his ancestral tradition of being royal scribes are presented by citing verbatim the texts of two royal decrees, written in medieval style, in which the monarch bestows fief on the author’s ancestors. The very narrative structure of this munāzirah, then, acts out an identity crisis, an impasse which is also mirrored in other elements of the narrative.

As we saw earlier, the opening lines of the exchange between the Shaykh and the Shūkh, Arabicized and foreign-accented respectively, reflect what we would expect of character types representing the binary traditional-modern. This assumption, however, is immediately disrupted, for in the next exchange, and following the Shaykh’s criticism of the use of foreign words, the Shūkh’s language changes into a heavily verbose and allusive speech that we would expect from the Shaykh. The latter, in turn, makes use of colloquial speech in response (412-15, 428-9 and elsewhere). Each performs the language of the other in order to chastise the opponent’s discourse. However, the act of performance leads to the act of adaptation, for indeed throughout the rest of the narrative any binaristic assumption about what the two figures should stand for is disrupted time and again. The Shūkh, for example, has morphed from his earlier incarnation as emulator of the west into a nationalist figure, lamenting the loss of land to the Russians and to the British in the Caucasus and in Afghanistan (415-16). The Shaykh, in turn, is far from a “traditional” figure. He has extensive knowledge of world politics and in fact challenges his opponent’s knowledge of foreign affairs (421). It is the Shaykh who espouses foreign loans and employment of foreign teachers while the Shūkh challenges the efficacy of this approach and

290 In Persian the doubling of the same word by replacing its initial letter in the second coinage creates a rhythmic effect that gives the initial word a generic connotation. As such, translation fails to give an English “equivalent.” My use of “moetry” is therefore to echo the rhythm in the original, perhaps through merging the words “musical” and “poetry.”
warns of foreign encroachment (424, 426). This of course is not a straightforward shifting of roles, for each figure still reflects the views of the particular social stratum it represents. The Shaykh, for example, refutes the Shūkh’s assertion that western science is superior through a temporal maneuver which we have amply witnessed above: citing the Quran, he purports that what is considered astronomical discoveries today was reported by the prophet of Islam “one thousand and three hundred years ago,” as it was by Persian sages: “Thou think’st but this world there is none/But for this earth and sky there is none; Like the worm hidden betwixt the wheat/Its earth and sky confined to wheat.” The Shūkh’s response is “damn traditional astronomy” (murdah shūr hay’at rā bibarad, 419). The Shaykh attacks the Shūkh’s peers, graduates of the dār al-funūn, on grounds of their topographical impotence which resulted in the British mapping of the northwestern frontiers at Azerbaijan (420), and yet he is the one who offers a “three-tiered” solution for reform, all of which would typically fall within the Shūkh’s discourse (424).

The two agree on a number of issues, however. In fact, they are in agreement on the most basic concerns: the healing of Iran from its illnesses, resistance to foreign influence in the country, and the reform of infrastructure, with which the intrusive author also agrees (434, 442). All three share the same anxiety about the continuation of the Shah’s support of the nascent parliament (429, 437, 438, 441). Yet the Shūkh and the author differ on the sufficiency of resorting to tradition in overcoming the problems posed in the contemporary world. While the former rejects tradition altogether, the latter has a mixed feeling towards it, invoking, alternatively, historical figures that led the country to glorious heights or to its demise (Mahmud of Ghazna and Muhammad Khwarazm Shah, respectively, 431). The Shaykh and the Shūkh reflect this ambivalence by exchanging a joke, each upholding the other as the epitome of wisdom (438).

These intermediary positions, ideologies, and discourses, these overlapping and mediated identities populate the text of the munāzirah, as they do the social text. Some espouse

291 The lines cited are from the twelfth century polymath and poet Nizami Ganjavi (1141-1209). The original reads: “tu pindārī kih ʿalam juz hamān nīšt/zamīn u āsimānī ghayr az īn nīšt; chu ān kirmī kih dar gandum nahān ast/zamīn u āsimānī-t ī ā hamān ast.” The English translation is mine.

292 Muhammad ‘Ali Shah (r. 1907-1909) had always resented the constitutional movement but had managed to hide his resentment until circumstances allowed for its dismantlement. He in fact did so by ordering the Russian cossacks in his employ to bombard the Majlis, which task they accomplished in June 1908. For further reading on Muhammad ‘Ali Shah’s attitude towards the Majlis, see Edward Browne, Persian Revolution (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1966), 133-72.
absolutism, some support constitutionalism; others advocate the rule of sharia (mashrūʿa); some promote being a protectorate, others champion the rule of law, and yet some endorse republicanism while others resort to feudalism (428). Iran is populated by these identities, approaches, orientations, ideologies, and discourses: “Iran is an explosive mass, composed of differing forms, to the point of chaos, towards constitutionalism and the [rule of] law” (428). And lest languages are not thrown into the mix, this sentence is parodically presented in a Persianized Arabic (Al-Īrān jism-i nārī, yatashakkal bih ashkāl-i mukhtalifah, hattal harj u wal marj, sū-yi al-mashrūṭah wal qānūn). The figures representing this entangled web of discourses, the Shaykh and the Shūkh, similarly fit the description the author gives of himself, albeit through the comments of the newspaper staff: “both a scribe and a supervisor of a [public] association [anjuman], both a traditionally trained clergy and a select [i.e. modern] teacher, also the compiler of the proverbs of Persians and Arabs” (430).

Into this mix are thrown appearances, consciousness of which was increasingly becoming associated with identity.293 While in the pre-constitutional munāzirahs the focus had been on adaptation of western laws, in the constitutional era necessity of adaptation began to gradually equate anxiety of adoption.294 The phrase “peoples are blasted by their imitation” (khalq rā taqlīdishān bar bād dād, 424) became a catch phrase in many narratives in this period and later.295 In this vein, both the Shaykh and the Shūkh are presented as figures of excess, while the author-narrator occupies an invisible intermediary space alternating his support or denouncement of either figure. Representing the social type “farangī maʿāb” (European mannered), the Shūkh is lambasted for his excesses:

The farangī maʿābs are a step ahead of them [Europeans themselves]. The farangī only rejects his eminence the prophet peace be upon him, [while] the farangī maʿāb [rejects] from Adam to Muhammad, even the creator of the universe. The farangī drinks a little alcohol to help digest his food, [while] the farangī maʿāb [drinks] a demijohn of araq and wine to the point of passing out in alleys or gutters. The farangī denies the sky [meaning the metaphysical world], [while] the farangī maʿāb [denies] both the earth and the sky.

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293 The periodical Habl al-Matīn, for example, considered Reza Shah’s proposal for a uniform national attire a “necessary moral coup d’etat” (kūdatā-yi akhlāqī-yi ġāzim), No. 1, 7 Azar 1307/27 November 1928, 25-26.
294 I have based the phrase “anxiety of adoption” on Harold Bloom’s phrase “anxiety of influence.” See note 281 above.
295 Phrases approximating this sense abound in many writings in this period. See for example Shaykh u Shūkh and Guftigū-yi Mirzā va Ṭavām.
The *farangī* urinates standing up, [while] the *farangī maʿāb* [urinates] on the wall so that the splashes land on his clothes. The *farangī* declines to use naturally made henna, [while] the *farangī maʿāb* [uses] alkaloid sulphur until the hair goes gray. The *farangī* eats fresh pork meat or cheese where he cannot find poultry or lamb, [while] the *farangī maʿāb*, despite the availability and low price of poultry and fatty calf meat, buys disgusting and rotten cheeses of *Farangistān* at a hefty price and eats them, never mind other foul eatables such as lobster broth and frog stew and lizard kebobs and soups (412).

The Shaykh’s appearance and mannerisms are equally described as excessive: “Behold this lice infested [person] who... pulls his cloak on his head lest stench and vapour escape his nostrils, what nonsense he speaks” (412). There is also a more detailed description of the Shaykh’s appearance which draws on racial discourse reminiscent of Dickens’s portrayal of Fagin in *Oliver Twist*: “what they have said in the science of physiognomy about a perverted man with a bald head and foxlike features and shortness of height and a hunched back and thin beard and an ugly snout is accurate in your respect” (440).²⁹⁶ It is important to note that the Shaykh’s eerie perversion is reflected through the equally eccentric (to the contemporary eye) appearance of the Shūkh. The Shaykh initially “drooled [over] that shapely form [*shikl u shamāyil*] and that tall cypress and that graceful manner” (411). The sexualized and effeminate portrayal of the Shūkh casts him simultaneously as an object of desire and a figure of illegitimate sexual love.²⁹⁷ Indeed, the Shaykh makes an implicit offer of sex to the Shūkh (419). Just as the Shūkh’s appearance is derided as an excessive imitation of the west, the figure of the Shaykh is portrayed as the unsightly excesses and perversions of tradition. In this way, the two not only oppose but also complement each other as figures of excess. In a narrative of parallel texts,²⁹⁸ the figures purportedly standing for opposites in fact overlap, mirror, and echo each other as figures of simultaneity. The Shaykh’s brief address to the Shūkh, a short utterance in Arabic and French, succinctly articulates the coexistence of parallels: “Well said! Well said! And yes you *garçon*” [*Ahsant! Ahsant! Wa niʾam al-garçon ant*] (emphasis added, 429).

²⁹⁶ The figure also has an uncanny resemblance to the old man (*pīr mard-i khinzīr pīnzīr*) in Sadeq Hedayat’s *The Blind Owl*, published in 1937.

²⁹⁷ Sexual attraction toward young boys among older men was prevalent at this time. See Afsaneh Najmabadi *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005), 11-63.

²⁹⁸ Throughout the narrative the author’s commentary written in the margins (in the form of marginal footnotes) visually parallels the main narrative. In this way narrative and meta narrative are placed in parallel positions.
3.3 The Bukharan Teacher and the European Person

In a reversal of the position in the two “Syakh and Shūkh” narratives, the next chapter in the munāzirah over Iranian modernity shifts the blame from the apish Farangī Maʿāb to the regressive Shaykh. Munāzirah-i Mudarris-i Bukhārāʾī bā Yak Nafar Farangī dar Bārah-i Makātib-i Jadīdah (The Munāzirah of a Bukharan Teacher and a European Person about Modern Schools) was written by the literatus Fitrat of Bukhara299 in 1327/1909 and published in Istanbul by Hikmat publishers in 1328/1910.300 As a Caucasian munāzirah – as we also saw in the case of Musāhibah-i Islāmīyyah in the pre-constitutional period – this narrative’s main anxiety revolves around the dissolution of Islam as a result of the regressive clergy as well as the Russian encroachment over the formerly Perso-Islamic domain. This anxiety is reflected in the European character’s attitude best reflected in this comment: “In a few years you will witness Transoxianian Islam crushed under the hefty burden of infidel rule, and before you know it you will see your mosques turned into idolatrous temples and your children into Christians” (23). This anxiety was also reflected in numerous letters sent from the Caucasus to the Persian newspapers of this and earlier times.301 Accordingly, this munāzirah does not intimately engage with the developments taking place within Iran at the time. It does, however, employ some elemental topoi of the genre that testify to the reach of its dialogical orientation beyond the borders of Iran and into the Persianate world: the simultaneity of tradition and modernity and the temporal association of the principles of Europe’s futural progress with Islamic teachings and traditions through a blend of parallel narratives.

In the prologue (muqaddamah) the author succinctly puts this orientation to words: “the opposition between the new and the traditional … is nothing but an error and the corrupting

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299 Abdul Ra’uf Fitrat of Bukhara (1886-1938) was a writer, poet and author of several works. He is purportedly the “founder” of modern Persian literature in the Transoxiana region. See Khodayar, “Naqd-i Sākhtārī-i Munāzirah-i Fitrat-i Būkhārāʾī” [A structural analysis of Fitrat of Bukhara’s Munāzirah.

300 Ibrahim Khodayar, “Naqd-i Sākhtārī-i Munāzirah-i Fitrat-i Būkhārāʾī.” Naqd-i Adabī, 2:5 (Spring 1388/2009), 79. Khodayar believes that although the date printed on the cover page is 1327/1909, it appears that this date indicates the completion of the manuscript in Transoxianan Bukhara while the actual publication took place in Istanbul when Fitrat travelled there the following year.

301 The periodicals of the time are replete with letters from the Caucasian region, now under Russian control, sent to the editor, asking their Muslim brethren to help relieve them from the fangs of the infidel rulers. See, among many others, Majlīs. No. 144. 13 Jamādī al-Sānī/24 July 1907: “Haqīqat nīgār az ‘īshā ābbād” [An insightful person from Ishqabad] in which the author laments subjugation to a foreign power since the Russians “have separated our homeland” (vatan-i mā).
attitude of some traitors” (2). The author explains his objective to write this piece in these words: “I came across a tale [hikāyat] that includes the debate [munāzirah] between a Bukharan teacher on his way to do the pilgrimage with a European person in India about novel and traditional principles. Since the aforementioned tale [hikāyat] completely resolved this issue [of the opposition between the novel and the traditional], I decided to reproduce and publish it in the form of a treatise [risālah] but in the manner of a Bukharan dialogue [muhāvirah]” (2). The very first page of the narrative thus explicitly foregrounds the simultaneity of the traditional and the modern; it also implicitly reveals the engagement of competing discourses in (un)settling this debate. A narrative that purports to be a tale, a treatise, a dialogue, and a munāzirah simultaneously cannot fail but to reveal the intense, uneasy, and overlapping process of identity formation through a plurality of genres, discourses and their attendant ideologies.

The very opening exchange between the teacher and the European mirrors this anxiety-ridden process of contestation. In discussing (read: defining) the science of geography, no less than four genres are fielded: hikāyat (tale), qissah (fictional account), ‘ilm (science) and the subgenre statistics (īštātistīq). The teacher deems geography to be a fictional story while the European upholds it as a “useful science” (4). The dispute, however, is not merely over the issue of naming. It is, more importantly, an evaluative commentary over discursive ascendancy. Both participants seem to implicitly agree on the supremacy of science over fiction. This apparently easy consensus, however, is problematized when it is put in the context of the frame narrative, itself presented as a fictional account (recall the author’s comment in the prologue). The ambivalence persists also at the level of characterization. Throughout the narrative, the European comes across as a true Muslim and is more passionate about Islam. He refers to the religion as “the beloved Islam” (Islām-i azīz, 54). On the other hand, the teacher and the class he represents are presented as violators of Islamic principles (e.g. 11), notwithstanding the European person’s self identification in these words: “we [Europeans] are the enemy of your religion” (6). Similarly, the teacher is presented in a dual role: often as the representative of regressive clergy but sometimes as a critic of his class through the use of self parody (9, 10, 13).302 The mélange of inter-texts in the rest of the munāzirah echoes these overlapping and shifting identities.

302 Recall that a similar technique, the Bakhtinian “parodic stylization,” was employed in other munāzirahs, particularly in Mukālimah-i Sayyāh-i Irānī bā Shakh-i Hindī [The Conversation between an Iranian Traveller and an Indian Person].
The European person persistently invokes, cites, and upholds prophetic traditions and Quranic verses throughout the narrative. About the necessity of public education, for example, he quotes no less than three prophetic traditions, including the famous saying “Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave” (utlubul ‘ilm min al-mahdi ilal lahd). He also cites the Quranic verse “Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know?” all within the space of the same paragraph (6). In comparison, the teacher makes no reference to the Quran and only refers to two prophetic traditions (36, 44), both of which, it turns out, are misinterpretations of the saying which the European person proceeds to correct. The European is therefore a hybrid identity embodying both a Muslim and a Farangī. In fact, the first person pronoun “we,” used by the European person, alternatively refers to “we the Europeans” (mā farangān, 7) or implies “we reform-minded Muslims” (21). The latter implication occurs when the two put the implications of the famous maxim “amr bih ma’rūf va nahy az munkar” (ordering to virtues and forbidding from sin) to debate where the European corrects the teacher’s misconception about the true meaning of this verse. In his promotion of the sciences (‘ilm), similarly, the European refers to the “savages of America,” the “uncivilized Russians” and “a bunch of British islanders” who have gained mastery of the world at the expense of the “civilized of the Persianate world [Īrān zamān]” by espousing the sciences. Indeed, incidences of such utterances are so commonplace that the European’s language gradually turns into the voice of a devout Muslim reformer half way through the narrative, coinciding with the softening of the teacher’s regressive attitude. That is, however, until the Farangī proposes that the solution to all the ills plaguing Muslim lands is the establishment of modern schools.

Reminiscent of the clergy’s response to the minister in Malkum Khan’s Shaykh u Vazīr, the European’s proposal meets with renewed stiff resistance by the teacher. From this point forward, the teacher’s argument against the establishment of modern schools is premised on three bases: that modern schools will turn Muslim children into infidels (32, 37, 39), that modern education is religiously prohibited (harām, 42-3), and that it is a form of heresy (bid’at, 57). The European’s response to these objections is centred on a single premise: that by being fixated on the superficial yet constant elements of tradition – such as reducing the number of letters in the

303 Quran 39: 9. The intended portion of the verse reads: “hal yatassawī allāzīna ya’lamūn wa allāzīna lā ya’lamūn.”

304 See, for example, pages 27-30. Also see page 44 where the Farangī knows more about the traditional sources than the teacher.
alphabet (53-4) or sitting on a stool rather than on the floor (44) – the clergy have disrupted the simultaneity of Islamic principles with the principles of progress in Farangistān, failing to realize that the infidels have reached such heights of progress by following the teachings of Islam (63) and that, consequently, modern schools are not the creation of the infidels (maktab-i jadīd ikhtīrāt-i kuffār nīst, 52). This disruptive act has not only fragmented the essential unity of Islam with modern civilization, it has also led to the internal fragmentation of the religion into warring sects (56). As will be remembered, a similar accusation was laid against the clerical class in the other Caucasian munāzirah (Musāhibah-i Islāmīyyah). Notwithstanding the fact that the strong anti-clerical stance in the Caucasian (in comparison to the Iranian) munāzirah shows the influence of the soviet Marxist sensibility, the idea of fragmentation continues to be a fundamental feature of the munāzirah and is deployed through other narrative elements.

Besides the conflicting and conflicted identities of the participants noted above (the teacher takes turns agreeing with and challenging the Farangī, for instance), the text of the munāzirah itself is a split narrative composed of competing genres (recall the prologue) and an intertextual web of citations and allusions. The European alludes to Malkum’s coinage “ādamīyyat” (humanity), for example, to convey to the teacher that resigning worldly affairs to the will of saints (awliyā) is out of indolence, thus simultaneously condemning Muslim practice while upholding Islam through a concept that has its roots in Malkum’s freemasonry. He also simultaneously criticizes and defends the local monarch, Amir Muzaffar (30, 47, respectively). His language is split into foreign words alongside Quranic verses (e.g. 4, 40). The teacher, too, both considers the building of canons and guns religiously forbidden (harām) and supports the production of the same locally (56, 62, respectively). The text of the munāzirah itself is a compendium of parallel texts where anecdotes (46) and tales (48) intersect with the social text and with real events. It is a text that identifies itself as split texts. And even though the conclusion of the munāzirah gives an unprecedented sense of closure through the teacher’s submission to the Farangī (63), the final section (khātamah) immediately disrupts the false sense of a final resolution by directly addressing the king and the nation in two separate sections, begging each to lend a listening ear to the points aforementioned.

305 The author, Fitrat of Bukhara, was actively involved in the creation of the communist party in Uzbekistan and was eventually executed in 1938 by order of Stalin’s government. Ibrahim Khodayar, “Naqd-i Sākhtārī.” Naqd-i Adabī, 2:5 (Spring 1388/2009), 79.
3.4 Conversation with My Friend’s Skull

Yet another cross-national munāzirah shows similar tendencies. *Suhbat bā Sar-i Rafīqam va yā Nālah-i Gharībānah-i Nayyir* (Conversation with My Friend’s Skull or the Lament of Nayyir) was written by Mirza Ghulam Hosayn Nuri, pen named Nayyir, in Muharram 1327/February 1909 at Tbilisi in present day Georgia. Part autobiography, part elegiac commentary on the sad state of Iran and its migrant refugees in the Caucasus in the aftermath of destruction of the Majlis by the Shah, *Suhbat bā Sar-i Rafīqam* is not formally written in the form of a munāzirah. Neither do there exist polemical opponents who contest certain issues or concepts. What little conversation does take place is between the author, Ghulam Hosayn, and the decapitated head of his friend, Ghulam’ali Kajri. The author relays in the prologue (*muqaddamah*) the story of meeting this mysterious and ascetic friend in Iran. He then explains that after having spent a few months travelling together, the friend wishes the author to remove his (the friend’s) head upon his death and to carry it with him wherever he might go. The author’s image with his friend’s skull on a pedestal in front of him appears on the last page of the prologue. The “conversation” therefore is in fact a monologue directed towards the friend’s skull by the author.

The real dialogue, however, takes place between genres and ideologies. The narrative of this munāzirah is visibly, and not just rhetorically, composed of parallel texts. From start to finish, the story is told twice, as parallel texts, once in prose and again in verse. The simultaneity of poetry and prose as the alleged genres of tradition and modernity, respectively, not only rhetorically makes the munāzirah the narrative of coexistent genres, it also ideologically legitimizes the narrative for the widest possible readership for a single objective: to awaken all to the evils of despotism. As the author puts it, in verse: “These two hemistiches with utmost hope/I chant in a thousand modes” (20). The mixing of “a thousand modes” is of course not limited to prose and poetry. For rhetorical features from each genre is brought in to bear on the other. At the outset, the author promises to relay the story in “a facile and simple speech” (*kalām-i sahl u sādah*, 3) which, as perceived by numerous reform-minded intellectuals of the time, is a characteristic of modern prose, a feature for which poetry, denigrated for its use of stock

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306 The nascent parliament was shelled by the Cossack Brigade under the command of Colonel Vladimir Liakhov and by order of Muhammad ‘Ali Shah in June 1908.

307 This is my translation of the original: “īn du misra’ bīh ārizū-yi tamām/bā hizārān tarānah mīkhwānam.”
metaphors and convoluted language, is not known. The verse rendition of the story in this munāzirah, however, is noticeable for its deliberate use of simple language used in contemporary speech. In fact, the only use of traditional poetic images is the employment of “bād-i sabā” (the zephyr) as the messenger taking the lover’s message to the beloved (16). The beloved, however, is here the homeland (vatan). A similar strategy is used in the prose section. The heart-rending story of the homeland allegorically alludes to the story of Joseph and his brothers. In this way, a modern story is superimposed on a scriptural tale where the Shah and his despotic courtiers take the place of Joseph’s brothers while the homeland plays the role of the beautiful and victimized Joseph (62). Genres are therefore fielded not as straightforward opposites but as overlapping, intersecting, and contending hybrid entities.

Similar to the prosaic and verse renditions of the same story, competing ideologies and discourses are morphed in parallel narratives. Arabic, for example, is not only deployed as the venerated language of Islam through prophetic traditions (21), it also is, on the very same page, repudiated as a foreign language which is of no use to the homeland. In a textual move that marks the gradual beginnings of a nascent nationalism, Turkish is also fielded but immediately translated (42, 44). While still venerated, Islam now finds itself paralleled by nationalism. If the earlier munāzirahs (e.g. Musāhibah-i Islāmīyyah) had lamented the shrinking of the once vast Muslim empire, in an almost identical fashion, the author now mourns the shrinking of the Persian empire (17). Worse yet, mourning for the current state of the homeland should take precedence over mourning for Imam Husayn (41, 54-5). And while a preoccupation in some earlier munāzirahs is the union of Muslim states against the western invaders, now the union of the nation is foregrounded (53). A similar overlapping of parallel discourses takes place in discussing monarchy and the role of the monarch. As we have seen, earlier munāzirahs had emphatically exempted the shah of any responsibility for the current state of affairs. This

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308 A comprehensive referencing of all the available instances of perceiving, and encouraging, simplicity in language as a necessary feature of writing in modern times would entail a full scale study of its own. For an example of such perception and encouragement, see Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani’s “Fann-i guftan va nivishtan” [The craft of speech and writing], Akhtar, No. 11, 17 Rabi’ul Avval 1307/11 November 1889.

309 For further information on this classical poetic image, see Anne Marie Schimmel, A Two-Colored Brocade: The Imagery of Persian Poetry (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 201-216.

310 The third infallible Imam of Shiite Muslims, the martyrdom of Husayn Ibn ‘Ali at the battle of Karbala in the seventh century is annually commemorated in mourning processions held in the month of Muharram. Since this munāzirah was written in the same month, the comparison has unmistakable discursive implications.
munāzirah starts on a similar note, blaming the courtiers as the real culprits who commit such atrocities without the shah’s knowledge. The author goes further to describe Iranians as “shah-worshipping” (shāh parast) subjects who consider the king as God incarnate on earth (shāh rā khudā-yi rū-yi zamīn mūdānand, 15). It is important that such a comment is presented at the outset, for it will gradually, as the narrative unfolds, be sublimated into a discourse that first subtly questions the king for his lack of authority and knowledge (47-8), for gathering ignorant companions around himself (52), and finally, and explicitly, for his lack of compassion for his people (pidar-i kam muhabbat, 60). And if there were room for any ambiguity as to the author’s intention, he clarifies his meaning via a quasi-academic footnote embedded within the frame narrative as a parallel text: “These two lines refer to the unaffectionate father [figure] of our time” (60).

No such subtlety is discernible in the author’s treatment of the clergy. Viewing them as conspirators (fitnah-i mullā, 19) and the most important problem (20), they are seen as shams of religious scholars (mullā hā-yi ʿālim numā, 46). But most importantly, they are viewed as irreligious: mullā hā-yi khudā nashnās (45). The fact that the clerical class is thus presented as irreligious is significant when put in the context of the religiously inspired frame narrative. As an ascetic himself (darvīsh, 11), the author’s narrative repeatedly derives from dreamlike visions (16-17, 38, 50). As we have seen, the dream trope (here khāb) signifies the invisible world and the message received in sleep as divine message.311 Not surprisingly, in one of these visions, an angel visits the author, but the divine message relayed is, much like the ange’s message in Yak Kalimah, “the rule of law” (qānūn) accompanied by a definition of the term on the following page (38-9). The invocation of qānūn is in stark contrast with the summoning of qazā u qadar (divine decree and destiny), itself a pacifist ascetic notion (26, 28).312 The author upholds the worldly rule of law and denounces passive resorting to divine destiny captured in the popular saying inshā allāh (if God so wills). He nevertheless (and on the very same page) denounces the clergy for being too busy amassing wealth and power to follow “Quranic law” as they should

311 See note 174 above.

312 According to Gheravi, qazā refers to unchangeable divine decree in the laws of universe, while qadar signifies the limited extent to which humans can modify divine decree to determine their personal destiny. In popular imagination, the terms qazā u qadar, used jointly, refer to unchangeable circumstances. See Gheravi, Chand Guftār, chapter (guftār) 5.
Such pairing of conflicting yet overlapping discourses acts as the ideological parallel to the narrative coupling of prose and verse.

The coexistence of a myriad of other genres and texts further enriches and complicates this relationship, in which historical accounts, newspapers, hikāyats, reports of real events, and personal and official letters partake. Making reference to the constitutional movement (23), for instance, the author gives a brief account of the shelling of the Majlis (24) and later alludes to the execution of constitutionalists (62). Iranian migrants and their miserable conditions (29) in the Caucasus and elsewhere as menial workers are narrated both in the form of a report (55) and in the form of a hikāyat (56), coalescing the social and the narrative texts, the real and the fictional discourses. The text of a complaint (‘arīzah) sent to the Russian emperor in St Petersburg is invoked to relay the story of the author’s struggle to save his friend’s skull from being confiscated by the police (34). The text of a letter from the author’s sister, informing him of the death of his niece, leads to a verse elegy on the tyranny and oppression inflicting the homeland (58-9). This cross-generic narration is perhaps best explained by an instance from the text itself where the author states, in prose, that he intends to convey the story (hikāyat) of and the story in his dream vision to the skull, in verse (hikāyati ān khāb rā nazman bih tu mirasānam, 17). In an uncanny similarity to the narrator in Sadeq Hedayat’s The Blind Owl (1937), narrator in this munāzirah addresses the entire story to the skull, as the title suggests. To the literary critic this might be an opportune moment in the history of modern Iranian literature when the fictional supersedes the didactic. For the historian of ideas, however, this instance marks the evolving tension, fielded in the form of munāzirah, between discourses, of the real and the fictional, the national and the devotional. Shifting attitudes toward the Shah, Islam, and the nascent parliament itself find expression in yet another munāzirah involving the debate of hybrid identities and through competing genres.

The fissure in shifting views of Farangistān, the widening gap between the opponents and proponents of adoption of European principles during the turbulent years of the constitutional era led to increasing attempts at synthesizing mashrūtah (constitutionalism) and mashrū′ah (sharia based law) in the post-constitutional era. This attempt is evident to some degree in the munāzirahs of this period, beginning with Muqīm u Musāfīr (The Resident and the Traveller) written by a constitutionalist cleric and perhaps one of the most eloquent polemics on the commensurability of mashrūtah and mashrū′ah.
3.5 The Resident and the Traveller

Written in the turbulent years between the suppression of the first Majlis (Consultative Assembly) at the hands of Muhammad ‘Ali Shah in 1908 and the conquest of Tehran by constitutionalist forces in 1909 and the reestablishment of the second Majlis, Mukālimāh-i Hājjī-yi Muqīm va Musāfīr dar Bayān-i Haqīqat-i Ma’nā-yi Mashrūtah va Mutlaqah (The Conversation of the Resident Hajji and the Traveller on Expressing the True Meaning of Constitutional and Absolute Governance) is one of the seminal texts of the Constitutional period written by one of the most devoted constitutional activists of the time, Muhammad Mehdi Najafi Isfahani also known as Nurallah Najafi Isfahani (Thiqat al-Islam (1859-1927)).

Having undergone traditional seminary education, he managed to reach the status of mujtahid (religious juror) and joined the ranks of other prominent clerics espousing the constitutionalist cause. The fact that one of the most important texts of the constitutional period is written by a high ranking cleric not only challenges binaristic views of the Iranian adaptation of modernity as a clear-cut and easy opposition between the “traditional” and the “modern,” it also confirms the role of the munāzirah, the hybrid narrative of plural identities, as the genre of the constitutional movement.

The setting of this munāzirah includes a specific date (Muharram 1327/February 1909) and a specific place (in Sa’ādat Ābād village in Isfahan, 2). As such, setting is not fictionally thematized but acts instead as the threshold where narrative text intersects with social text. This is also reinforced through characterization. While the two character types Resident (muqīm) and Traveller (musāfīr), following the attributes “static” and “dynamic” associated with their nomenclature, might seem to represent social types against and in favour of a constitutional


314 Nurallah Isfahani had been involved with the reform movement from the very beginning, from joining the cause of the Tobacco Movement in 1891 to mobilizing a resistance corps to join the constitutionalist forces intending to advance on the capital in 1909. He was the founder of the Anjuman-i Isfahān (Isfahān Society) and was involved in establishing public schools, orphanages, hospitals, and a public reading room (qarā‘at khānah) to disseminate news and improve public knowledge. For more Information, see Musa Najafi, Andīshah-yi Siyāsī va Tārīkh-i Nihzat-i Hāj Āqā Nūrullah Najafī (Tehran: Tārīkh-i Mu’āṣir, 1378/1999).

315 Some of the most notable among these clerics included Grand Ayatullah Mirza Hasan Shirazi, Muhammad Taqi Najafi Isfahani (the author’s older brother), Muhammad Kazem Khorasani, Sayyid Jamal al-Din Isfahani, Mirza Sayyid Mohammad Tabataba’i, and ‘Abdullah Mazandarani. For more information on the clerical role in the constitutional movement, see Muhammad Hasan Rajabi, ‘Ulamā-yi Mujāhid (Tehran: Markaz-i Asnad-i Inqilab-i Islami, 1382/2003).
government, respectively, their views in fact encompass shifting ideologies, mirroring the multiplicity of discourses in the social text. A third character as well, the host Mirza Hidayat Allah (2), provides the link with the social text. We saw how in earlier munāẓirahs, if there was a third person, as in a narrator, he overlapped with the author and acted as the ideological double of the main character or the author (for example in Yak Kalimah, Musāhibah-I Islāmiyyah, and Shaykh u Shāh). Here however we witness the emergence of a third independent figure, the figure of the host, which though ideologically aligned with the Traveller, occupies the middle ground, the position of a witness to the debate between the opposing sides and acts as the linkage not only between the participants but also between the narrative and social texts. The issues discussed are, similarly, at issue in both texts: house of justice (18), the penal system (53), liberty (60), import/export, national income, national treasury (73), national industry, mining (79), national investment and banks (80), security of life and property (81). This multiplicity and superimposition of issues, characters, ideologies, and texts is deployed throughout the rest of the narrative.

The text of the munāẓirah starts like an oration (khutbah) recited by a priest at the beginning of a religious address (2). However, soon competing texts enter the narrative in the form of poetry, religious lectures, history (‘ilm-i tārīkh, 150), journalism, hikāyats, telegraphs, and even the texts of religious decrees (fatwa) produced by real life personalities. And as we have amply witnessed, these texts do not represent static and well defined discourses. They coexist, overlap, shift, and are employed for contradictory purposes. Poetry, for example, is cited simultaneously in its traditional role as an authoritative maxim and as tradition’s regressive support for despotism: “The Lord’s edict [is the same as] the Shah’s decree” (chih fārmān-I yāzdān chih fārmān-I shāh, 9). Similarly, while the public orators and journalists are blamed for creating disunity and unrest thus invoking the Shah’s wrath (87), their style of writing is nonetheless employed to educate the readership on issues of contention. As we have seen, a favourite technique used in the newspaper editorials was the employment of the dialogic question and answer form to introduce, define and analyze novel concepts and their relevance to the Iranian context.316 The same technique is utilized time and again in the text and for a similar purpose: “What is the meaning of absolute

316 Drawing on the indigenous and familiar genre the chīstān, riddle, numerous newspaper articles and editorials embarked on tackling the myriad of novel notions which bombarded the collective imagination at a disorienting rate. The chīstān proved to be the ideal form to deal with these questions. Every chīstān embeds within its text a question posing a dilemma which requires an answer.
[versus] constitutional rule and what is their difference?” (ma ‘nā-yi saltanat-i mutlaqah va mashrūtah čīst va farq-i ānhā chih, 6) and again, “what is the difference between mashrūtah [constitutional governance] and mustabiddah [despotic rule]?” (33). When the Traveller explains that constitutional government is an Islamic practice, the Resident demands an explanation in a tone identical to newspaper editorials: “how did constitutionalism start from the prophet and what is the reason? (10). A similar style is employed in defining parliamentary deputies (vukalā, 34) and in outlining the responsibilities of the parliament (134). A similar duality of intent characterizes the ideological approach to the other notions fielded in the text, such as attitudes toward the Shah, despotism, constitutionalism and Islam.

In general, every aspect of constitutionalism is equated with a Quranic or prophetic statement throughout the text with an emphasis on “consultation” (shūrā) being one of the main pillars of Islam and its prophet’s message. Statements such as these are present all through the narrative: “constitutionalism is the essence of Islam and Islam is the same as constitutionalism” (mashrūtah ‘āyn-i islām va islām hamān mashrūtah ast, 29); “constitutional law is in accordance with Islamic law” (qānūn-i mashrūtah mutābiq bā qānūn-i islām ast, 132). The Traveller even goes as far as claiming that the prophet’s oath of allegiance (bay’at) with his people was a “constitutional consensus” (bay’at-i mashrūtah, 12), that his grandson Husayn, the third Shiite Imam, was martyred for the constitutional cause (157), and that constitutionalism is the same as jihad (mashrūtīyyat…bi manzilah-i jahād…ast, 114, 117). These views far from settle the debate, however. The Resident challenges the Traveller by posing the difficult question of mashrū’ah (governance based on religious law): If constitutionalism is in accordance with Islamic law, why do the constitutionalists oppose the term mashrū’ah? The Traveller’s response says much about shifting attitudes and hybrid ideologies. Those who have erected this term, he opines, have taken it from Mu’āvīyyah and Amr-i ‘Ās (83).

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317 For more examples, see pages 5, 11, 20, 24, 131, 137.
318 In Islamic tradition, every new leader had to legitimize his governance through a ceremonious agreement with the heads of other tribes, with notable individuals, and with the people. Bay’at therefore is synonymous with public consent in Islamic tradition.
319 The term is a derivative (as is the word Sharia) of the root shar’ meaning Islamic canon. It was a coinage by anti-constitutionalist clerics, most notably Shaykh Fazlullah Nuri, meant to counter, but also rhyme, the term mashrūtah (conditional rule).
320 In the Shiite rendition of the battle of Siffin, these two personalities, the former being the governor of Syria and the latter his deputy, are said to have conspired to rob ‘Ali, the first Shiite Imam, of his divine right to the caliphate by deceptively upholding the Quran to judge between them. In the ensuing political intrigues engineered by Amr Ibn
“Islamic law” in place of the term “conditional law” is testimony to the sharp detour from one to another discourse. As if to justify this shift, the Traveller later explains – in response to the Resident’s challenge about how we can call it Islamic if European governments are constitutional – that after the Crusades, the British sent spies to find out what is the reason for Muslim victories despite their smaller numbers, and they found out the reason is to be found in Islamic law, i.e. constitutional government (150-53). They then took Islamic law and implemented it (az qānūn-i islām akhz kardah and, 155). The coexistence of a mélange of sources, histories, and ideologies foregrounds and necessitates the act of citation and annexation. Indeed, alternative equivalents for the word “cite” are fielded time and again in the narrative – tamassuk (26), munzim (27); iqṭibās (83), Akhz (154-5) – in a desperate plea to prove that what one says is in fact the original version of the story: “īn matālibī kih arz mīkunam tamām az maʾākhiz-i saḥīhah-i tārikhīyyah asiṭ” (what I am presenting is all based on accurate historical sources, 154).

This multiplicity of discourses warrants split subjects. The conflicted sentiment towards the king finds expression in the characters’ shifting attitudes for example. In several henceforth unprecedented statements (similar to Suhbat bā Sar-ī Rāfīqam) the Shah is on numerous occasions accused of mismanaging the country (15, 37), of being a despot (istibdā-ī sultan, 59), and, implicitly, of being licentious (ʿayāshī u khush guzarānī, 71-2). A little further down the page, and the Qajar dynasty is addressed directly (pādhāhān-ī Qājārīyyah, 72) and condemned for having no other objective than to satisfy their own lust and being prepared to sell the country for it (91). In a country where kingdom is equated with divine charisma, the daring statement “the king is not infallible” (pādshāh kih maʾsūm nīst, 96) is significant. It coincides, however, with the opposite sentiment where both the muqīm and the musāfir wonder whether the shah is aware of all the injustices in the country (50); similarly, the host first defends (38) and then criticizes the shah shortly after (39, 69). Later the host is referred to as a “constitutionalist” (mashrūṭah talab, 99-100). Finally, the grand ‘ulamāʾs telegraphs refer to “the oppressive governance” (dowlāt-i zālim, 122) of the Qajar dynasty (ahd-ī saltanat-ī Qājārīyyah, 124). On

al-ʿĀs, ʿAli was stripped of the caliphate and Muʿāvīyyah became the first ruler of the first Muslim dynasty, the Umayyads. In Shiite parlance, therefore, the two are synonymous with hypocrisy and deception.
the very next page, however, the people of Iran, including the ‘ulamā, are collectively referred to as “king worshipping slaves” (mā hamah bandagānīm khusrōw parast, 125). These shifting attitudes towards the monarchy are but a single instance of the shifting ideologies that affect the characters’ utterances and the discursive (dis)orientation of the narrative itself. The ambivalence and lack of consensus rages on concerning a number of other topics of contention. The figure of the despotic ruler, for example, includes not just the shah but also the mujtahid, or religious juror (7). Coupled with the clerical support for constitutional government (97) and their pronouncement that a Sharia-based monarchy (saltanat-i haqqah-i mashru’a, 130) is a conflict in terms, this definition disrupts the centuries’ old maxim “kingship and religion are twins” by unsettling the once complimentary side of the equation.321 A similar incertitude afflicts the characters. The muqīm starts off by blaming the country’s ruin on constitutionalists (tamām-i īn kharābīhā az mashrūtah va mashrūtah talabānast, 4) though he refuses to be branded as a supporter of despotism (bandah mustabid nīstam, 29), thus occupying an intermediary space between the allegedly opposite poles. Alternating between agreement and lack thereof is a necessary element of such transitional state and is narratively acted out through the Resident’s ongoing positional shifts in agreeing or disagreeing with the musāfir. Questioning the necessity of a consultative assembly on the grounds that the prophet of Islam did not convene one, the muqīm considers constitutionalism as the creation of Europeans (payghambar…chirā hīchvaqt majlis-i dār al-shūrā-yi kubrā nadāsht? Īn kārīst kīh farangīhā kardah-hand, 21), only to concede a few paragraphs later that “constitutionalism is the foundation of Islam” (mashrūtah uss-i asās-i islām ast, 24). Quranic verses are of course cited in a dual capacity, by the Traveller to prove that consultation is a foundational principle in Islam and by the Resident to show that divine and prophetic commands are non-negotiable (26), thus prying the act of interpretation open to multiple readings.

The Resident invokes yet other Quranic verses and prophetic traditions that equate the sultan with the shadow of God immediately after he has agreed with the Traveller’s argument about the

321 This Sasanian maxim from pre-Islamic Persia became one of the principles of governance in post-Islamic after the demise of the second and last caliphate, the ‘Abbasids, in the thirteenth century C.E. and the rise of kings as the “guardians” of the caliph but in reality as new rulers. Great thinkers such as al-Ghazali and statesmen such as Nizam al-Mulk wrote treatises promoting this ancient Persian idea of kingship. For more on this development in Islamic history, see Robert Irwin, The New Cambridge History of Islam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 233-240. See also Nizam al-Mulk’s Sīyāsāt Nāmah which became the standard text for princes for centuries.
necessity of armed resistance to despots (89). In another episode, the muqīm demands an answer to the question “why didn’t they [the constitutionalists] accept the term Sharia-based governance?” (chirā lazf-i mashrūʿah rā qabūl nakardand). The response provided by the musāfir, the embodiment of authorial attitude, echoes the position of reform-minded clerics: worldly affairs such as customs and taxes cannot be managed on the basis of religion (129). The relinquishing of the basis of their power, the Sharia, by constitutionalist clerics in statements such as these was more than selfless political activism. It was also a rhetorical act that allowed for the adaptation of foreign principles into indigenous ideological discourse. Performing this act narratively once again, the musāfir warns that if constitutionalism is not realized, “the nationality, ethnicity and empire of Shias will perish” (millīyyat u qowmīyyat u saltanat-i shiʿah az mīyān biravād, 92), implying, as he has elsewhere, the increasing and dangerous encroachment of foreign powers. And yet he proposes elsewhere that in realizing the constitutional dream “we also have to follow Europeans to become like them” (mā ham az ān rāh biravām tā ānkīh misl-i ānhā bishavām, 160-1). One such measure is the training of a professional army. This is challenged by the muqīm who believes that doing military exercises like the Farangišs constitutes an act of emulation when we can depend on saints and Imams (tavakkul) to help us. In an identical language to the narrator in Suhbat bā Sar-i Rafīqam, the Traveller-cleric denounces reliance on saints and supplication (tavakkul va duʿā) as the offspring of idleness and lack of zeal (bī ʿārī and bī hammaṭiyātī, 164-7).

Into this mix of hybrid identities and overlapping discourses are thrown fragments of the social text. The entry of social text into narrative text is launched early on when the muqīm invokes part of the national collective as anti-constitutional contenders: “I have heard some have said that constitutionalism is against the laws of Islam (shanīdah-am baʿzī guftah-and mashrūtah khalāf-i qānūn-i islām ast, 6) to which the musāfir responds by in turn invoking another segment of the national collective, the grand ʿulamā of Najaf, as supporters of the constitutional cause (31). The remaining members of the national body, the constitutionalists and the reactionaries, are brought in as narrative collectives prompted by the headings “the constitutionalist says” (mashrūtah mīɡūyad) and “the reactionary states” (mustabiddah gūyad) throughout the munāẓirah.323

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322 The idea of the king as the shadow of God on earth is also reportedly an ancient Persian maxim that was later reported as a hadith. See Robert Irwin, The New Cambridge History of Islam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 234.

323 For examples, see the following pages: 34-6, 40-42, 43-4, 51-4, 59, 62, 64, 66, 70-3, 74-6, 78-9, 80-1.
national conversation thus established is then further supplied with episodic fragments of real events to illustrate (as if to historicize since some of these episodes include precise dates) the ailments plaguing the country.\footnote{For examples of these episodes see the following pages: 37, 45, 55, 63, 67, 73, 125, 137.} These hikāyats are often introduced by Mirza Hidayat Allah, the host, or sometimes by the musāfir whose voices sometimes textually merge when there is no heading to physically separate their speech on the page (43, 58). Various texts also take the narrative field and contain, exclude or compete with each other. The actual text of the grand ‘ulamā’s telegraphs and letters in support of constitutionalism, for example, starts on page 101 and goes on to page 123, interrupting the narrative of the munāzirah and the flow of the conversation. Within this intertextual disruption, there is also the text of letters written to the supreme clergy requesting their position on current conditions in the form of question and answer (\textit{su’āl u javāb}, 105, 108). The text of a letter written by the grand clerics to the refugees in Tehran (\textit{mutahassinin-i Tihrān}, 111) finds its way into this web of intertexts as well,\footnote{This inclusion reflects real historical events as they were unfolding. For an account of the grand clerics’ open letter see Nazem al-Islam Kermani, \textit{Tarīkh-i Bīdārī} (Tehran: Bonyad-i Farhang-i Iran, 1357/1978), Vol. 5, 350.} as does the text of an open letter by clerical leaders of the constitutional movement “addressed to the national collective and to the statesmen” (\textit{khatāb bih umūm-i millat va ahl-i nizām}, 115). Yet other dated letters addressed to the military commanders of the constitutional forces, Samsam al-Saltanah and Zargham al-Saltanah (118-19), are added to the mix, as is a direct address to the reactionary orators supporting the Shah from their pulpits (123), drawing in ever more layers of the myriad of voices and discourses partaking in the national munāzirah. In the words of the muqīm, “unless matters are put to debate and refusals and refutations, [the solution] will not become evident” (\textit{tā matālib taht-i bahs u radd u īrād vāq’i nashavad ma’lūm namīgardad}, 99).

This is a debate, however, that is ongoing as the text of \textit{Muqīm va Musāfir} becomes yet another incomplete chapter in the narrative of Iranian modernity: “[Thus] is finished the first volume of the book” (173) is the statement that ends the narrative. There, of course, never followed another installment.\footnote{Like other editors of such treatises, Najafi takes the promise of future instalments literally and believes that “one can assume that this book must have another volume or volumes, or that perhaps the author had meant to compose other volumes.” Musa Najafi, \textit{Bunyād-i Falsafah-yi Siyāsī} (Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Daneshgahi, 1376/1997), 20.}
3.6 The *Munāzirah* in Constitutional Periodicals

The unfinished national dialogue was taken up in the parallel text of the newspapers which also drew on the dialogical orientation of the *munāzirah*. The granting of the assembly and the signing of the constitution by Muzaffar al-Din Shah in the fall of 1906 helped usher in a new era in Iranian politics and society, one that brought optimism but also challenges, new preoccupations, demands, threats and concerns. The dialogue was still capable of accommodating these shifting concerns. In the fall of 1906, five weeks after the signing of the first Iranian constitution by Muzaffar al-Din Shah, the very important national issue of a constitutional government was taken up by the journal *Tarbiyat* – in the form of the *munāzirah*. *Tarbiyat* (Education) published a serialized piece entitled “The question and answer article on the benefits of the national assembly” over four issues until 20 December 1906.327 Matters of immediate daily concern were put to the dialogue as well. The influential periodical *Sūr-i Isrāfil* (Seraph's Trumpet) is of note for its focus on practical matters. One of the staff members and a regular contributor to this periodical was 'Ali Akbar Dihkhuda (1879-1956), the renowned creator of the monumental glossary of the Persian language, the acclaimed *Lughat Nāmah* (Lexicon). Dihkhuda’s column appeared under the title "Charand u Parand" (fiddle-faddle) and usually discussed matters of daily concern in a humorous and sarcastic tone. Several of Dihkhuda's "Charand u Parand" columns appeared in dialogue form. An example is the column in which an imaginary dialogue takes place between the author and his friend about the role of journalism in this new era and the necessity of addressing the truth of injustices in the country.328 In another column, the issue of rampant corruption is fictively fielded in the form of a story involving a bribe sent to the newspaper's office over which the fictive participants Damdamī (moody), Khar Magas (gadfly), Yār Qulī, Āzād Khan (Mister Liberty) and Mullah Īnak 'Ali (Mullah Contemporary 'Ali) engage in sarcastic debate.329 It is important to note the hybrid identities of some of these characters. The character “moody” personifies and intermediary state that could take either form in the flick of an eye, while the character “gadfly” impersonates an in-between condition since the words “khar” (meaning donkey) and “magas” (meaning fly)

328 *Sūr-i Isrāfil*. No. 5, 27 June 1907.
329 *Sūr-i Isrāfil*. No. 15, 5 November 1907.
combine to create a merged identity. Mullah Īnak 'Ali is similarly a creation of the contemporaneity of the traditional figure “Mullah” and the contemporary condition “Īnak” (meaning present). This trope and the accompanying fictive element were not limited to Sūr-i Isrāfīl.

The periodical *Nadāy-i Vatan* (Call of Homeland), for example, published a similar piece in its very first issue on 27 December 1906 entitled "Muzākirāt-i Mullah Nasr al-Dīn bā Buhlūl" (The negotiations between Mullah Nasr al-Dīn and Buhlūl). Themelves configurations of the figure of the fool-philosopher in folk imagination, the two engage in a conversation about the state of contemporary Tehran in the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution. Within the bounds of this imaginary dialogue, concepts such as freedom and homeland are discussed. Here again, we can see the intersection of several elements within the hybrid space of the munāzirah: folk literature, contemporary issues, modern concepts, and reincarnated fictive-historical figures of tradition. To this is added the inconclusivity resulting from an ongoing debate, for these often continuous dialogues were often serialized over several issues and frequently abandoned unfinished. This piece continued to be posted until issue 47 of 20 July 1907, covering a span of seven months. The trend was continued in the same periodical with pieces such as "The question and answer between two Iranian youths in one of the coffeehouses of Paris" and “The conversation between Mirza Abdullah and Mirza Sadiq.” In the former dialogue, the characters, Faraydūn and Manūchihr, discuss topics ranging from fashion to political treaties, the union of nations, and the miserable conditions of Iran under the premiership of Amin al-Sultan Atābak-i A'zam, who is named in the article. This piece was serialized until issue 44 on 16 June

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330 This is not Dīkhudā’s coinage of course. His use of the already-existing term, however, suggests such implication when put in the context we have been witnessing.

331 Nasreddin was a Sufi believed to have lived and died under the Seljuq dynasty during the thirteenth century near Konya in present day Turkey. He was a popular philosopher known for short witty anecdotes in which he appears as a simultaneously clownish but wise figure. These stories are popularly cited for their humorous and didactic effect. For more information on this figure and his role in popular imagination, see Javadi, “Molla Nasreddin” in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, and Perry, “Cultural currents in the Turco-Persian world.” Wahib ibn ’Amr lived in Kufa, present day Iraq, in the eighth century C.E. He was a contemporary of the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid and provided counsel to no less a personality than the caliph himself. He was a scholar and a teacher, but when he became the object of the caliph’s wrath, he claimed insanity but continued to give counsel to people. For more information on his life, connection to the court and association with the sixth Shi’ite Imam, Ja'far ibn Sadiq, see Bearman, P. et al, ed. “Buhlūl al-Madjnūn al-Kūfī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

332 *Nadāy-i Vatan*. No. 41, 6 June 1907, 6-7.

333 *Nadāy-i Vatan*. No. 52, 2 August 1907, 8.
1907. In the latter piece, "The conversation between Mirza Abdullah and Mirza Sadiq," notions such as the backwardness of Iran, despotism, dependence on the West, law, court corruption, and foreign debt are put to debate, a debate however which is yet again inconclusive. The article appeared across issues 52 to 62 (22 September 1907), at which date it was abandoned. The piece entitled "Nonsensicals or the tale of the jinni bathhouse" (jafangīyāt yā hikāyat-i hammām-i jinnīyān) which appeared in the periodical Tamaddun (Civilization)334 was also serialized over a year until 13 May 1908. It is in fact a story (hikāyat) which is predominantly written in the dialogue form, a conversation between "Hasan Khan" and his father "Heydar Khan." The merging of the munāzirah with the hikāyat points to a direction this and similar pieces were increasingly taking: the mixing of dialogue and story, gravity and ironic jest, reality and fictivity.

The mixing of genres and of modes of representation is accompanied by a shift in characterization. So far we have seen that most characters in the pre-constitutional munāzirahs represented social types while the constitutional era texts gravitated increasingly towards individualized social types. This trend continues to evolve with the naming of characters in periodicals. The characters Faraydūn and Manūchihr as well as Mirza Abdullah and Mirza Sadiq in the pieces cited above continue to represent the class with which they are associated (the former representing a rising class of western educated individuals with purely Persian names and the latter signifying the traditional scribal class – Mīrzas – with predominantly Arabic names). However, besides the overlapping nature of the issues discussed and the attitudes towards them, they progressively represent an individualized national consciousness that is internally split and that continues to engage in dialogue for an ultimate but elusive consensus. In an article entitled "Panorama, the first view of the parliamentary scene in Iran" (pānurāmā, manzarah-i avval az manāzir-i pārlimān-i īrān)335 which appeared in the periodical Hikmat (Wisdom), for example, the author offers a review of the goings on in the nascent assembly using the headings "I said/asked" (guftam) and "they replied" (guftand) instead of characters. In this article, which appeared in two instalments in the same issue, the headings are replaced with "S" (standing for Su'āl, meaning question) and "J" (standing for Javāb, meaning answer). The employment of headings, social types, or individualized characters alternatively reveals the existence of a

334 Tamaddun. No. 42, 4 November 1907.
335 Hikmat. No. 878, 14 Zul Qa’dah 1324/17 January 1906.
collective consciousness that foregrounds the munāzirah over characterization. The debate between the polemical character-positions in the serialized piece "The dispute between the blind and the seeing" (mujādilah-i kūr u bīnā) in Subh-i Sadiq (Dawn) is testimony to this observation. In it, the blind and the seeing engage in a dialogue not about individual positions but about the polemical question whether poetry is a useful vehicle of expression for modern concepts and necessities, displaying a fascinating genre consciousness. This is a debate, however, that is yet again inconclusive, for the final instalment entitled “The continuation of the conversation between the blind and the seeing” (baqīyah-i guftīgū-yi kūr u bīnā) anticipates future instalments that never followed. These instances, a handful of representative examples among many, point to the hybridity of the social and textual spaces that informed Iranian modernity as a site of in-betweenness, a locus of the simultaneity.

These in-between spaces are populated by ideologies, individuals, personalities, styles, and genres. In an article which appeared under the title "Correspondence from Paris: In what respect will Iran become similar to France?" (maktūb az pārīs: īrān dar kujā bih farānsah mushābihat khwāhad nimūd) in the Calcutta edition of the journal Habl al-Matīn, the question of Iran’s progress in comparison to France’s is as much about a political issue as it is about genre rivalry. After setting the stage to attend to this question, a second, entirely different piece entitled "Trial" is included in the text explained in this way: "Here it is necessary to adjudicate between the current state of disorder in Iran with the present state of France (p. 4). From this point forward (pp. 5-8), the piece is presented as a formal trial in the form of question and answer. At once a letter, an article, and a dramatic trial, this piece stages the composite and heterogeneous space of competing genres rivalling for expression. It is indeed very common in the periodicals of this period to come across a piece that starts with questions and what follows is an expository essay attending to those questions. It is also common to see serialized pieces that embed a number of rhetorical approaches (such as question and answer, exposition, the fusion of prose and poetry, etc.) and are left unfinished after several instalments. One such piece, entitled “A nation

336 Subh-i Sādiq, Nos. 16 to 29, 11 Rabi’ al-Avval 1325/25 April 1907 to 27 Rabi’ al-Avval 1325/11 May 1907.
338 As an example, see, among several others, Habl al-Matīn (Calcutta edition). No. 33, 1 March 1908.
339 It would take pages of notes to document all of the pieces that ended in this way. A few examples, among many, are as follows: “The dispute between the blind and the seeing,” Subh-i Sādiq, No. 16, 25 April 1907; “A nation
without wealth, a body without soul,” starts with explaining the woes of a nation without wealth in its first instalment. In the second instalment, it turns into a dialogue between rafīq (friend) and faqīr (beggar), becomes an expository essay in the third instalment, and is then abandoned.  

This unmistakably dialogical orientation of the munāzirah renders it the narrative of national dialogue, far beyond, but also including, the mere text of a “news” paper or the text of a narrative story presented in dialogue form.

If the rhetorical coincidence of parallel texts were to leave any doubt as to the existence of a national dialogue, the element of direct address furnishes that purpose. A quite discernible shift in the style of writing in Habl al-Matīn, noticeable especially in the Tehran issue, is the addition of direct address. While articles and editorials in this journal are still predominantly in the question and answer form, the addition of direct address adds a diegetic, as opposed to a merely mimetic, dimension to the “story” being told, one that involves a teller and a listener. In article after article, the author follows the familiar routine of posing an issue as a question and attempting an answer but also starts to directly address the audience, at times in a dramatic fashion. An article may be addressed to the clerical establishment, as was one entitled “For the consideration of the learned scholars” (qābil-i mulāhhizah-i ‘ulamā-yi a’lām) in which the author makes a direct plea to the ‘ulamā: “Oh learned scholars, oh leaders of mankind, oh protectors of the brilliant Sharia.” Or it could be addressed to the government and the citizens as the involved parties in the fate of the country, such as an article entitled “Political” (ṣī’yāsī): “Oh government ministers, oh trustees of the crown. Oh gentle people of Iran, oh citizens of the beloved homeland.” The combination of questions and answers with direct address, present in almost every issue of the journal, makes the newspaper an unmistakable cite of national dialogue, evidenced also by the ferocity with which its copies were consumed. An article, for instance,
entitled “What is law” (qānūn chīst) and subtitled “Which is constitutional law” (qānūn-i asāsī kudām ast)\textsuperscript{344} is written mostly in the question and answer form and ends by addressing the members of the parliament directly, asking them to heed the points just discussed. Neither was this a unilateral address, for considerable space within the contents of the Tehran Habl al-Matīn was allocated for the participation of the readership. The inclusion in almost every single issue of a column titled "maktūbāt" (writings or correspondence) is testimony to this mutual participation. These correspondences arrived from readers, from the nascent societies (anjuman), and from the provinces. In between the years 1905 to 1908, the maktūbāt columns flood the contents of the periodical so much so that the “news” section (tilgirāfāt) is moved to the end of a given issue. Besides the maktūbāt from the provinces which populate the paper quite considerably from around the thirteenth year of its publication, a new column generically titled with phrases like "a speaker says" (gūyandahī gūyad), “a neutral writer writes,” or “they write from Kabul [or Kerman or Chabahar, etc.]” is added to the Calcutta version of the paper.

Parliamentary debates were also reported in both papers.

Regarding the reporting of parliamentary debates, mention must be made of the periodical Majlis (Parliament). Hailed as the first national newspaper,\textsuperscript{345} Majlis reflected all classes of society, including the illiterate, who saw their hopes and anxieties regarding the fledgling parliament reflected within its pages.\textsuperscript{346} The periodical indeed provided for a vibrant national dialogue in all the forms noted above: in the form of chīstāns,\textsuperscript{347} by means of maktūbāt, and through the publication of parliamentary debates. As the finally realized enactment of the national dialogue, these parliamentary debates were published on a daily basis in Majlis, sometimes taking up the contents of an entire issue\textsuperscript{348} or several successive issues\textsuperscript{349} and sometimes including authorial

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\textsuperscript{344} Habl al- Matīn (Tehran edition). No. 4, 22 April 1908, 5-6.


\textsuperscript{346} Muhammad Isma'il Rizvani, “Rūznāmah-yi Majlis.” Tārīkh-i Mu'āsir, 8 (1374/1995), 28.

\textsuperscript{347} A chīstān (literally “what is”) is a centuries old indigenous equivalent of a riddle. Its inherently dialogical structure includes a puzzle, posed in the form of a question, to which the addressee must provide an answer.

\textsuperscript{348} Majlis. No. 32. 7 Zi Hajjah 1324/23 January 1907.

\textsuperscript{349} Majlis. No. 45. 12 Muharram 1325/26 February 1907 to No. 47.
narration in the manner of a dramatic stage direction. But the publication of parliamentary debates did not thwart the national dialogue. As was the tradition in earlier and contemporary periodicals, Majlis continued to define, assess, and engage novel notions and various issues of national concern in the form of chīstāns: “What is a national bank?” (bānk-i millī chīst); “what are the advantages of a national bank?” (bānk-i millī rā fāyīdah chīst); “What is Iran to do?” (taklīf-i īrān chīst); “How is the state of the homeland?” (vatan dar hālast); “Reform of the military or national soldiery” (islāh-i nizām yā sārbāz-i millī); “On crimes and punishment of members of parliament” (dar jināyat va mujāzāt-i a'zā'-i majlis); “Incarceration in Iran and the shortcomings of jails” (zindānīyān-i īrān va navāqīs-i habs khānahā); “National attire” (albasah-i vatanī); “Revival of the homeland or consumption of local goods” (ihyā-i vatan yā istī'māl-i ama'ta'ah dākhilah); “Wealth and [foreign] loans” (sirvat u istiqrāz); census and statistics; national currency; individual rights and private property; “Article: political parties” (maqālāt: ahzāb-i sīyāsī) and, a few days before the bombardment of the parliament on 23 June 1908, “Article: the advantages of constitutionalism” (maqālāt: favāyīd-i mashrūtah).

350 See, for example, Majlis. No. 39. 22 Zi Hajjah 1324/6 February 1907 in which the speaker’s action is documented in narrative fashion: "dar ḵān muqāh jināb-i rā'īs az majlis harakat kardah raftand bih utāq-i dīgār" (at this time Mr. Speaker left the assembly and entered another room). Of these instances there are numerous examples throughout the reports on parliamentary debates.

351 Majlis. No. 8. 22 Sahwwal 1324/9 December 1906. A few days later, an article announced the establishment of the national bank (i'lān-i tašīs-i bank-i millī), congratulating the nation on the founding of a national institution that will curb the unbridled practice of foreign loans: Majlis. No. 10. 25 Shawwal 1324/12 December 1906.

352 Majlis. No. 104. 21 Rabi' al-Sani 1325/3 June 1907.


354 Majlis. No. 216. 20 Savval 1325/27 November 1907.

355 Majlis. No. 22. 17 Zi Qa'dah 1324/2 January 1907.


357 Majlis. No. 116. Second year, 6 Rabi' al-Sani 1326/7 May 1908.


359 Majlis. No. 98. Second year. 14 Rabi' al-Avval 1326/16 April 1908.

360 Majlis. No. 90. Second year. 5 Rabi' al-Avval 1326/7 April 1908.

361 Majlis. No. 95. Second year. 11 Rabi' al-Avvali 1326/13 April 1908.

362 Majlis. No. 91. Second year. 6 Rabi' al-Sani 1326/7 May 1908.

363 Majlis. No. 90. Second year. 18 Rabi' al-Avval/20 April 1908.

The response that these prompts generated attests to the vibrant national dialogue taking place within the pages, as it was in the house, of *Majlis*. A telegraph from a reader in Baku, present day Azerbaijan, for example, congratulated the parliamentarians on passing the bill for the establishment of a national bank, thereby curbing the monarch’s unrestrained practice of exacting foreign loans.\(^{365}\) Other correspondences (*maktubāt*) from individuals or *anjumans* engaged with *Majlis*, and with each other, on various issues and concerns. Members of parliament, for example, were continually addressed in correspondences sent to the newspaper, reminding them of their duties,\(^{366}\) inviting them to action rather than just talk,\(^{367}\) or asking the periodical for an explanation why correspondences disrespecting the deputies or other notables were published, addressing the deputies to rectify this matter.\(^{368}\) Correspondences from the Caucasus\(^{369}\) or from religious minorities such as Iranian Jews\(^{370}\) or Zoroastrians\(^{371}\) were also sent to the newspaper, addressing the deputies and setting forth their concerns. Using the pages of the periodical as the site of dialogue, the readership sometimes engaged in conversation with each other as well, engaging in debates about contentious issues such as “liberty and freedom” (*hurrīyat u ʿāzādī*), citing and cross referencing each other.\(^{372}\) It appears, in fact, that the sheer volume of these *maktubāt* prompted the periodical to ask, and remind, contributors to write and sign their names at the end of their correspondence.\(^{373}\) The grand ayatollahs and even the king himself were included and engaged in the dialogue. On 3 October 1907, for example, the text of a petition (*ʿarīzah*) by court trustees (*umanāʾi darbār*) to the Shah and the text of the Shah's

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365 Majlis. No. 14. 3 Zil Qa'dah 1324/18 December 1906 under the title “sūrat-i tilgirāf-i bādkūbah.”
367 “Maktūbīst kih yakī az hamvatanān az pārīs.” Majlis. No. 95. 8 Rabi' al-Sani 1325/21 April 1907.
369 “Maktūb az Bukhārā.” Majlis. No. 76. 8 Rabi' al-Awwal 1325/22 April 1907.
370 “*Arz-i hāl-i jamā'at-i yahūd bih khidmat-i vukalā'-yi muhtaram-i majlis-i shūrā'-yi millī ast.” Majlis. No. 89. 27 Rabi' al-Awwal 1325/11 May 1907.
372 “Maktūb az shīrūz dar pāsukh bih maktūb-i kirmānshāh dar numrah-i 45 bih imzā'-yi Muhammad ibn Muhammad.” Majlis. No. 68. 25 Safar 1325/9 April 1907 to number 69.
Another article, addressed directly to the Shah, warned of the necessity of the union of the state and the people. The Shah himself took the initiative to write to the Tabriz Society (anjuman-i tabrīz) reassuring them of his loyalty to the province and promising his support for that city regarding the frontier intrigues by the Ottomans. The text of the Shah’s telegraph and the Society’s response were both published in the same issue of the paper. The role of this national dialogue was perceived to be so significant that the author of the article entitled “Majlis” anticipated a great calamity – the bombardment of the assembly which took place less than two weeks after its publication – as the result of the corruption of those who have barred the interaction (murāvidah) between the Shah and his people.

The representatives of the religious class were equally engaged in this dialogue. On 3 June 1907, for example, the proceedings of the parliamentary debate included the text of the telegraphs from the grand ʿulamā in response to a question from the nation (umūm-i millat) under the heading “question” (suʿāl) which was read out in the assembly and subsequently published. Others would directly post their questions to the grand ʿulamā and receive a response on various issues. A question (suʿāl) asked of Ayatollah Mirza Husayn Haji Mirza Khalil about whether the parliament is in accordance with Islam received the response (javāb) that it in fact is because the consultative assembly is based on the Islamic principle of consultation (amr bih maʿrūf va nahy az munkar), reflecting the main argument of several munāzirahs noted above. A similar exchange between the nation (umūm-i millat) and the grand priests focused on a question (suʿāl) about whether a modern army is in accordance with Islam to which the answer (javāb) was again positive. Exchanges such as these, widespread in both the munāzirahs and the periodicals of this period, testify to the extent to which the narrative of the munāzirah formally overlapped with

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374 Majlis. No. 188. 24 Sha’ban 1325/3 October 1907.
376 Majlis. No. 29. Second year. 16 Zi Hajjah 1325/21 January 1908.
378 Majlis. No. 104. 21 Rabi’ al-Sani 1325/3 June 1907.
the narrative of the *tawzīḥul masāʾīl* (explication of [religious] matters).\footnote{The genre of *tawzīḥul masāʾīl* encompasses expository treatises (*risālah*) or books written in response to the myriad of questions regarding daily matters to which the Quran does not provide an explicit answer. These could range from matters as mundane as how to wash oneself correctly to more important issues regarding wedlock or engaging in trade. This is common practice only in Shia Islam, the followers of which believe that in the absence of the prophet and his line (the twelve infallible Imams), a living scholar, known as a *mujtahid*, can lead the community on religious matters. The practice continues to this day where followers of a certain *mujtahid* can find answers to their daily questions in a *tawzīḥul masāʾīl*, visit and ask the *mujtahid* in person, and even pose their questions on websites launched for this purpose.} However, whereas the relationship between the questioner and the answerer in the *tawzīḥul masāʾīl* is that of a follower and an authority who provides an indisputable proclamation (*fatwa*), in the *munāẓirah* the relationship between the two sides is that of the participants in a debate that requires mutual consent.

This is in fact reflected through the blending of parallel texts in the narrative of the *munāẓirah*. For side by side such exchanges with the religious authorities, we witness the coexistence of a national discourse that was gaining increasing momentum. Numerous correspondences from the provinces, for example, were sent to the paper in denouncing anti-constitutionalist activism of the prominent cleric Shaykh Fazlullah Nuri.\footnote{“Tīlīgāt-i vilāyāt dar bārah-i haji shaykh fazlullah.” *Majlis*. No. 15. Second year. 29 Zi Qa'dah 1325/4 January 1908.} Others made more explicit pronouncements in which national discourse was selected over Islamic discourse. Whereas previously numerous attempts had been made to equate constitutionalism with the principles of Islam, a similar claim was now made about pre-Islamic ancient Persia: “Iran’s monarchical tradition has been from time immemorial constitutional (meaning from the time of Kayūmars the first wise king of Iran)” (saltanat-i īrān az khaylī zamān qadīm mashrūtah būdah (ya’ni az zamān-i kayūmars avval pādshāh-i dānāy-i īrān)).\footnote{*Majlis*. No. 65. 19 Safar 1325/3 April 1907.} The foregrounding of a national discourse found increasing expression in quasi-historical “articles” (*maqālāt*) which purported to inform the readers of Persia’s pre-Islamic glories.\footnote{“Rāji’ bih irānīyān-i bāstān.” *Majlis*. No. 143. Second year. 7 Jamadi al-Avval 1326/8 June 1908.} Pursuant to these developments, voices began to advocate the use of Persian, the “national” language, over Arabic, the language of the Quran.\footnote{*Majlis*. No. 71. 30 Safar 1325/14 April 1907.} These were, however, far from decisive pronouncements. In a narrative that was shaped by the coexistence...
and rivalry of genres, styles, classes, ideologies and languages, an all-encompassing consensus was far from being realized.

386 Majlis showed its support of both the monarchy and the religious establishment by publishing, alternatively, the images of Muzaffar al-Din Shah and Muhammad 'Ali Shah as the purported founder and supporter of constitutionalism, respectively, in its second issue, 3 Zi Qa'dah 1325/9 December 1907 and later the images of Sayyid 'Abdullah Behbahani and Mirza Sayyid Tabataba'i in its eighteenth issue of the second year, 2 Zi Hajjah 1325/6 January 1908.

387 A letter of congratulation for the establishment of Russian Duma sent by the Iranian parliament to its Russian counterpart was published both in French and in Persian. Majlis. No. 87. 25 Rabi’ al-Awwal 1325/8 May 1907.
Chapter 4

4 The Post-Constitutional Munāzirah

4.1 Ramadan Soiree

This lack of consensus for a final verdict also appeared in discussions about healing the ailing national body. *Shab Nishīnī-yi Ramizān yā Suḥbat-i Sāng u Sabū* (Ramadan Soiree or the Conversation between the Stone and the Pot) was written in the second half of the year 1327/1909, most likely during the month of Ramadan/September, a few months after the deposition of Muhammad ‘Ali Shah Qajar (r. 8 January 1907 to 16 July 1909) at the hands of the victorious mujahidin. The author, Mirza Sulayman Khan Adīb al-Hukmā Hājīlū Jāvānshīr Qarabāghī, was private physician to Muhammad Vali Khan Sipahsalar, minister of war and three times prime minister during the years 1907 to 1912. Adīb al-Hukmā was the deputy of the Bureau of Military Health (*idārah-i sihiyyah-i nizām*) and partook in the campaign against the rebellious Turkmens alongside Sipahsalar. The subject of the book revolves around the question of widespread opium addiction in Iran for which the author purports to have a definitive cure presented in his earlier work, *Tafannunāt-i Salāsah* (The Ternary Amusements, 3). There is no connection between the subject of the book and its title besides the implicit metaphoric wisdom from classical literature that the conversation between a stone and a pot will inevitably lead to the breaking of the pot, implying the futility of such talk. Indeed the disconnection between title and subject is reflected throughout the narrative where texts take over the story, literally, so much so that incoherence becomes the only cohesive factor within the narrative. Viewed as the main feature of the munāzirah rather than a deficiency, however, incoherence becomes the only link to the title, for the real *Suḥbat* (conversation) takes place among genres, styles, and ideologies.

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388 There are many references within the narrative itself regarding the date of its composition. See page 16 for example. There are also references to the month of Ramadan, including the one in the title. For examples of other textual references, see pages 193-8.

389 Isna ‘Ashari, Mahin, ed. *Suḥbat-i Sāngu u Sabū*, page 8. The author self identifies as an official of the Bureau on the title page of the original published manuscript.
After some introductory notes about those who show determination as opposed to those who flounder in ridding themselves of opium addiction (2-16), the author praises the determination of the constitutional mujahidin in overthrowing the despotic government of Muhammad ‘Ali Shah (16-17) and calls for a similar fortitude for abandoning opium (18-20). This comparison becomes the basis of the entire story through a pre/post approach that ties the problem of opium addiction to the problem of despotism, a linkage, however, that is far from an easy binary as we will amply see. At any rate, using the now current rhetoric on liberty, the Reactionary Opiumists (irtijā ‘īyyūn afyūnīyyūn) form a political party of their own to oppose rehabilitation and plan to advance on and occupy the Prime Minister Park (pārk-i sadr-i a’zam) in a satirical reenactment of the constitutionalist occupation of Tehran (31). Through a comparison to the war with Turkmens (34), the narrative launches into the history of the civil strife in Ramadan 1325/October 1907 under a new heading, “The fleeing of opium-addicted troops after victory over Turkmens (farār-i qushūn-i tiryākīyān ba’d az fath u ghalabah bar turkamānān). Real personalities who were involved in the war are mentioned (36), such as Muhammad Vali Khan Sipahdār A’zam. This story is interrupted in the middle and turns into an ethnographic travelogue in which the author describes the geographic features of the Turkmens’ land and provides ethnographic information about its people (39). At this point the author interjects (44) and says that readers must be waiting for him to finish the siege of the park but that he must board the ship to Baku and from there to the Turkmen steppe and describe the war there which he duly does. In the middle of that history, the narrative switches to the history of the conquest of Tehran by the Constitutionalis (66-74).

With the prompt “again we started our irrelevant digression” (bāz banā-yi bī rābī gā’ī rā bih mīyān āvardīm), the author returns to the story of the Turkmens (74). A few pages later (83), we are taken back to the satirical story of the addicts’ campaign. In the middle of this story, the narrative switches to political commentary on the authorities’ negligence to unite Shia and Sunni to prevent such civil wars, provides a geographical sketch of the Turkmen Steppe accompanied by more ethnographic information (88-9), reports on the miserable state of the Turkmens and their land (92-3), and makes some archeological remarks about ancient remains in the land (98).

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390 Real-life figures involved on both sides of the constitutional movement are mentioned throughout the narrative. Some examples, among many, include mention of the reactionaries Amir Bahadur and Shaykh Fazlullah (16) or the constitutionalist mujtahid Akhund Mulla Kazim Khurasani (81).
Returning to the story of the addicts’ campaign leads to more ethnographic observations about the practice of opium smoking among the Turkmens (102-3) in which the author provides statistics (104). In the middle of this section, the author reports his conversation with one of the lieutenants (sar kardah) regarding the budget set aside for the troops and how it is taken back through the corruption of state accountants in the name of royal offering (taqdīmī-yi huzūr-i humāyūnī, 106-8). At this point, the author interjects and declares that “we should now explain the meaning of the telegraph conductor’s tip [mujīgānī] and then finish our discourse on the reactionary addicts” (108). This story is meant to illustrate the rampant corruption among governors and officials who use their post as telegraph conductors as a means of exacting favours or bribes from notables. In the middle of this story we are told the tale (hikāyat) of the price of newspapers and of almanacs, censorship and how local governors use forceful subscriptions as a means of income by taking money from merchants and guilds (111). The author then gives advice to the reactionary addicts to abandon their campaign because they do not stand a chance against the mujahidin and that it would be better to listen to his advice and quit opium (112-13). The amalgamation of texts of various genres and styles is so conspicuous in this munāzirah that it is difficult to identify a single frame narrative. If there is a central story, it is the story of a narrative in becoming. At this point, however, we are presented with a lengthy tale (hikāyat) that might impose some degree of continuity on the narrative.

“The Story of the Opium-Smoking Master and the Master-Killing Servant” (hikāyat-i āqā-yi taryāk kish va nukar-i āqā kush) relates the story of a master, Hājī Vazīr (Hajji Vizier), and his servant, Hamīd Āqā (Mister Hamid) locked into a battle over opium. Hamid plans to thwart his master’s decision to quit opium smoking and increase his dependence on it. The Hajji intends to consult the author’s work, The Ternary Amusements (tafannunāt-i salāsah) to help him quit opium, but Hamid does his best to take the Hajji’s mind off the book and to maintain his opium diet. He succeeds in his plans, marries the Hajji Vizier’s young wife, and takes over his assets after the Hajji’s death. This simple plot line is discernible only after excavating its fragments from among a myriad of parallel narratives that disrupt, overlap, or entirely overtake the story. After setting the stage for the initial developments in the story, for example, the author interjects to offer his diagnosis of the condition of the Hajji (122) and again his diagnosis of the weakness of the Hajji’s infant, Mūchūl Khan. That turns the narrative into social commentary on the erroneous practice, apparently current in the contemporary Tehran, of wrapping infants in a
rough plastic sheet and depriving them of movement (129). The narrative is once again interrupted to provide the history of opium in Iran and how a farm in Mahan, Kirman, named after a prominent Sufi (Shah Ni’matullah), became the first site of opium production in Iran (158-9). The introduction of two doctors into the Hajji’s presence by another character, Mirza ‘Arif, provides the prompt for another spiral digression in which the author makes critical social commentary on the practice of taʿāruf or ritual social etiquette (175-185), a commentary that leads to a hikāyat about the counterfeiting of seals as a result of such vanity (185) followed by an account of the author’s personal experience with the same issue (189) which in turn prompts a discussion of the ills of not keeping records and dates leading to the absence of an official census on the population (191-2). At this point the author apologizes for digressing, only to start digressing on the next page (192-3). The nature of the latter digression is peculiarly noteworthy in that the author clearly disapproves of unnecessary elongation of speech. In an attempt to demonstrate this unacceptable practice of fragmenting speech, the author compares his own digressions to gamblers during the nights of Ramadan. What follows is a description of such a gathering:

I imagine I am similar to those gamblers during Ramadan nights who appear after hours, converging from different directions, sitting in separate bands; one plays cards, another plays tirum; one band plays the backgammon like Iranians, another prefers the farangī or Ottoman style… another one is wandering in their midst, now mixing with this band now joining the other… finally the hubbub and disorder reaches such a level that one can neither call it a Jewish drinking bash nor a Muslim gathering and such a higgledy-piggledy ensues that no dog recognizes its owner and no servant finds his master…[they] drink a pint of alcohol at night and smoke opium and hashish while gambling, ending the night in the aforementioned style until it is time for eating before the fast, and that’s how they call it the holy month. (193-8)

Narrative digression in this way finds its parallel in the social text populated by incoherent identities who are neither this nor that, neither Muslim nor Jewish, neither Iranian nor Ottoman

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391 Since Ramadan is the month of fasting and is thus considered a spiritual time in Muslim tradition, the practice of gambling during Ramadan nights is associated with splitting one’s loyalties between God and forbidden earthly activities.

392 I was not able to find the meaning of this term.

393 This is a literal translation of the expression shrub al-yahūd which literally means “drinking of Jews” but also connotes, according to Dehkhoda Lexicon, drinking secretly or considering legitimate (Halal) treating another’s property as one’s own.
nor farangī, neither belonging to this band nor to that, drinking alcohol before fasting, a fragmentation best enacted by the narrative of the munāzirah.

Returning to the story at length (198), we are reminded of the remedy prescribed by two doctors, Haji Hakīm Bāshī and Khan Hakīm Bāshī (representatives of religious and temporal leaders of the country, respectively), brought in as part of Hamid’s plan to deny his master access to the author of the Ternary Amusements. The author interrupts the story to give an analysis of the doctors’ diagnosis under the heading “An analysis of the reasoning of the chief physician” (hallājī-yi istidlāl-i hakīm bāshī). His wrong diagnosis is compared to the wrong moves of the despotic government followed by the analysis of the second doctor’s diagnosis (207) whose wrong diagnosis is compared to the wrong diagnosis of the mujtahids (religious leaders). That leads to the story of Fath ‘Ali Shah’s (r. 1797-1834) intention not to fast during Ramadan by asking a mujtahid to justify his intent. The text of the mujtahid’s fatwa is presented, which text is also followed by the text of an istifā’ (lit. asking for a fatwa) from another leading mujtahid whose response under the heading “javāb” (response) refutes the earlier mujtahid’s statement (207-9). It is important to note that the indexing of the texts of these fatwas within the narrative of the larger issue is performed in a similar style as the listing of letters, telegraphs, istifsā’ūs, petitions, and correspondences that, as we have seen, was a common practice in the periodicals of the time. At once story, history, journalism, tawzīḥ al-masā’il (Exposition of [religious] Matters, see note 308), and polemic, the narrative enacts the munāzirah of genres, styles, and approaches. To this is added the text of the remedies prescribed by the two physicians (210-13) in which the prescription of pomegranate juice and lemonade exemplifies, respectively, the traditional and modern education of each doctor. The author then presents us with technical definitions of health (sihhat), illness (maraz) and cure (muʿālijah, 256-9), each under a separate heading. A shift is then effected through which medical discourse merges with political speech: illness is compared to an enemy attacking the nation and the sultan is perceived as disposition (tabīʿat) which/who will defend the body nation against its advances (259-60). Echoing the style of the chīstān, the heading “Now let us see what is the duty of the physician” (hālā bībīnīm

The term Hakīm can literally be translated as “sage,” “philosopher,” or “doctor.” In the last sense, it carries the sense of a traditional doctor. The term Bāshī translates as “chief” or “master.” The clever blending of these terms with the epithets “Hājī” (one who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca) and “Khān” (a tribal chief or local governor) makes each doctor the representative of a class, the religious class and the feudalist (that is, despotic) class, respectively.
concludes this section by speculating that the doctor/sultan is the servant of the body national (tabīb khādim-i tabīʿat ast, 262). Through this narrative maneuver, the centuries old transcendental maxim of the king as a divinely appointed overlord is sublimated into a corporeal discourse that views the sultan as the servant of the national body.

The rest of the story relates the conversation between Mirza ‘Arif and Hamid Āqā in the form of munāzirah proper in which a similar strategy is employed to equate expedient political discourse with Islamic policy. Mirza ‘Arif, whose voice at this point merges with the author’s, presents his theory of “the necessity of the present” (muqtazīyyāt-i vaqr, 273). A lengthy speech follows (275-283) in which the Mirza-author explains how God, the prophet, and the ‘ulamā utilized the principle of “the necessity of the present” throughout the ages in order to overcome novel challenges facing Muslim community and to unite Muslims, concluding “thus in reality the necessity of the present is one of the exemplars of the rules of Sharia and of God’s commandments” (pas dar haqīqat iqtizā-yi hāl yakā az navāsikh-i ahkām-i sharīyyah va avāmir-i illāhiyyah mībāshad, 283). The issue of king as servant of nation is taken up again through two hikāyats demonstrating that designation as such does not constitute essential nature, meaning the designation “king” does not make the bearer a ruler by nature (285-290). Following the style of universal histories, a brief dynastic history of Iran is then presented (294-299), covering major dynasties to the rise of the Qajars, in which promotion of science and scientific discourse are said to have been suppressed by factional strife. At this point the author interjects to remind us that we need to continue the discussion of the body national’s ailments and its recovery and the responsibilities and requirements of the doctor. Merging with the voice of the author again, Mirza ‘Arif instead presents us with definitions of homeland (mamlīkat), the health of homeland, and types of governance (299-303). Even though the author had earlier promised to conclude the story, Hamid and Mirza ‘Arif reemerge at this point to continue the debate about the meaning of constitutionalism and despotism (303-4). The dream of a strong Iran can only be realized, says Mirza ‘Arif-author, by resorting to action and wisdom, “not based on the hollow talk of orators … nor on the periodicals of inexperienced, Europeanized youth” (na biharf-i khālī az ‘amal-i nattāqān … va na bā jarāyid-i javānān-i bī tajārub-i farangī ma’ābān, 308), suggesting that

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395 For more information on the currency of universal and dynastic histories in the Safavid and Qajar times, see chapters 5 and 6 in Charles Melville, ed. Persian Historiography (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), especially pages 224 and 280.
consensus can be reached at the in-between space separating the traditional orators (nattāqān) and the modern Europeanized journalists (jarāyid). The section under the heading “warning” (ikhtar), which itself echoes journalistic style, finally returns to the story of the addicts and of the social issue of opium addiction and advises the addicts to consult the author for rehabilitation, a section which is itself written at times in the style of a newspaper advertisement or announcement (328-35).

This dizzying multitude of texts, styles, and discourses coincides with parenthetical digressions, footnoted afterthoughts, punctuated discourses, interrupted speeches, and apostrophized identities. The incorporation of headings, footnotes, genres, images, and styles form the compositional aspect of this equation. Even a main formal attribute of the munāzirah is affected in that the dialogical sections of the narrative are not formally presented under visibly separate headings but are embedded within the prose. The embeddedness of styles, languages and forms is evident in other aspects of the narrative. Colloquialism, for example, is mixed in with high literary, at times verbose, style throughout the narrative. An example will demonstrate the degree of such embeddedness (colloquial expressions have been italicized in an attempt to reproduce the linguistic effect in the original Persian): “Altogether Mister Hamid is very cloudy and tense and topsy-turvy so that it cannot be captured by explanation and expression; as the popular saying [goes] a simple flick and he will bleed. Howbeit Mirza ‘Arif realized the result is reversed and his toil is wasted” (rū-yi hamraftah hamīd āqā khaylī girīfah u munqabiz u dar ham u bar ham ast kih bivāṣf u bayān namīāyad biqawl-i ma ‘rūf talangurash bizanī khūnash

396 Orators, public speakers often with an intermediate education in traditional Islamic scholarship, played an important role in disseminating news, criticizing or alternatively supporting the monarchy, and invoking the public’s sentiments. For one such example, see the speech given by the orator Aqa Sayyid Jamal al-Din at the King’s Mosque (Masjid-i Shah) in December 1905 shortly before the granting of the constitution by Muzaffar al-Din Shah. The power of such public speeches were so much that the ‘Ain al-Dawlah, the governor of Tehran, conspired with another clergy to disperse the orator and the audience by the force of clubs and daggers and at the instigation of another clergy, the reactionary Imam Jum’a. Edward Browne, Persian Revolution (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1966), 13-14.

397 Several such footnotes are dispersed throughout the narrative, in the form of definitions (27, 35, 58, 94), asides (28), or authorial interjections (234, 265).

398 As we have seen, the narrative is relayed through a multiplicity of genres: historiographical, ethnographic, geographical, journalistic, medical, scientific, fictional.

399 The Addicts’ Society’s banner (25); drinkers on Ramadan night (194); the two doctors visit Hajji Vizier (201); Hajji’s young wife, Khurshid Khānūm (Madam Sun), eyes Hamid by Hajji’s death bed (218); Khurshid turns farangi (246).

400 For a few examples among many, see pages 29, 32, 120-1, 167
mīchikad. Bārī mīrzā ‘ārif ham fahmīd keh natījah bar ‘aks shud va zahimātash bihadar raft, 167). The mixing of styles is paralleled by the blending of genres. In the style current in the periodicals of the time, for instance, the addicts’ correspondence (maktūb) to the author is presented under a standalone heading (8). This, combined with the author’s reference to his own writing as “fiddle-faddle” (charand u parand, 291) which was also the title of the columns written by his contemporary ‘Ali Akbar Dihkhoda,401 points to the coexistence of journalistic genre as a rival discourse. Poetry is also thrown into the mix in a similar fashion when it is cited, for instance, both by the addicts in praise of opium (15) and by the author to satirize their disposition (16). Elsewhere it is cited in support of asceticism (‘irfān, 159) and veneration of royalty (284), both of which discourses the author blames as tradition’s falsehoods hindering the country’s progress. Islamic discourse, of course, features in this discursive amalgam, accompanied by the attendant languages, Arabic and Persian. The author’s intent to inspire effort on the part of the addicts is presented both in Persian (dar numīdī basī umīd ast) and then in Arabic (himam arrijāl taqta’ al-jībāl), to which the addicts’ response draws on the prophetic maxim “People preside over their own property and selves” (al-nās muslitūn ‘alā anwālihum wa anfusihum, 19). Such legalistic discourse leads the addicts to invoke Quran 41:31402 to form their own political party, Reactionary Opiumists (irtijā‘īyyun afyūnīyyūn), and to publish their manifesto which is, incidentally, presented in journalistic style (21), complete with an official agenda (nizām nāmah) and a constitution (qānūn-i asāsī, 22) as well as a banner (25). Its Swiftian satire aside, such incomplete, intertwined, and overlapping appropriations of discourses attests to the intense competition over authoritative meaning making. Hamid’s offer of the author’s other book The Ternary Amusements (tafannūn-i salāsah) – “tea and hookah and opium” (118) – to the Hajji (115) is precisely premised on the search for an authoritative account. The author’s book is considered an authority on the topic on account of its attention to “religious matters and economic [aspects] and scientific reasons … and religious theorems … and statistical experiences” (116), a narrative that includes the very discourses in contention in the social text. Given that Hamid’s real intent is to sustain his master’s dependence on opium, his

401 See the discussion of the periodical Sūr-i Isrāfīl in Chapter Three.
402 “We are your protectors in this life and in the Hereafter: therein shall ye have all that your souls shall desire; therein shall ye have all that ye ask for!” The Reactionary Opiumists appropriate this verse in justification of unbridled liberty, a subject of intense debate in the Constitutional era.
offer of the very text which will undo his plans speaks to the uncertainty that characterizes conflicted hybrid identities.

The character Hajī Vazīr, the master of the house who does not follow farangī customs (137), is the only static character representing the ailing body-national. The Hajī’s illness and the intrigues over his recovery are repeatedly compared to the strife between constitutionalism (mashrūtāt) and despotism (mustabiddah, 245, 253). In fact, the nation is explicitly compared to a body (mamlikat rā bimanzilah-i badan-i insānī nigāshtah, 254) that needs urgent attention. It is on this body that all manners of discourses and diagnoses converge. Unlike this static body, the rest of the cast are hybrid identities that exhibit discursive pluralities coexistent with the type of textual polyphony noted above. The servant Hamid Āqā, for example, initially uses the iconoclastic tendencies of the author of the Ternary Amusements as justification for preventing his master from using the book (i’tiqād-i durustī nadārad, 144). He also consults the Quran using the traditional practice of augury (istikhārāh)⁴⁰³ to find out whether the other two doctors, which he himself has preselected following a secret session with Mirza ‘Arif, should be called in (147). Hamid again consults the poetry of Hafiz for divination (fāl) to ascertain whether his love for his master’s young wife will be realized to which the maestro Hafiz shows a green light, encouraging him to persist in his plans (152). Casting the word of god and the master of classical poetry as accomplices in Hamid’s regressive plans speaks volumes about the extent to which the rival discourses rational action (Hamid’s plan) and devotional reliance (his consulting texts of tradition) inform his split subject of Iranian modernity. This discursive rivalry is both ideologically deployed and textually enacted through embedding a line of poetry within the frame prose. At the end of the story, however, Hamid turns into European emulator (farangī ma’āb) who asks Mirza ‘Aif to rearticulate his sermons “according to European taste” (bih saliqah-i farangī bigū ’īd, 265-6), protesting the Mirza’s use of Arabic words (305, 307). His future lover, who earlier embodied the dedication and chastity of a traditional wife, Khānūm Āqā, also starts to exhibit signs of Europeanization by fashioning a silk kerchief as hijab “in a European manner” (bitawr-i farangī ma’ābī, 243).

⁴⁰³ According to Dehkhoda lexicon, the literal meaning of the term istikhārāh is “to seek the best.” In Muslim tradition, it means to leave the decision to God when one is unsure of how to proceed in a given situation. There are several types of istikhārāh, including consulting the Quran or bidding rosary beads. In Iran, consulting the ghazals of the classical poet Hafiz. For definition, common practices and Muslim scholars’ views on the istikhārāh, see Abulfazl Tarīgheh Dar, Kand u Kāvī dar Istikhārāh va Tafā ’ul (Qom: Bustan-i Kitab, 1386/2007).
Mirza ‘Arif follows a similar trajectory. Initially described as an ideologue of asceticism (‘irfān maslak) and an alchemist (kīmīyā gar), articulate in the degenerate discourses of tradition (147), he becomes an advocate of constitutionalism on the very next page (148) when he uses poetic rhyme to promote parliamentary consultation over Quranic consultation (īn muqa’ taklīf istishārah ast nah istikhārah). Almost immediately after, he endorses the concept of tavvakul (trust in God) only to admire European mastery of the science of chemistry which enables them to extract the morphine out of opium (149-151). The alchemist-turned-chemist presents us with “scientific propositions” (matālib-i ‘ilmī) in which it is asserted that Suhrāb’s proverbial potion (nūsh dārū-yi suhrāb)404 was in fact opium from which European doctors (hukamā-yi farang) have been able to take several extracts (161-2). The sense of belatedness associated with Suhrāb’s potion parallels the endlessly delayed application of the remedy presented in the author’s other book on the afflicted body-national. It also signifies the deferred germination of an identity present in the very name Mirza ‘Arif. Simultaneously a prince, a traditional man of letters (Mīrzā) and an ascetic (‘Ārif), the character is also Hamid’s accomplice, merges with author’s voice on several issues, and is compared to the invisible angle (hātaf-i ghaybī, 223), the bearer of divine message. In fact, his speech which is planned, through consultation with Hamid, to encourage the Haji Vizier to continue using opium, alternates between promoting and denouncing the use of opium as amusement, a fact that is mirrored by Hamid’s alternating feelings of anxiety and serenity (incidentally, Hamid’s happiness is elsewhere compared to the happiness of the despotic government’s imaginary conquest of Tabriz, 164, while his anxiety is compared to the news of the conquest of Tehran by the Constitutionalists, 167). Overlaid with scientific, traditional, national, and medical discourses, Mirza ‘Arif’s speech persistently defers conclusiveness.

The two doctors brought in to visit the body-national, Hājī Hakīm Bāshī and Khān Hakīm Bāshī, whose selection is based on istikhārah (169) but who are in fact are partners in crime (172), represent the discourses of traditional and modern medicine which, while coexisting at the social

404 In the Persian national epic, the Shāhnāmah (Book of Kings) of Firdawsi (940-1020), the legendary hero, Rustam, engages in a battle with another heroic figure, Suhrāb, who turns out to be his own son. Not knowing their blood relation, Rustam stabs Suhrab in the heart, only to find out from his necklace that Suhrab is his son. Suhrab’s mother, Tahminah, arrives too late on the battlefield to save their son.
and institutional levels, were engaged in a constant contestation for legitimacy. Portrayed as a hybrid entity wearing both a turban and European boots, the Europeanized (mustafrang) Khān Hakīm Bāshi’s knowledge is said to be limited to two texts: the Zakhīrah-i Khwārazm Shāhī (Treasure of Khwārazm Shāh) of Jurjānī and the Hifż-i Shafāʾīyyah (Preservation of Recovery) of Schlimmer (205-6). Embodying traditional and modern medical discourses, the two doctors are in fact corporeal fragments of a single consciousness engaged in an internal munāzirah. It is along these lines that Mirza ‘Arif, himself a hybrid entity, proclaims that the problem with Iranians is that “they neither like the traditional ways nor have proper knowledge of or accept the novel circumstances of the moderns; they have both of these in an incomplete way; therefore they are lagging this and driven from that” (az īnjā māndah u az ānjā rāndah). This, opines the Mirza-author, is their purgatory (barzakh, 266). It is these same hybrid entities that in the heat of the war with the Turkmens flee the battlefield. When entreated by the author to return to battle, their refusal exhibits an identitarian crisis rather than lack of zeal: “No matter how we exhorted the Turkish and Persian [soldiers] whom we came across to return, they all became Arabs” (har chih bih turk u fārs bar khurdah taklīf-i murāji’at kardīm kullan ‘arab shudand, 59). Suggesting a lack of comprehension (Arabs won’t understand Turkish or Persian), these defecting soldiers represent ethnic, national, religious, and discursive hybrids in an undecided battle over identity.

National discourse now enters the discursive polemics of the munāzirah and begins to occupy an ever more conspicuous space alongside the discourses of modernity, Europeanization, religious identity and tradition, complementing, contradicting, deviating, and overlapping the others. Hailed as the “Paris of its time” (Rayy kih dar ān zamān bimanzilah-i pārīs-i īn ahd būd), the city of Rayy (an important ancient city lying on the outskirts of the contemporary capital) is said to have been turned into ruins by the Mongols because of religious factionalism (294), thereby implicitly blaming religious fanaticism for national downfall. A similar strategy is employed when the author criticizes the religious superstition of the soldiers in the Turkmen war. Their

405 For the institutional, educational and political implications of the blend of traditional and modern medicine, see Hormoz Ebrahimnejad, Medicine, Public Health, and the Qajar State (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 105-8.
406 Written in the twelfth century C.E by Isma’il Jurjānī’s Zakhīrah-i Khwārazm Shāhī was the largest medical text written to date and was dedicated to the reigning monarch of the Khwārazm dynasty, Qutbuddin Khwārazm Shāh.
407 Johann Luis Schlimmer became a professor of medicine at the Dār al-Funūn in 1860. He quickly realized that for effective communication with his Persian students and colleagues, he will have to create a synthesis between traditional Persian and modern medical terms. See Hormoz Ebrahimnejad, Medicine, Public Health, and the Qajar State (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 106.
cries of “‘Ali, ‘Ali” (64) for divine help rather than firing their rifles is viewed as one of the reasons for the national disgrace at that battle. In comparison, the national victory of the constitutionalist mujahidin owed to their use of “god-given national power” (qudrat-i khudā dādah-i millī, 67). Meanwhile the spiritual leaders of the nation (ru’sā-yi millat) are said to be unjustly blamed when the real problem in Iran has been lack of unity between the legislative and executive levels of the government (271), only to decry the restriction of public education to religious sciences on the next page (‘ulūm rā faqat ‘ulūmi dinī mīdānistand, 272). The author’s invention of novel methods for the rehabilitation of opium addicts is said to have been inspired by the prevalence of traditional medicine’s adherence to the outdated theory of the four humours (akhlāt), the negligence of the political leaders, and the laxity of the spiritual leaders who did not religiously implement the doctrine of amr bih ma’rūf (11, 16, 105). This confused incentive to heal the national body draws from a mixed attitude that gives equal significance to “consultation with God and consultation with physicians” (istikhārah-i khudā va istishārah-i atibbā’, 156). The ranks of the addicts, who are synonymous with the despots, includes snake catchers (mār gīrān), fortunetellers (fāl binān), exorcists (jinn gīrān), magicians (jādā gārān), alchemists (kīmiyā gārān), and dervishes (darvīshān, 22), collectively known as impostors (shayyādān) who use ritual religious recitals (zikr) as their tool (30). They are offshoots of a tradition of mysticism which has promoted a culture of superstition and pacifism (155, 158-9). In fact, the spread of opium and the invention of the rituals of the amusements (ikhtīrāt-i a’rāf-i tafannunāt) is attributed to the dervishes (165). It is precisely the mystic figure of Mirza ‘Arif (lit. Prince Mystic), however, whose voice continuously merges with the author’s in condemning both the traditionalists and the European emulators (mustafrang) and who is not only a social reformer but also an accomplice in Hamid’s evil plans. In asking the Mirza for help, for example, Hamid asks the former to justify his “rational right” to his master’s property using religious law (kārī bukunīd kih haqq-i ‘aqī-ī in zī haq ta’īn-i shar‘ī paydā kunad, 228), a feat that the Mirza accomplishes citing a line of poetry in support (232). This utter confusion, the dizzying shift between ideologies, discourses, attitudes, and texts finds its way into the discussion of the deposed monarch.

408 These were forms of public amusement during the Qajar period and as such constituents of popular imagination. For a detailed discussion of such public forms of amusement, see Shireen Mahdavi, “Amusements in Qajar Iran,” Iranian Studies, 40:4 (2007), 483-499.
Muhammad ‘Ali Shah, the anti-constitutionalist mastermind behind the bombardment of the first Majlis, is alternatively described as “despotic and unprincipled” (shāh-i khud ra’y u sust unsur, 72) but later, echoing the ancient Persian maxim of kingdom as divine agency, excused as the innocent victim of his courtiers’ plans (292). The advent of the telegraph in Iran as an effective tool for reaching out to the court is also compared to Anushirvan’s chain of justice\(^4\) (zanjīrī ‘adālatī anūshīrvān, 109), suggesting an inherent goodness in the Persian monarchical tradition and its commensurability with modern civilization. Combined with the clerical class, the duo had for centuries been the joint temporal-spiritual leaders of a country where legal deeds had to be endorsed both by the clergy’s writ and the king’s decree (qabalah-i shar’ī va farmān-i dawlatī, 97). Into this established oligarchy has stepped the discourses of constitutionalism, nationalism, modernity, individualism, empiricism and a host of associated ideologies, an ongoing and uneasy competition of coexisting voices that could best find expression through the munāzirah. This open-ended, unceasing, and ambivalent dialogue makes the munāzirah an ongoing and incomplete narrative with a ceaseless promise of future instalments. Here as elsewhere, too, we are given the promise of future books (70, 82-3).

4.2 The Remedy for the Ailments of Iran

If opium and opium addicts were the objects of reproach in Suhbat-i Sang u Sabū, in yet another munāzirah, they take centre stage as agents of the dialogue about Iran’s ailments. Written by Mirza Hasan Khan Ansari in 1912, Nūsh Dārū yā Dāvāy-i Dard-i Īrānviyān (The Remedy or the Medicine for the Ailments of Iranians), three years after the successful and lasting establishment of a constitutional government, Nūsh Dārū dramatizes the ongoing debate over modernization. Drawing on a similar approach to medical discourse, Nūsh Dārū is the dialogue between two characters called “Old Man” (pīr) and “Youth” (javān). In this munāzirah, the participants discuss the miserable state of the country with an emphasis on the corruption and inefficiency of the government as well as the decadence rampant in the capital. The conversation starts in a teahouse on the famed Lālah Zār Avenue in Tehran (448)\(^5\) where the characters observe, over

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\(^4\) Mythical Persian king known for his impeccable justice. A chain is said to have been dangling outside of his palace which his subjects could freely pull to sound the bell of justice. They would be granted immediate audience with the monarch.

\(^5\) For a brief history of the Lālah Zār Avenue and its transformations, see Chapter Five below as well as notes 509-512.
an opium roll on hookah, the young men and women, compared to “fair princesses and princes” (Najafi, 451), striding by in European attire. One might be tempted to expect the old man to espouse traditional ideals and the youngster to symbolize infatuation with all things modern, especially since the former is dressed as a darvīsh (Sufi mystic) and the latter up to date with toiletry. Though this temptation is affirmed by the image of the two characters, it is the youngster who, though seemingly enjoying the scenery, concludes the scene with this comment: “Don’t think America and Europe are as lawless and unbridled as this,” to which the old man agrees, comparing “this situation [to] a dot above hurriyyat” (freedom) which would transform the word into khariyyat (asinity, 450-2).\footnote{In the Persian script, placing a dot atop the letter representing “h” will introduce a new letter equivalent to the sound of “kh.” The substitution of the initial letter changes the meaning of the word from “freedom” to “asinity” rhyming with the word “ass.”}

In this newfound freedom gone astray, instead of the wheels of justice, the wheels of love carriages are in motion, says the old man (451). After setting the initial scene in this way, the two contenders engage in criticizing a wide array of social ills, from the sham of language purification to the replacement of the traditional notation and accounting system known as siyāq with modern calculus which they call geometry (hindisah, 457, 466). In each case, the state of affairs before and after the introduction of a modernizing project is sarcastically compared using the headings “kuhnah parast” (the old-fashioned) and “īrān-i naw” (new/modern Iran), starting early in the text (453) and continuing on till the end. Before the introduction of calculus, all affairs and balances were in order. Now with an army of fiscal administrators, the country is in a state of shambles. Before this change, the state paid all its servants solely on tax money; now with income from customs, foreign travel, modern coinage, oil, contracts, and international port cities, it is in debt. Before the change, the legal system was swift and effective. Now a claim can circulate for months among longwinded lawyers and the bureaucracy and nothing happens. The ministry of war, the foreign ministry, the ministry of post and telegraph, the ministry of agriculture are all sharply and sarcastically criticized as ineffectual facades of governance. From modern medicine to modern schools, from novels to showrooms and cinemas are placed under scrutiny. Vis-à-vis these observations, the old man and the youngster also attack certain aspects of the traditional way of things: the excesses of the royal patronage system, the extravagance of the princes, the lavishness of their ceremonies and parties, the overindulgence of the courtiers
and ministers, the hypocritical mullahs, and corrupt judges, a double entente that is best thematically parallel with the setting of the drama: “Tehran is a hodgepodge of a zoo [jangal-i mawlā]. She embraces all manners of animals: nightwalkers, hypocrites and the affluent” (452). Indeed, the most discernible feature of this munāzirah is the coexistence of in-between figures, states, and texts.

Starting with the multi-layered narration in this munāzirah, indeterminacy reigns supreme. In the prologue the narrator introduces himself as Mirza ‘Ali (447) who has embarked on editing and distributing the author’s treatise. Within the text itself, the voice of the author merges both with the old man (482) and with the youth (495) while at one point in the story the headings “Youth” (javān) and “Old Man” (pīr) turn into Fakir (faqīr) and Dervish (darvīsh, 453), suggesting the merger of all four characters into the figure of the mystic. The shifting attitudes and designations of each distinct yet overlapping figure defines not only the narrative but also the bewilderment of national characters: “Now our lord’s fakir [i.e. a mystic devotee of Imam ‘Ali] has lost the camel [but] is looking for the reins. What they seek, they do not know where to find” (460). The use of the third person singular in the first, as opposed to the plural pronoun in the second, part of the sentence suggests a collective perceived as a single figure, one whose roots go back to the servitude of ‘Ali, the first Shiite Imam.412 The narrative itself is a muddled corpus of genres. Self-identifying as treatise (risālah), poetry (shi’r-i man), travelogue (sīyāhat nāmah), satire (hazl), didactic (ta’līm), allegory (tamsīl), advice (nasāyih), and witticism (latāyif, 448), it also shows consciousness of the competing genres of journalism, which it views as corrupt (464), the novel, which corrupts Iranian ethics (481), and classical tales such as Kalilah u Dimnah413 and Marzbān Nāmah414 from which Iranians should draw their way of life (486).

412 In fact, here, too, the nation is imagined as a single corporeal entity – “the nation’s body” (badan-i mamlkat) – in a footnote (491).

413 Known as *Panchatantra*, this ancient collection of animal fables is believed to have originated in India in between the years 500 to 100 BCE. It is a collection of interrelated tales within a frame story involving two jackals Kalilah and Demnah. In the sixth century CE, it was brought into Iran by the royal physician Burzāya and translated into Middle Persian Ibn al-Muqaffa translated it from Middle Persian into Arabic after the advent of Islam. For further information, see the entry “Kalila wa Denna” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

414 *Marzbān Nāmah* is largely an adaptation of *Kalilah u Dimnah*. It was first written in Tabarī, a Persian dialect, and later reproduced into Persian by Sa’d al-Din Varavini the thirteenth century CE. For more information, see Zabihullah Safa, *Tārīkh-i Adabīyāt dar Irān* (Tehran: Qoqonus, 1381/2002), Vol. 1, 359-66.
This polyphonic admixture of genres and texts is also manifested by the existence of parallel
texts. Similar to Ansari’s earlier work, Ganjīnah-i Asrār (Treasury of Helpers), authorial
“footnotes” occupy a parallel position on the page with the main narrative (at times occupying
more space on a given page). These metanarrative texts themselves represent a myriad of genres,
styles, and textual asides. They appear in the form of hikāyats (454), geographical information
and historical evidence (456), topographical observations (458), mathematical definitions (461),
poetic interjections (e.g. on the legal system, 465-6), citations from other works (466), references
to the author’s other books (469, 471), grammatical instructions (471), political commentary
(484), Quranic citations (488), economic advice, cultural insights (490), and religious
commentary in the form of interpretive tafsīr (492). And as if to demonstrate the parallel, as
opposed to an inferior, position of these “footnotes,” even parts of the munāzirah itself are
included in the footnote (489-90). An assortment of dialects and transcribed foreign terms side
by side Persian words further underline this coexistence. Arabic and Persian maxims or verse,
usually adages on the same topic, are dispersed throughout the narrative (448, 474, for example).

Neither is this hodgepodge of parallel texts and languages celebrated. While making use of
several French words himself, the old man nevertheless laments the “Parisian-tempered Persian”
(pārsī bā pārīsī āmīkhtah, 454) and sermonizes about the futility of teaching Iranians French
(474-7). Likewise, the refusal of Iranians to hear of anything in Arabic has caused them to lose
sight of their Islamic history’s political lessons (478) and created an unsound culture in which
Arabic names have to be changed into Persian ones in order for the named to get a job (454).

Such ambiguity also exists at the discursive level. The royal and Islamic discourses, always
complementing factors in legitimization, have now found stern rivals in the competing
discourses of constitutionalism and nationalism, respectively. Though Islam is still viewed as the
seal of all religions and the best among them (ḥīch sharī‘tū bihtar az islām nayāmadah, 489), it
does not carry authority unless it bears official (read: national) stamp of proof (452, 466).

Similarly, the centuries old tradition of monarchy is venerated and its efficacy upheld in such

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415 These French words are not offered as translations but embedded within the Persian narrative intended to carry
their original French sense: garçon (449), madam (452), antique, musée (462), charlatan (479), ultimatum (485),
monsieur (486), injection (488, 491), famille (488), program (489), toilet (491). Persian dialects from around the
country are also included: Kashani (explained as such in a footnote, 463), Khurasani (also pointed out in a footnote,
464), and Turkish-accented Persian in an implicit parody of Ahmad Shah as the infant king accepting his royal
appointment.
figures as Karim Khan Zand,\textsuperscript{416} Nadir Shah,\textsuperscript{417} Agha Muhammad Khan (455),\textsuperscript{418} and Salah al-Din (456). Shortly after, however, the extravagances, corruption, and injustices of recent monarchs are severely attacked (469) while a king of the same royal family, Naser al-Din Shah, is referred to as the “martyred Shah” (\textit{shāh-i shahīd}, 456).\textsuperscript{419} We are reminded again, nevertheless, that Iran needs a Nadir or an Anūshīrvān for its survival (487), though we are also given evidence in support, first, of constitutionalism (483) and then of “Islamic constitutionalism” (\textit{mashrūṭīyyat-i islāmī}, 484) after, of course, having judged both the clerics and the parliamentarians as complicit in corruption (465).

The arbiters of such fragmented ideologies are hybrid entities that embody shifting loyalties, fluid perspectives, and alternative beings. As we have seen in other \textit{munāzirahs}, besides merging with the author-narrator’s voice, the old man and the youth change their position on a given topic without being able to adhere to a single ideology as it might seem otherwise given the strength of their initial arguments.\textsuperscript{420} After challenging the old man on the necessity of modern schools and the teaching of French to pupils (479), for example, the youth suggests that educating women in modern sciences and in French is a vain project, at which point the author interjects, through a footnote, ensuring the readers that he is not against female education by citing a Quranic verse in support of knowledge (495). Suggesting that the establishment of modern schools in Iran is an enactment of the popular saying “neither crow nor partridge” about the vanity of emulation (\textit{bih ʿayn misl-i kalāgh u kabk shud}, 481), the old man goes on a few pages later to argue for the necessity of a national elementary education (489). Elsewhere the old man advises against the efficacy of implementing European laws in Iran, only to immediately advocate the use of official seals and a national currency (468). A similar shift in ideology occurs when the old man discusses the issue of language. Having earlier condemned the divine status enjoyed by

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{416} Karim Khan Zand (1705–1779) was the founder of Zand Dynasty and famed for his unassuming rule and benevolent justice. For more information on this monarch, see John R.Perry, \textit{Karīm Khān Zand: A history of Iran, 1747–1779} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
\item \textsuperscript{417} Nadir Shah Afshar (r. 1736–47) was the founder of the Afsharid Dynasty. He is known for his military genius and has been referred to as the Napoleon of Persia. See Michael Axworthy, \textit{The Sword of Persia} (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), xvii.
\item \textsuperscript{418} Agha Muhammad Khan founded the Qajar Dynasty in 1794 whose line still ruled Persia at the time of the publication of this munāzirah.
\item \textsuperscript{419} This became the title of Naser al-Din after his assassination in May 1896.
\item \textsuperscript{420} See pages 468-9, 473, 475, 479, 483 for examples.
\end{itemize}
translators (468) and the impracticality of teaching French in Iran (476-7), the old man promotes the necessity of sending students to Europe for the very purpose of translation of “Parisian sciences” (‘ulūm-i pārīs, 489). Arabic meets with a similar mixed fortune. Although the old man (and at times the youth) uses Arabic terms, proverbs, and maxims throughout, he is nevertheless against publicizing Arabic (480) and instead promotes the national language (481-2), advising that national elementary education must include Persian language, religious studies and ethics (pārsī, dīnī va akhlāqī bāshad, 489). Having thus established his preference for a national consciousness, he goes on to advocate the superiority of religious unity over national unity (ījtimā’u ishtirāk-i dīnī akmal az vatanī ast, 488). Finally, while his speech is replete with modern medical terms (hence the title of the munāzirah), the old man asserts that traditional medicine is superior to modern medicine (474-5). While passing judgement on the state of the nation, the old man and the youth nevertheless enact its itinerant identities.

Such unsettled and homeless identities find expression in descriptions of the national character as that of a crossbreed: “each of their veins has the trace of a fair Turk, Tajik, Iranian, Caucasian, Armenian, Zoroastrian, Swedish, Russian, a Lur, a villager, a Bakhtiyārī,421 a gendarme, and a Cossack” (451). These “new Iranians” are “a scion of a London flower crossed with a Muscovite” (473). Citing an exact sentence from his other book, the author reemphasizes the disrupted, conflicted, ambiguous, and multi-layered character of the body-national, in Persianized Arabic: “Iran is an explosive mass, composed of differing forms, to the point of chaos, towards constitutionalism and the [rule of] law” (Al-Īrān jism-i nārī, yatashakkal bih ashkāl-i mukhtalifah, hattal harj u wal marj, sū-yi al-mashrūtah wal qānūn). At the closing of the narrative, the youth asks the old man to summarize his observation of the nation’s capital. What follows is not only a vivid description of a fragmented collective, but also of the unresolved and tentative ending of the munāzirah:

Youth: How did you see the people of this area?
Old man: On the surface a united group, in essence differing hearts. At present like a headless herd, a flock without a shepherd, enchanter and enchanted, despotic yet obliged, prepared yet in impediment, ignorant and arrogant, learned yet blind, liberated yet captive, ignorant and besieged, commanding yet appointed, functionary yet excused [ma’mūr u ma’zūr], imperious yet constrained, friend yet hated, adversary yet desired,

421 Both Lurs and Bakhtiyaris are a southwestern tribal peoples of Iran. Under the command of Sardar Asa’d, they played a key role in the conquest of Tehran and the reestablishment of the constitutional government.
burglar and bold, liar yet famed for honesty, deceitful yet upheld as righteous, epileptic and political master, demented yet constitutionally cleansed, merchant yet down to his abacus mortgaged to the bank, and tradesman yet his trade stealing at all cost…

Youth: What did you find most among them?


This dizzying array of hybrid entities represents the social equivalent of narrative polyphony. Contradictory yet coinciding, episodic yet continuous, fragmented yet whole, syncretic yet simultaneous, these various discourses, factions, classes, languages, idioms, neologisms, and identities form the very vocabulary of the munāzirah, the unfinished narrative of Iranian modernity.

4.3 Mirror of Constitutionalism

Much like its predecessor Nūshdārū, Ā‘īnah-i Mashrūtah (Mirror of/for Constitutionalism) engages in a re-evaluation of the constitutional government, its promises, its failures and successes, and the question of its continuity in Iran. It was written by Mirza Mohsen Dastgerdi (d. 1956), pen named Muhandis (Engineer), in 1925 some ten months before the deposition of the last monarch of the Qajar house, Ahmad Shah (r. 1909-1925), and the crowning of the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, Reza Khan. A farmer by profession, Muhandis’ views reflect the perceptions of the working classes in regards to the multifarious questions of constitutionalism.

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422 This could also be translated as “cleanser of the Constitution.”
423 Perceived as a womanly practice now common among men who emulate farangī manners.
424 This could also be translated as “photographed synthesis.”
425 My translation of “fiqh-i farānsah.” Since the term “fiqh” signifies Islamic jurisprudence which is now attributed to France, I have coined the term “Frenchislamic” to convey that sense.
426 This expression is derived from Quran 3:40 in which God is projected as the agent of his own will: “Yea, thus is Allah. He does what he wills” (kazālik allāhu yaf‘alu mā yashā‘). To use this expression with the Farangī is to emphasize the blasphemous god-like authority he wields over the country’s fate.
427 Reza Khan, henceforth Reza Shah Pahlavi, was crowned as the new monarch on 15 December 1925 and reigned until 1941 when he was forcibly abdicated and later exiled by a joint Anglo-Soviet design who had invaded Iran.
such assemblage of competing discourses is “mirrored,” as the book’s title makes explicit, not only in the ideologically strife ridden history of the constitutional movement but also reflected in the sheer number of rival genres. In fact, generic polyphony is so conspicuous that the manuscript editor annoyingly reports placing a lengthy and “incongruous fragment” (yak pārah-i nāsāzigār) – deemed to be an inexplicable digression on the frame story – in between blank pages so that the reader might easily skip this section and continue with the rest of the story. Appearing as such according to the posthumous requirements of “coherence,” this discord is in fact the very foundation of the genre of the munāzirah.

Set in a village, the munāzirah involves four characters: the Farmer (diḥqān), his son, a European-mannered Youth (javān-i farangī maʿāb), a Traveller (sayyāh), and the village Cleric (Shaykh). Recalling the social types fielded numerously in previous munāzirahs, the Youth and the Shaykh take the extreme positions. While the in-between characters who occupy the middle position, the Farmer and the Traveller, represent a fusion of stasis and dynamism, a synthesis of the other two extreme positons. The narrative follows a similar trajectory. Set around the frame story of the conversation between the Farmer and the Traveller (which will later involve the participation of the Youth and the Cleric), other texts take turns occupying marginal, intermediary, or central positions in relation to the frame story, which, incidentally, does not start until we are well into the narrative (65). Narrative polyphony starts from the very beginning in the author’s prologue (dībāchah) in which the author explains his purpose for writing. The question of writing and the “requirements and duties of a writer” (Mir Ansari, 30) leads the author to seek a wise man’s (sāhib dil) counsel. Citing the Quran in his response, the wise man reiterates Islam’s promotion of seeking knowledge. The author, however, asks the wise man to provide “rational reasons” (dalāyil-i ‘aqlī) which the former proceeds to do by relating the story of his meeting with a Europeanized youth (31-3). Taking over from the wise man’s tale, the

428 His works reflect this multiplicity of consciousness: Collection of Poems (dīvān-i ashʿār), Two Hundred Stories by Muhandis (du sad dāstān-i muhandis), Discourse on the Manner of Creation (bāhs dar chigānagī-i ʿafarīnīsh), Report on Reza Shah’s Travel to Turkey (safar nāmah-i rizā shāh bi turkīyyah), The Atrocities of Humanity (fajāyī-i bashar), Description of Ferdowsi’s Millenary Celebration (sharḥ-i jashn-i hazār sālah-i fīrduwīsī), and Book of Despotism (istibdād nāmah). See Ali Mir Ansari, ed. Āʾinah-i Mashrūtah (Tehran: Mehrnamag, 1385/2006), 8.

429 Ibid., 22.
author launches into a tale of his own which is based on the historical events of the Bolshevik revolution, concluding that he has decided to tell his story “in the form of a ballad and a tale or novel” (bih tawr-i chakāmah u qissah yā rumān) to engage the literary tastes of Iranians (35). Identification of the narrative as simultaneously a ballad, a tale, and a novel is of particular interest when we heed the fact that the narrative is entirely written in verse, in the form of mathnavī modelled after the Shāhnāmah of Ferdowsi.430 Rejoining this hybrid narrative of genres, the wise man then reassures the author that the truth must be told by relating yet another “hikāyat” (35-6). At this point the author begs the readers’ pardon for “these scattered pages or tale and novel” (īn awrāq-i parīshān yā qissah u rumān), taking his leave in three languages, Arabic, English and Persian, respectively: “As traditionalists say, ‘wassalāmu ʿalā min attabbaʿal hudā;’ as the moderns say, ‘goodbye’ or ‘khudā hāfiz’” (emphasis added to indicate the presence of the three languages, 36). What follows is indeed a scattered account of multiple genres, languages, ideologies and discourses.

The narrative opens with a brief section on the beginnings of the ancient dynastic history of Persia, concluding this section with a medical metaphor in which the physician’s role in healing his patient out to take place by counsel or by force (37-41). This narrative is interrupted by an allegorical “Account of a Farmer’s Garden” (dāstān-i bāgh-i dihqān) in which the order and tranquility of the farmer’s stable is violated by a horse’s demand for unbridled freedom which it proceeds to achieve, setting free all the flock. The wolves (representing British imperialism) in the surrounding plains catch the news of this event, convene, and embark on sending their ambassadors, the foxes, to all corners of the globe. Having studied the affairs of the sheep in the flock, the spies return with detailed reports to the wolves’ convention which is now wary of the northern army of bears (representing Russian aggression) and the necessity of diplomatic ties with them. The wolves order their ranks, attack the garden and feast on the liberated but ignorant flock (41-56). The text then returns to the interrupted narrative of Persia’s ancient history covering the events of the mythic Pîshdādíyān dynasty from their rise to their downfall. (56-64). The munāzirah proper starts at this point. After customary greetings, the traveller states his purpose for having returned from China after hearing about the revolt of the sons of the

430 A mathnavī is a rhyming couplet in which each set of distiches in a line rhyme with each other, each line carrying its own separate rhyme. The Shāhnāmah of Ferdowsi is entirely written in the form of mathnavī.
homeland, upon hearing which the farmer provides a brief account of the constitutional
movement and the persistence of old problems (65-75). Interrupting this account, the Farmer
relates the story of a youth whose addiction to opium puts his wife and children through
calamitous trials ending in the death of his son and the suicide of his wife (79-113). After this
long disruption, we finally return to the conversation between the farmer and the traveller and the
entry of the farmer's son and the cleric into their midst. The four figures engage in debate until
the narrative is once again interrupted by the farmer to present the details of a parliamentary bill
banning the use of opium. This is in turn interrupted with, respectively, the “hikāyat” of a royal
spy and his mission during the reign of despotism, the farmer’s commentary on the anti-opium
bill, and the story of the wise budget policies of the monarch Karim Khan of Zand dynasty (127-
134). The youth’s refutation of the cleric also involves two hikāyats about the corruption of
clerical judges during the reign of despotism (138-143). In confronting the traveller, the youth
also invokes a “novel” within whose story is related the meeting of an Iranian poet with a
European traveller in which the poet tells the European a “hikāyat” about the meeting of a
panegyric poet with the Afghan invader of Iran (163-166). The munāzirah finally ends when the
traveller advises the youth and the cleric to unite, from which point his voice merges with the
voice of the author who now ends the story. The narrative, however, does not end at this point,
for we are presented with two new poems (qasīdah) covering the universal history of humanity
and of religions from Adam to Jesus, the continuation of the history of pre-Islamic Persia to the
rise of Islam, and the history of Islam to the rise of the Qajar dynasty and the advent of
colonialism and the first world war (169-182). The author interjects again to announce the
ending of the book, only to present us with a few more ghazals as a “relic of remembrance”
(182-189). The book finally ends with a strophic piece (qata'h) and a quatrain (rubā‘ī) by the
scribe praising the author’s “novel” (rumān) and his apt ability for the “condemnation of
regressive discourse in poetry” (zi taqbih-i shu‘ār-i bad dar ash‘ār, 189-190).

Such generic plurality is enabled by a narrative that, being modeled after Ferdowsi’s national
epic, projects itself as a narrative of Iranian identity and is yet scattered through with fragments
of other genres, styles, terminologies, languages, and concepts. Presenting the verse narrative as
a “novel” does not merely constitute a case of empty nominal fusion. What is novel, instead, is
the simultaneous coexistence of the modern with the traditional which creates a narrative of
plural national identities. What is “national,” in other words, about the narrative is not so much
the modelling of its narrative form on Ferdowsi’s national epic but the episodic, fragmented, and polyphonic fielding of various genres and ideologies enacting a discursive plurality in which the foreign and the indigenous, the traditional and the modern, the religious and the national coexist, intersect, overlap, repel, attract, and, most importantly, inform each other. The narrative begins, for example, with the customary evocation of the name of Allah in Arabic. Immediately after, however, it is addressed to inheritors of the land of the mythical kings of Persia and the protectors of their crown and throne (29). National heritage (āsār-i millī) is venerated (45) as is the national holiday, Naw Rūz (59). The use of pure Persian words in the manner of Firdawsi’s Shāhnāmah (57) and the fact that the story itself is modelled after that epic creates the illusion that this is a “national” narrative. It only take a few pages, however, to notice the visible coexistence of novel terms and foreign languages and contending ideologies, so much so that the product reads almost like a parody of a national language in its essentialist sense. Terms such as civilization (tamaddun), progress (taraqqī, 39), modernity (tajaddud, 41), masses (tūdah, 43), politics (pulītīk, 44), economic affairs (umūr-i iqtisādī, 47), orientalist (mustashriq, 49), constitution (qānūn-i asāsī, 70), reforms (islāhāt), political parties (ahzāb-i siyāsī, 72), automobile (tutumbīl, 73), export (sādirāt, 75), injection (anjiksīyun, 97) and even football (fūtbāl, 118) are scattered liberally throughout the narrative side by side “pure” Persian words, maxims, and traditional wisdom. Thrown into this mix is a host of foreign languages along with the hybrids who utter them: a British spy who uses Arabic proverbs (53), the Iranian youth whose greetings are in English, whose letter to his father is in a francophonized Persian (119), and whose language is a mix of Persian, English and French (122, 135), and a cameleer whose Persian is mixed with Arabic (91).

The discourse of Islam is increasingly rarefied, though Islam is still held to be superior to Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Confucianism (40, 100, 146) and prophetic tradition is cited to support the necessity of limits on freedom, for example (55). The Quranic maxim “enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong” is still upheld as a civilizational ideal, though distorted and forced into the Persian rhyme scheme (zi nahy-i munkar u amr-i bih

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431 Several other such examples exist in the text: industries (39), society, nation, law (43), mineralogy (44), customs (45), canon, airplane (45), treaty (47), ticket, theatre, restaurant (42, 56), form, pose (61), regime (69), parliament, newspaper (71), machine, (72), bank (74), oil field (75), whiskey, cognac (80), doctor (96), dynamite (107), geography, physics (118), protest, ultimatum (125).
maʿrūf), it is promoted for the creation of “civility” (ijtimāʿāt) and “order” (intizāmāt, 40). When in the prologue the wise man cites the Quran in response to the author’s inquiry about the requirements of a writer, the latter requests rational reasons instead (31). The figure of the wise man (ṣāhib dil, lit. possessor of heart, i.e. visionary) is suggestive of spiritual attainment, one whose esoteric knowledge surpasses empirical sense perception. As such, the figure is closely connected with mysticism, the spiritual aspect of Islam. The giving of “rational reasons” (dalāyil-i ‘aqlī) by such a figure is itself testimony to the dual role superimposed on a figure of national heritage. When we heed the author’s continual rejection of mysticism as a form of regressive superstition, this ambivalent duality become more apparent. The author asserts that religiosity (dīyānat) is a necessity whereas mysticism (tasavvuf) is destructive of true belief and of national identity. Venerating the pre-Islamic kings of Persia and the “national” religion Zoroastrianism, the author blames their destruction on mysticism, twice using the exact same verse: “Mysticism uprooted the foundation of the kings/Mysticism plucked the roots of Zoroastrians” (tasavvuf bīkh u bunyād-i kīyān kand/tasavvuf rīshah-i zartushṭīyān kand, 46, 60). Elsewhere the author equates mysticism with laziness (tanbal) and inaction (bīkār, 61), suggests that mysticism is the gift of Satan to Iran (171), and that the Iranians’ adherence to Sufi and dervish mannerisms is their true enemy (mā sūfī u darvīshīm mā khud ʿadū-yi khwīshīm, 185). This, of course, is contradicted elsewhere when the author endorses a “true Sufi” (namīgūyam zi sūfī-yi haqīqī/namāʾī dark-i matlab gar daqīqī, 46). Such ambivalence creates hybrid entities whose shifting views, attitudes, and loyalties are as fragmented and episodic as the discursive plurality of the narrative itself.

The four characters’ shifting views on the issues of modernity, tradition, national identity, and civilizational progress are testimony to such polyphonic ambiguity. In the allegorical account of the wolves’ schemes for the farm animals, the figure of the tajaddud khāh (lit. seeker of modernity) is viewed as the helper of the wolves (53) and his folly is exposed by accusing him of equating modernity (tajaddud) with pleasure seeking (ʿishrat, 144). Civilization itself is viewed as a disguise for hypocrites (tamaddun rā bibīn mamlūv zi talbīs, 93) and an excuse for

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432 For a discussion of this figure in classical literature, see Anne Marie Schimmel, A Two-Colored Brocade (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 104, 195.

433 For a history of Sufism in Iran, see Lloyd Ridgeon, Morals and Mysticism: A History of Sufi-futuwwat in Iran (New York: Routledge, 2010).
accumulating gold and copper (97). Shortly after, however, civilization is upheld as the essence of action and cooperation (123) and a speech is given on proving its necessity under a separate heading (*isbāt-i luzūm-i tamaddun*, 154). Other headings and the following polemic advocate the virtues of civilizational institutions such as municipalities (*baladīyyah*), ministry of education (*maʿārif*), trade, consultative assembly (*majlis-i shūrā*), finance ministry (*mālīyyah*), and justice bureau (*ʿadliyyah*), among others (155-160). Elsewhere we are told, however, that banks and cooperative societies (*anjuman*) are mere tools for colonial dominance (177) and that modern education is a sham (117), this iterated by the farmer who is well-versed in world politics and who had earlier advocated the establishment of modern institutions jointly with the traveller (125). Advice about respect for traditional heritage is compared to poetry which is itself equated with nonsensicals (*arājīf*, 134) but which is later, citing Ferdowsi, deemed the narrative of national identity (167). A similar ambivalence is displayed towards the novel. While viewing the novel as a potential source of misguidance (30), the author goes on to present his work “in the form of a novel” (35-6). Elsewhere the novel is deemed to be superior to poetry (163, 166) while its translation into Persian is seen to only promote the decadence of Parisian lovers (120). The writers of novels (*rumān*), magazines (*majallah*), treatises (*risālah*) and articles (*maqālah*) are accused of being blasphemous snobs (121) while the Shah’s travelogues are deemed to be only useful in importing decadent amusements and theatres from *Farang* (119). And while newspapers are viewed as blasphemous accounts (101), the narrative itself makes use of the journalistic style of *chūstān* (see note243) to discuss the duties of parliamentary deputies (153). This muddled assortment of genres is also reflected in the fusion of discourses. The present justice bureau (*ʿadliyyah*) is said to be as corrupt as the traditional judiciary (144) and the new Europeanized dandies as numerous and as corrupt as the traditional mullahs (145). In refuting the youth, the Shaykh uses modern medical discourse (148) while the traveller, the figure of the wise man of the world, sides with the Shaykh in defending the righteous clergy. Lest we might suspect the traveller’s unyielding loyalty to the representatives of Islam, he immediately asserts that we do not have to follow the clergy for guidance and that Islam itself does not confer the role of the guide on the clerical class. He also refutes the Shaykh on the issue of constitutionalism and upholds its necessity (150-1). He had, of course, earlier made mention of constitutionalism as a cause gone astray (69).
Such a polyphonic narrative is unsurprisingly populated by heteroglot figures of in-between-ness. Thus the character archetype Khânûm Sayyidah (lit. Ms. Prophet-descendant) becomes a Christian missionary (101-2) in an army of missionaries whose ranks include liminal entities “sometimes Muslim, sometimes Christian” (gahî muslim zamânî armanî bûd, 105). In introducing his son, the farmer himself feels incapable of capturing the true essence of his son’s identity: “He said, I do not know what brand his Excellency is” (bigufî îshân namîdânâm chih bâshand, 115). A similar image of duality is discernible in the descriptions of the youth and the Shaykh as figures of excess. The youth has ironed hair, shining with cosmetics (kusmâtîk) and powder (pûdr). His shoes are equally shiny, and it is not clear how he has changed the colour of his eyes to blue (zâq). Sporting a tight outfit and a hat, he walks around with glasses and a cane (115). The Shaykh has a cloak on his back and a henna-dyed beard. The length of his turban is in excess of thirty metres (sî zar’). In his customary vanity, upon entering the house he looks for the highest place to sit as a reflection of his status. Since he cannot find a heater which would indicate the best place in the room, he ascends to the roof and sits by the chimney (116). Both are seen as figures of cultural poverty and abomination (kih hastîd har du andar faqr u nikbat, 162). This duality (du’îyyat, 168) of character does not escape the observant traveller who invites the two to unite and look beyond cloak and coat. The unison of which the traveller speaks reflects an anxiety of identity, of a social text populated with split subjects:

One says all of Iran must become [like] Europe in all respects; another believes that the sole path to the progress of the country and the nation is the banning of hijab and the establishment of theatres and hotels and public parks and perfection of music. One identifies despotism and coup d’etat [küditâ] and revolution [rivulisîyûn] as the means of progress, [while] another prescribes Bolshevik ideology [maslak-i bâlshivik] as the ultimate remedy; one demands the perfection and implementation of economic equality [musâvât-i iqtisâdî], [while] another recognizes the elevation of the nation through the mixing of Iranian blood and race with the European [race]… One supported the workers and their rights; another advocated land reform; one admired Paris, another revered trinity [taslîs]… one proposed a seven-hour work day, another tabled shelters for the poor… one established schools, another constructed roads. (33-4, 71)

In such a society, the members of various classes and professions, the “farmer,” the “cleric,” the “prince,” the “baker,” the “grocer,” the “preacher” (murshîd), the “fortune-teller,” the “orator” (vâ’îz), the “descendent of the prophet” (sayyîd), and the “commoner” (73) are in a state of

434 Since the second portion of the quote, after the first set of ellipses, is in verse in the original (p. 71), my translation is not verbatim but does capture the intended meaning.
bewilderment. The sheer multiplicity of contending discourses, ideologies, genres, styles, and languages parallels the array of split voices that articulate them. Inscribed all over the social text, this polyphony finds expression in the narrative of the munāzirah which “mirrors” it.

4.4 Persian Is Sugar

The polyphony of discourses and of genres reappears in Muhammad ‘Ali Jamalzadeh’s “Fārsī Shikar Ast” (Persian Is Sugar).435 First published in the periodical Kāvah on 11 January 1921, it later appeared in a collection of “short stories” entitled Yakī Būd u Yakī Nabūd (Once upon a Time) in numerous editions.436 As such, “Fārsī Shikar Ast” precedes Ā‘īnah-i Mashrūtah (Mirror of Constitutionalism) by a span of four years which would have necessitated its chronological placement before the latter text in this study. Its anachronistic invocation as the final text, however, is due to its special status in the Iranian imagination. Universally hailed as the first “modern” short story in the history of Iranian literature, “Fārsī Shikar Ast” is identified in the national imagination as the seminal text marking the “advent” of modern literature (by which it is meant prose fiction) in Iran.437 A cursory look at the historical conditions that influenced its composition, however, proves otherwise. Rather than a “break” with tradition, “Fārsī Shikar Ast” draws on the deep structure of the munāzirah. Even though the narrative of the story does not apparently follow the formal attributes of the genre, it fits readily along the continuum of the munāzirah.

The periodical Kāvah was founded in Berlin by Sayyid Hassan Taqi Zadeh (1878-1970), a polymath and tireless political activist whose career encompassed numerous official posts (including election as deputy to both the first and the second Majlis), exiles, and more

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435 The expression connotes sweetness. “Persian is sugar,” therefore, signifies the sweetness or superiority of the national language over other competing languages, particularly Arabic, Turkish and European languages, mainly French and English, which were in still in currency at the time. See “Prologue to the fifth edition” in the sixth edition of Muhamad ‘Ali Jamalzadeh’s Yakī Būd u Yakī Nabūd (Tehran: Kanun-i Ma’rifat, 1339/1960), i.

436 The collection was reprinted no fewer than six times in less than six decades only by the same publisher. The text perused here is from the sixth edition.

437 The sheer number of sources, literati and important personalities making this claim would provide for a very lengthy note indeed. Perhaps it would be enough to cite the Persian textbook used in secondary schools in Iran (in what is equivalent to grades 9 to 12), required reading in high schools nationwide: Ministry of Education. Adabīyyāt-i Fārsī (Tehran, 1383/2005).
importantly for our purposes, transformations. Born in a religious family in Tabriz and to a clerical father, his early education included typical subjects on the traditional seminary curriculum (such as the Quran, Arabic, philosophy and astronomy), but soon he was drawn to modern learning in which he engaged but some of which, such as learning French, he had to hide from his devoted father. Appearing as a cloaked and turbaned cleric in his first post as deputy to the consultative assembly in 1906, Taqi Zadeh transformed into a tuxedo wearing democrat in his later years. The cleric-turned-farangī, Taqi Zadeh is famous for having summarized the solution to Iran’s problems in the wholesale adoption of European values. In the issue of the periodical where “Fārsī Shikar Ast” first appeared, he reiterated that declaration in these words: “adoption of the principles and manners and customs of European civilization and accepting them unconditionally.” Even this brief sketch illustrates to what extent Taqi Zadeh was a product of his time. His transformation and internal contradictions are physical and ideological impersonations of the narrativized dialogism of the munāzirah, one in which the hybrid fragments of national consciousness repel, overlap and inform each other. In fact, in the same issue in which “Fārsī Shikar Ast” appeared, the very preceding article – entitled “munāzirah-i shab u rūz” (the debate between night and day) and subtitled “‘ilm-i hay‘at” (the science of astronomy) – paints a vivid picture of this liminal state of being. In denouncing the role of regressive reactionaries in promoting superstition in the name of science, the author identifies them as “half European-mannered seminarians or half clerical Euro maniacs” (tullāb-i nīmah farangī maʿāb yā farangī maʿābān-i nīmah ākhūnd). It is around the figure of these same liminal entities that “Fārsī Shikar Ast” revolves.

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440 In an often quoted proclamation, Taqi Zadeh declared, “The only [solution is that] Iran must become Europeanized in appearance and in essence and in body and in soul” (Iran bāyad zāhiran va bātīnan va jīsman va rūhān farangī maʿāb shavad va bas). “Dawrah-i jadīd,” Kāvah. 1 Jamadi al-Khačar 1338/22 January 1920. 5th year, No. 1.


442 Kāvah. 1. 2, 1 Rabī‘ul Avval 1339/11 January 1921, 8.
Narrated by an expatriate returning to Iran, the story paints a picture of the country’s disorder in the form of the officials’ corruption. Sensing the possibility of booty from the farangī looking narrator, the border guards place him under temporary arrest. The guards strip the narrator of all his belongings except two items which he manages to take back: “The only thing[s] I could take from them unharmed was my European [farangī] hat and my belief [in Islam]” (Jamalzadeh, 24). Parodic effect is not the only function of this statement. It also points to a figure whose inseparable treasured possessions are tokens of two different worlds. The self identification of the narrator to another character, Ramazān, as “an Iranian and your religious brother” (35) places Iranian-ness precisely in a liminal space between Islam and Farang. The Iranian imaginary, in other words, is the locus of the intersection of distinct and contending discourses. The other characters in the story are indeed the embodiments of this discursive convergence. “Fārsī Shikar Ast” is the story of the convergence of the characters Farangī Ma‘āb (lit. European-mannered) and Shaykh (Cleric) upon the liminal space represented by the naïve youth, Ramazān. Representatives of their social types, the two characters are described as caricatures of excess: The former, “one of those notorious Farangī Ma‘ābs,” is wearing “a collar as long as a samovar pipe … sitting atop a ledge, and under the pressure of this collar which was like the pillory around his neck was reading a ‘novel’ in the dim light” (25). His opposite number, the Shaykh, looks like a “shining white cat coiled on a heap of coal dust … but it turned out that it is a Shaykh squatting as is customary while hugging his knees and wrapping his cloak around him, and the shining white cat is his … turban of which the ending had come loose and looked like a cat’s tail” (26). It is to these incarnations of excessive duality that Ramazān, the newcomer with a felt hat, turns for help.

Instinctively turning to his heritage in the form of the Shaykh, Ramazān begs for an explanation for his gratuitous incarceration. The Shaykh responds in a verbose and heavily Arabicized Persian which defies comprehension (27-29). As an example, part of the Shaykh’s response reads thus (I have replaced Arabic words in the original with their italicized Latin equivalents in order to convey the sense of the original to an English reader): “ut spero [I hope] that mox [soon] the bail money shall become apparent and quidem [surely] the alpha and quidem the beta of quo factum est [how this came to be] either statim [immediately] or tandem [ultimately] shall reach our auscultations” (28). Thinking the Shaykh is a “possessed” (jinnī) Arab, Ramazān turns to Monsieur Farangī Ma‘āb. The latter responds to Ramazān’s query with an equally bizarre
Francophonized Persian: “Oh friend and beloved compatriot! Why have they put us here? I have been excavating my skull [but] absolument do not find a thing, neither a positif thing nor a négatif thing, absolument! Is not this comique that they take me, a diplomé youth from the best famille, in place of a… of a criminel and do treatment to me as it went ahead formerly?” (31-2).

Terror-stricken, Ramazān cries out to the guards for help at which point the narrator steps in and assures the youth that he is Iranian like him, as are the other two. Ramazān is not convinced:

“Did you see how these lunatics cannot understand a word of [normal] speech and kept speaking in the language of the jinnis?” The author’s response confirms the dissolution of the Iranian collective consciousness into competing discourses: “Bro these are neither possessed nor deranged, on the contrary [they] are Iranian and our compatriot and religious brothers!” (barādar-i vatanī va dīnī, 35).

As creatures of liminality in folk imagination, the jinn are metaphysical entities according to the Quran that can take both a physical form and a metaphysical non-form.443 The fact that both the Shaykh and the Farangī Ma‘āb are described as such is noteworthy, as is all the characters’ “brotherly” kinship. Caught between their Iranian nationality, Islamic heritage, and the ever encroaching European rhetoric, the four “brotherly” characters represent disparate national discourses in a story that dramatizes the polyphonic munāẓirah of contending voices within the liminal space of the jail. The arrival of a fifth arrestee, a youth who speaks “in a certain Farsi … brought from Istanbul” (36), at the end of the story pinpoints the route through which European ideas often entered Iran.444 Both in his brief introduction to the story’s first appaearance in Kāvah (1921) and in the lengthy prologue to the fifth edition of the collection Yakī Būd u Yakī Nabūd, Jamalzadeh addressed the issue of polyphony. In the former, he announced the publication of the collection, of which “Fārsī Shikar Ast” was to be an example, in a near future. The aim of the collection, written for “the amusement of the mind” (tafrīh-i khātir), was to “present a specimen of contemporary Farsi’s usual and current” use (nimūnahī az fārsī-yi ma’ūlī va mutadāvīl-i imrāzah).445 In the latter prologue, Jamalzadeh reiterated this aim and expressed satisfaction over the collective attempts to purge Persian from “European,

443 In Quran 55:14, they are said to be created out of a fire without smoke. Surah 72 in the Quran is entitled Al-Jinn.
444 Recall that many influential periodicals, such as Akhtar, which operated from the Ottoman Istanbul.
445 Kāvah. 1. 2, 1 Rabī’ul Avval 1339/11 January 1921, 8.
Turkish, and Arabic words and expressions and constructions”.\(^{446}\) So far as the promotion of the national language is concerned, this was a national-literary manifesto with the aim of purging the national tongue from “foreign” languages. This was to be a purge limited to parole, however, for the grammar of Jamalzadeh’s work continued to dictate the discursive dialogism of the munāżirah with the national, Islamic, and European discourses continuing their vibrant interaction.

As such, post-Jamalzadeh literary productions may indeed have compositionally distanced themselves from the formal attributes of the munāżirah, but the latter continued to provide the dialogical foundation upon which they were composed. Jamalzadeh himself points to this synthesis. He denounced the “despotic political essence of Iranians … [which] can also be seen in the field of literature, meaning the writer only considers the elite when taking up the task of writing.”\(^{447}\) In order to amend this situation, he continued, efforts must be made to mobilize “the inshā’ on the path of the novel and the hikāyat” (8). Literally meaning “composition,” the inshā’ is an indigenous form of prose narrative consisting of various genres: letters, official correspondence, and descriptive or narrative accounts. More importantly, the inshā’ literature was meant to also serve as a model of good writing for emerging literati.\(^{448}\) Jamalzadeh’s promotion of “novelistic inshā’” (inshā’-i rumānī), alternatively termed “hikāyat-based inshā’” (inshā’-i hikāyatī), clearly demarcates a liminal narrative composed of fragments of the Perso-Islamic inshā’, the indigenous hikāyat, and the European novel.\(^{449}\)

As a matter of fact, all the “stories” in the collection Yakī Būd u Yakī Nabūd are identified as hikāyats (For example “The first hikāyat: ‘Fārsī Shikar Ast’ and so on), a symbolic move which aimed to highlight the national equivalent to modern writing but which was nonetheless informed by European-style prose fiction. Jamalzadeh made this liminal ambiguity explicit elsewhere as late as 1959. In his 1954 prologue to the fifth edition of Yakī Būd u Yakī Nabūd, he declared that we can find

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\(^{448}\) Paul Jürgen’s definition aptly covers the historical development and multi-generic orientation of the inshā’ as well as its role as the ideal form of writing: “The process of creating or composing something as well as the result of this process and the rules of the art; it denotes a genre of prose literature, copies, drafts, or specimens of official and private correspondence. Their aim in composing or compiling works of enšā’ was to show what and how cultivated men should write to different individuals or groups on different occasions.” See the entry “ENŠĀ’” in Encyclopedia Iranica.

prominent instances of these new literary styles or as is popular today [these] ‘literary schools’ known variously as ‘romanticism’ and ‘symbolism’ etcetera and even ‘surrealism’, which have been imported into Iran as souvenirs from Europe and America, in our own ancient and aged literature.’  

Jamalzadeh’s rhetoric became more reproachful when in 1955 he denounced those who engaged in a “blind emulation of the farangīs” in these terms: “To those literary wannabes [jūjah udabā] who stuff their mouths and speak of European ‘literary schools’ thinking that they have brought coal to Newcastle must be said, sirs, if you had done a little research, you would have found excellent examples for every style and school which in your blind emulation of the farangīs you call ‘school’ [maktab].” He proceeds to provide one such example of a “realist” depiction of the comic figure of a dying old man in a mosque by the nineteenth century classical poet Qā’ānī (1808-1854) “who lived a long time before the founder of the ‘realist’ method who was one of the prominent French writers known as ‘Zola’” (76-80). A literary consciousness drawing at once from classical poetry, “realism,” inshā’, hikāyat, and novel, Jamalzadeh and his “Fārsī Shikar Ast” might have initiated the “advent” of a novel form of writing at the expense of suppressing other rival forms, but they were very much the product of the dialogical polyphony of the munāzirah. “Fārsī Shikar Ast,” in other words, is a threshold narrative, a synthesis of the continuity of tradition alongside novel discourses.

4.5 The Munāzirah in Post-Constitutional Periodicals

The periodicals of this period display a similar tendency: formal munāzirahs become more and more sparse, almost nonexistent in some cases. The periodical Al-Islām, for example, ran the munāzirah “Question and Answer [between] a Naturalist and a Theist” (suʿāl u javāb-i tabī‘ī va ilāhī), serialized over several issues, and national conversation in the form of chīstāns, direct address, official responses, and correspondence from the provinces and from expatriates.


452 This is particularly the case in the periodical Habī al-Matīn.

453 The monthly journal Al-Islām was founded by Musin Faqih Shirazi, a cleric, in June 1923 and was published in the city of Shiraz.

continued to prosper. But formal munāzirahs as such were becoming increasingly scarce. Discursive munāzirah, on the other hand, continued to thrive, albeit in modified and evolving ways. While the munāzirah in this period is formally sublimated into a continuous prose style gravitating further and further towards colloquial simplicity, in its capacity as discursive disputation it becomes even more pervasive as it forms the deep structure of the ongoing rivalry among nationalist, Islamic, and modernist discourses, keeping in mind that these were still overlapping, not well-defined or entirely distinct, camps.

Earlier mention was made of the inclusion of an article titled “Munazirah-i shab u rūz: ‘Ilm-i hay’at” (The debate between night and day: The science of astronomy) immediately preceding “Fārsī Shīkār Ast.” This was part of a series of similar articles published in Kāvah under the same generic title (the debate between night and day) and each dealing with a modern science in comparison with its traditional equivalent. The footnote to the first instalment in this series of articles – entitled “Munazirah-i shab u rūz: ‘Ilm-i hayvān shināsī” (The debate between night and day: The science of zoology) – read: “On this topic in most issues [of the periodical] a part of European sciences titled ‘western’ and its equivalent, if existing, on the same topic from our own sciences meaning Arabic or Iranian [sciences] will be published.” Other sciences explored

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455. Examples such as the following frequently appear in periodicals: “Az kirmān mānīvānd tāraqqī-yi ĭrān dar chīst” (They write from Kerman: What does Iran’s progress involve?), Habl al-Maṭīn. No. 5, 3 Sha’ban 1343/28 February 1925, 9. “Az islāmbul mānīvānd āqā-yi muddārīs chīth mīkhwāhād” (They write from Istanbul: What does Mr. Mudarrīs want?), Habl al-Maṭīn. No. 5, 3 Sha’ban 1343/28 February 1925, 11. “Su‘āl az vizārat-i fava’id-i āmmāh” (Question to the ministry of public welfare), Habl al-Maṭīn. No. 12, 7 Shavval 1343/1 May 1925, p. 13-14. “Dar javāb-i yākā az khānāmā hā-yi muhtaram-i fārs” (In response to one of the esteemed ladies of Fars [province]), Habl al-Maṭīn. No. 18, 26 Zi Qa’dah 1343/19 June 1925. The lady in question had published her views in number 9 of the same periodical (9-11). An article entitled “Īrān idārāh-i bahri mīkhwāhād” (Iran needs naval administration) addressed the then Prime Minister, and later the first monarch of the Pahlavi dynasty, Reza Khan under repeated subtitles “Mr. Pahlavi,” demanding the establishment of a naval corps in Iran, Habl al-Maṭīn. No. 19, 4 Zi Hajjah 1343/26 June 1925, p. 1-3. Other correspondences from across the country and from expatriates outside the country crowded the pages of the periodical. “Maktūbs” (correspondences) from “shūshār,” “bībahān,” and “bamba’ī” (Bombay) are a handful of such instances, Habl al-Maṭīn. No. 19, 4 Zi Hajjah 1343/26 June 1925. For an example of the ongoing relevance of the chīstān, see “Taklīf-i ahamm” (The most important duty) in which the issue of post-Qajar elections is discussed through subheadings as embedded questions: “Why did we end up like this?”; “What is to be done?”; “How do we find a powerful [political] party?” Habl al-Maṭīn. No. 35, 11 Rabi’ul Sani 1344/30 October 1925, p. 1-4. Another article entitled “What should men do?” addresses the issue of hijab and the necessity of removing it. The article examines the reaction of Iranian men through sub questions such as “What do European men do?” and “What should Iranian men do?” Habl al-Maṭīn. Number 40-41, 1 November 1927, 13-16.

456. I do not use the word “evolving” in its bio-ideological sense of “improvement” from a lower to a higher status. I simply mean to signify changing modes that underwent a shift as a result of the socio-historical currents.

under the same series included geology, etymology, and geography. The position of the periodical in respect to “night” and “day” was that of east versus west, respectively, as apparent in this brief description in one of the installments: “The illuminating scientific beliefs of Europe [in comparison with] some invalid research of eastern scientists on the basis of ignorance” (‘aqa‘i-yi ‘ilm-yi nūrān-yi ʿurūpā va ba‘zī tahqiqā-tī bātīlāh-i ‘ulamā-yi mashriq mabnī bar asās-i jahl). These series of articles were not written as formal munāzirahs but by means of its dialogical approach. This discursive rivalry under the generic title munāzirah informed much of the ongoing debate (whether scientific, political, or literary) in the periodicals of this period. It was this intense rivalry that led the periodical Habl al-Matīn, for example, to publish an article on “the necessity of separating spiritual leadership from politics.” It was also to this type of attitude from Habl al-Matīn and from likeminded periodicals such as “Nāmah-i Farangistān and Rastākhīz and Nāhīd” that the journal Al-Islām responded: “All these actions had one result and [sic] was based on one principle, and that principle is the enmity between ignorance and falsity with knowledge and truth and the result is the eradication of the spiritual class [i.e. clerics] and the omission of Islamic works.” Still, such explicit expressions of opposition do not necessarily translate into the antagonism of mutually exclusive and well defined binaries. For the two camps continued to overlap and inform each other considerably.

The rigid pro-European views of the founder of Kāvah, for instance, did not preclude the journal to seek the fatwa (istiflā) of a spiritual leader, Ayatollah Kashani, on the status of those who

460 “Munāzirah-i shab u rūz: ‘ilm-i jughrāfi (gharbī).” Kāvah. No. 6, 7 Bahman 1289/10 Shavval 1338/18 June 1920, 3-4.
461 Kāvah. No. 4, 10 Sha‘ban 1339/10 April 1921, 11.
463 Nāmeh Farangestān was published in Berlin in 1924-1925 by a group of university students including Moshfeq Kazemi, Ahmad Farhad, Gholamhosayn Foruhar, Hasan Nafisi, and Taqī Arani. These were significant years in the history of modern Iran leading to the transference of the crown from the Qajar to the Pahlavi dynasty. Rastākhīz was published in Cairo between the years 1913 and 1914 by ‘Abdollah Razi. Nāhīd, a pro Reza Khan weekly, was published from 1921 to 1933 jointly by Mirza Ebrahim Nahid and ‘Aref Qazvini.
assist foreign powers in question and answer form. Neither did it prevent the periodical *Habl al-Matīn* to tragically announce the bombardment of Prophet Muhammad’s mosque in Saudi Arabia and to broadcast the closure of the parliament for a public day of mourning on its first page. Nor did it, for that matter, avert the journal *Al-Islām* to continually, and approvingly, invoke European figures or modern scientific rhetoric as authority on a given “Islamic” topic which it was discussing. In reminding the readers of the significance of the mourning rituals of Muharram, for example, the author cites a certain “French doctor Joseph” to validate his argument. A series of articles, starting in January 1926, purported to prove the existence of god through “the science of autopsy.” In the same issue, the subject of hijab and its necessity prompts the author to refer to the “Larousse lexicon” (*qāmūs-i lārūs*) for a brief history and to ensure the readers that hijab does not prevent the education of women (12-16). In another article titled “Health and Islam,” the author compared the bodily movements during daily prayers to physical exercise which “the contemporaries call gymnastics” (*harikāt-i namāz rā hukamā az bihtarin turuq-i varzish-i badanī (rīyāzat) kih hālīyah ānrā jīmnāstīk nāmand mīdānand).* Finally, lest the influence of leftist discourse is left out of its discursive plurality, the periodical cites Tolstoy to prove the greatness of Islam in its lead article in April 1928: “Part one – On the testimony [given] by aliens and foreigners to the greatness of Islam and the translation of the words of the Russian Tolstoy in this regard for the attention of modernists.” Side by side an article by Jamalzadeh in *Kāvah* which traced the roots of Bolshevism to the pre-Islamic Iranian rebel Mazdak, these textual products represent the polyphony of ideologies, each repelling while appropriating the others. In the aforementioned article, Jamalzadeh introduced Mazdak as the first Bolshevik appearing “fourteen hundred years ago in our own Iran in the heat of Sasanian

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466 “Assalāmu ‘alayk yā rasūllallāh” (Peace be upon thee oh prophet of Allah). *Habl al-Matīn*. No. 28, 14 Safar 1344/4 September 1925.

467 Muharram rituals of mourning are annually held among Shiites for the martyrdom of their third Imam, Husayn ibn ‘Ali, at the battle of Karbala in on 10 Muharram 61/10 October 680.


470 *Al-Islām*. Year 5, Vol. 3, Rabī’ul Avval 1346/September 1927.

471 “Qismat-i avval – Dar shahādat-i ajānīb va aghyār bi’azimat-i islām va tarjumah-i kalamāt-i (tulstuy-i) rūsī dar īn muzūl qābil-i tavajjuh-i mutijaddidīn.” *Al-Islām*. Year 5, Vols. 11 and 12, Zi Qa’dah 1346/April 1928.
despotism” (dar hizār u chāhār sad sāl pīsh dar Īrān-i khudimān dar buhūhāh-i istibdād-i sāsānīyān). In a periodical that – like its sister Berlin publication, the journal Īrānshahr – intended to revive pre-Islamic Persia’s “national” glories, Jamalzadeh’s ambiguous reference to that historical period both in an approving (Mazdak as the first Bolshevik) and denunciatory (“Sasanian despotism”) tone attests to the liminal discourse of Iranian modernity.

Thus it was that “the war between turban and hat” raged on. In an article which appeared with this same title in Habl al-Matīn, the author supported Reza Shah’s suggested policy for a uniform national attire as a “necessary moral coup d’etat” (kūdatā-yi akhlāqī-yi lāzim) but did not, as it would be expected, attack the clerics as regressive social elements. Rather, he elevated their status above the hat-wearing dandies, who were now increasingly referred to as fukulī and judged the policy to be protective of the status of spiritual leaders. While the turban and the hat represented the dual image of the male body-national, the related and hotly debated issue of hijab addressed the female segment of the nation. On this issue, Habl al-Matīn took the anti-hijab stance. In a piece entirely in verse, the poet Zayn al-Abedin Khan Hikmat addressed “our Shaykh” (shaykhanā) as the obstacle to the rights of the “female masses” (tüdah-i nisvān), asserting that only with the eradication of the mullahs and the nobles (ākhūnd u ham ashrāf) can Iran escape the chains of captivity. In another article by “M. D. A member of ancient Iran,” the author considers hijab as “false chastity” (‘iffat-i durūghī) and a primitive phenomenon by providing a brief history of bodily covering. As a periodical that increasingly identified itself with the national discourse as is evident by the author’s signature in the article above, Habl al-Matīn had started to include dates only from the Persian and Julian calendars on its cover page, dropping the Islamic date which had thus far always been included. In a similar move, the periodical Al-Islām included only the Islamic date, excluding the Julian and Persian dates. On the
issue of hijab, the latter journal addressed the “modernists,” including Habl al-Maṭīn, in several articles.\(^{477}\) In an article entitled “In response to the 14 questions on the subject of the limits and duties of women signed by Juya in the ancient periodical Habl al-Maṭīn,” the author engages the latter periodical in the debate entirely in the form of question and answer.\(^{478}\) Another article by Sayyid Muhammad Kazim Bahrul ‘Ulum makes reference to the views of the periodicals Habl al-Maṭīn and Chihrah Namā (Exposer) on hijab as destabilizing the “strong nerves of civility” (\(a\ 'sāb-i qavī-yi madanīyyat\)) and “the pillars of the world of European civilization” (\(mihvar-i 'ālam-i tamaddun-i ārūp\)), which has prompted the author’s “spirit of patriotism” (\(rūhi vatan parast\)) to respond. The author then gives a brief history of hijab in ancient Greece and in ancient Persia as part of his argument.\(^{479}\)

The blending of the nationalist, modernist, and Islamic discourses in this article and in a periodical that explicitly identifies itself as Al-Islām (in Arabic) is unmistakable testimony to the coexistence of a plurality of discourses and of the liminal position of modern Iranian consciousness in relation to their rivalry. The presence of other contemporary munāzirahs such as the seminal Guftār-i Khush-i Yārquš (Yarquš’s Sweet Speech)\(^{480}\) and the serialized piece Su‘āl u Javāb-i Tabī‘ī va Ilāhī (The Question and Answer [between] the Materialist and the Theist)\(^{481}\) in this periodical attests to the sheer range of issues put to debate either as formal or as discursive munāzirah. Sections such as “Of interest” in Al-Islām announced news of the latest discoveries including telescopes and novel remedies for psychological disorders\(^{482}\) side by side

\(^{477}\) See for example “Qismat-i duvvum – Maqālah-i vāridah az shūshtar az yakī az āqāyān-i muhtaram dar atrāf-i maqālah-i mundarjah dar shumārah-i bīst u yikum va bīst u duvvum-i hablul maṭin rāji‘ bih hijāb va ghayrah” (Part two – An article received from Shushtar from one of the esteemed gentlemen about an article published in numbers twenty one and twenty two in Habl al-Maṭīn about hijab and so on). Al-Islām. Year 5, Vol. 6, Jamadiul Akhar 1346/November 1927.


\(^{479}\) “Qismat-i avval – dar maqālah-i hijābīyyah rikh ihtah-i qalam-i mubārak-i raqam-i yakī az āqāyān-i muhtaram-i rasht qābil-i tavajjuh-i mutijaddīdīn.” (Part one – On the article on hijab written by the blessed pen of one of the esteemed gentlemen of Rasht for the attention of modernists). Al-Islām. Year 5, Vol. 4, Rabī‘ul Sani 1346/October 1927, 3.

\(^{480}\) Guftār-i Khush-i Yārquš was published in 1925 by Muhammad Gharavi Mahallati. It is a well-known and well-received munāzirah on the falsity of the Baha’i movement in Iran.

\(^{481}\) Al-Islām. Year 3, Vol. 1, Muḥarram 1344/August 1925, 9. A similar debate between the materialist and religious views of the world was anonymously published circa 1930, entitled Māddī u Ma‘navī (manuscript held at the Masjid Gowershad Archives in Mashhad, Iran).

\(^{482}\) “Shanīdānīhā” (Of interest). Al-Islām. Year 3, Vol. 7, Sha‘ban 1344/February 1926.
listings of Quranic verses that are meant to prove Islam’s commensurability with “political” (sīyāsī), “social” (ijtimā‘ī), and “economical” (iqtisādī) aspects of modern civilization – this in an article entitled “On the commensurability of religiosity and civility” (Dar mulāzimah-i bayn-i tadayyun va tamaddun).

In certain issues, this simultaneous coexistence of discourses is physically visible. “Part four – Various beneficial [news],” for example, announces the invention of “new ships” (kashtī-yi jadīd) and “air alternators” (dīnmu-yi havā‘ī) right next to a religious question seeking a mujtahid’s fatwa about the question of determining the qiblah (the direction of Mecca towards which Muslims must say their prayers) in America, which is itself followed by a hikāyat. A salient feature of the munāzirah, the blending of genres and issues necessitates the imagining of distinct temporal categories as simultaneous.

Another such issue was the question of modern education and modern schools. Informed by the coexistence of competing discourses, the views of periodicals ebbed and flowed in between opposite poles. Within the span of one month, Habl al-Matin published two completely different views on the question of modern education. One article – “Iran needs [modern] education” (Īrān ma‘ārif lāzim dārad) demanded the improvement and speedy implementation of modern schooling in Iran.

Another spoke of its harms, reminding the readers of the scientific and cultural advances brought about by the Arab and Muslim culture and denouncing the useless emulation of European customs and manners among the modernists, while a third one suggested the middle path: “Education based on necessity is good and imitation is bad” (Ta’līm bimuqtazā-yi luzūm khūb va taqlīd bad ast). Al-Islām attacked Habl al-Matin and upheld the value of traditional education. Such discursive rivalry duly reflects the polyphony of views surrounding the Iranian consciousness, perhaps best captured in these words published in Habl al-Matin: “If you ask this problem of a mullah [ākhūnd] or a fukulī or a journalist, who is himself...

485 Habl al-Matin. No. 5, 3 Sha‘ban 1343/28 February 1925, 10-11.
487 Habl al-Matin. No. 18, 26 Zi Qa‘dah 1343/19 June 1925, 6-7.
this or that, they will jabber on for so long and speak such nonsense that even Plato’s brain would feel exhausted and give up. In all of this blabber, there is everything, inflection [saraf], syntax [nahv], logic, semantics, rhetoric, philosophy and the fables of Fontaine [fābl-i funtāyn], there is all of this but there is no Iranian sense [hiss-i īrānī].”

The curriculum of the girls’ school Nāmūs490 also reflects this intersection of discourses. The school’s announcement of its curriculum in Hahl al-Matīn reads like a melange of ideologies: “First [or grade one], for girls who are beginners [i.e. almost illiterate], elementary books in accordance with modern education [bitarz-i jadīd]. Second, for girls who are somewhat literate, the Quran and principles of [Islamic] belief and the Sharia. Third, books on Persian and composition [inshā’]. Fourth, a little geography and history of Iran. Fifth, orthography [rasmul khatt] and arithmetic and sīyāq [i.e. traditional accounting and math]. Sixth, sewing and crochet an hour a day.491 It does not take close reading of the above to notice the presence of elements of modern, Islamic, and national education in shaping the young minds of future Iran. And in a statement closely echoing Taqizadeh’s declaration of a wholesale adoption of European values, the periodical al-Islām, while approving of modern schools, warned about an educational system where the youth might be “outwardly and inwardly and apparently and virtually alienated from Islam” (zāhīran va bātinan va sūratan va ma’nan az islām bīgānah [shavand]).492

The question of national language was closely entangled with the question of national education and was as such a matter of contention in the social text, as it also was the main focus of “Fārsī Shikar Ast.” In an article entitled “Language” (zabān), the author, “M. H. K.,” provides a response to an earlier article in which the author had invoked “Islamic zeal” (ghayrat-i islāmī) to remind the readers of the fact that Iran is an Islamic country and that the presence of Arabic words in Persian should be a matter of pride. The former author responds, with due respect and with reference to quasi-scientific and historical evidence, that a living nation thrives on its


490 The school’s name itself is a locus of intersecting discourses. The word signifies one’s female relatives, especially mother, daughter and spouse. Its connotation, however, is that of protecting the females in a family. As such, it is linked with a family’s honour and the females’ chastity.


This might present itself as a simple case of disagreement. Underlying debates of this nature, however, were national, modernist, and Islamist rhetoric. This is more evident in another article entitled “Islam has no [fixed] language.” The author opens the article by citing the Quran 33:40 attesting to Muhammad as the true prophet of Allah. Having thus established his allegiance to Islam, the author draws on the first part of the verse as well as on “the science of philology” (filāluji or ‘ilmillisān) to prove that “language is the foundation of nationality not religiosity” (zābān asās-i millīyyat ast na diyānati). He then ends the article by quoting the Persian poet Nizami (1141-1209) as authority on unwarranted distortions to the true religion. Enclosed in between the discourses of Islam and of national tradition in verse, the prose article arrives at the modern nationalist discourse. Yet another article suggests the establishment of a “modern Pahlavi script” (khatt-i nuvīni pahlavī) which is reminiscent of Malkum Khan’s creation. Lest one might be tempted to think that these debates charted a one way traffic towards all things “modern” and away from all things “traditional,” the periodical Habl al-Matīn announced the omission of Latin letters from domestic stamps in its October 1929 issue. An issue of long contemplation, “national” language was now embedded with political, Islamic, modernist, and even ethical discourses. The article “Alphabet war” (jang-i alifbā), written by a female author, ‘Azrā Farbūd, considered the movement for a national language an “ethical coup d’etat” (kūditā-yi akhlāqī) and suggested the script from the Zand era (early to mid-nineteenth century) as the best option but emphatically rejected the adoption of Latin alphabet.

Such confused, multifarious, and polyphonic articulations of Iranian modernity testify to a liminal collective consciousness. As if capturing the essence of this intermediary state, the author of the article “Āzarbā’ījān” (Azerbaijan) published in Habl al-Matīn, paints a picture of the now

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495 The verse reads: “Muhammad is not father to any of your men, but he is the messenger of Allah and the seal of prophets.”
498 See for example the fielding of similar issues in the periodical Kāvah: “Ikhtār rajī’ bih rasmulkhatt.” Kāvah. No. 31-32, 5 Khordad 1288/26 May 1909, p. 17. The question of language and script had been ongoing since at least the middle of the nineteenth century, as we saw in the case of Malkum Khan above.
archetypal figures ākhūnd (cleric) and fukulī (dandy) as destructive of national balance (“this one destroys our worldly life the other our afterlife” [īn dunyā-yi mā rā kharāb mīkunad va ān ākhirat-i mā rā]), suggesting that the latter, the dandies, take the bulk of the blame for their extravagance and vanity.\textsuperscript{500} In a fascinating yet apt gesture of this liminal state of affairs, the author ends his article by signing as “The purgatorial” (barzakhī), explaining that this “means neither ākhūnd nor fukulī” (p. 15). In response to this article, a piece written and signed by an equally symbolic figure, “Hell bound” (dūzakhī), resummons the archetypes ākhūnd and fukulī. While agreeing with “purgatorial” that “neither ākhūnd nor fukulī is of use to us” (na ākhūnd va na fukulī bikār-i mā mīkhurad), the author differs on who takes the bigger share of the blame which in his opinion is the cleric.\textsuperscript{501} Though these two polarized figures of excess were increasingly being associated with the lack of national unity, each, as we have seen, embodies a multiplicity of discourses, ideologies, and languages. Lying on the symbolic extremes of the liminal collective consciousness, they nevertheless persistently meet, embrace, and transform in the elusive and polyphonic narrative of Iranian modernity. This anxiety of liminality is perhaps best apparent in the passing of a bill in 1929 on the uniformity of national attire.\textsuperscript{502}

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\textsuperscript{501} “Javāb-i āqā-yi barzakhī” (Response to Mr. Purgatory). Habl al-Matīn. No.21, 18 Zī Hajjah 1343/10 July 1925, 8-9.
\textsuperscript{502} “Qānūn-i ittihād-i libās dar jalasah-i 16” (The uniform clothing bill in [parliamentary] session 16). Habl al-Matīn. No. 5-6, 9 Bahman 1307/29 January 1929.
Chapter 5

5 The Munāzirah in Historical (Con)text

As the genre of Iranian modernity, the munāzirah narrativizes the societal transformations that characterized the difficult and contested course of Iran’s adaptation of modernity. Its topoi mirror the trajectory of the country’s shifting perceptions of itself as modern. More specifically, the thematic, structural, and conceptual shifts underlying the genre as a whole reflect changing sensibilities effected by corresponding socio-historical conditions which resulted in a gradual but increasing awareness of state mechanisms, foreign influences, ethno-religious identity, Iran’s geopolitical situation, socioeconomic realities, and individual and collective rights, all of which prompted ideations about lifting the country out of its wretched state. As such, shifts in the genre are indicative of the sociocultural transformations that informed its narrative which exhibits a progression in terms of mutable attitudes. This progression, however, should not be mistaken for the linear logic inherent in the term “progress,” for these shifts do not map an evolutionary path of progress from a purportedly lower to an allegedly higher state. For much in the winding course of Iranian modernity (as in the labyrinthine narrative of the munāzirah) would disrupt such linear imaginings of (a)historical progress. It would instead be more appropriate, given the sociocultural transformations reflected in the munāzirah, to speak of a circular trajectory animated by centrifugal and centripetal forces.

5.1 Characterization in the Munāzirah

This push-pull curvature is first and foremost evident in characterization in the munāzirah. It is readily discernible in the move from character archetypes in earlier munāzirahs to social types, individual types, and even real-life personalities in later ones. Character-actants such as the Friend (in several munāzirahs) Rafīq, Vazīr (friend and vizier in Rafīq u Vazīr), Shaykh, Vazīr (in Shaykh u Vazīr), the unseen angel Hātaf-i Ghaybī (in Yak Kalima and in Musāhibah-i Islāmīyyah), Shaykh,503 Shūkh (the clergy and the Europeanized graduates in two munāzirahs with the same title), Muqīm, Musāfir (resident and traveller in Muqīm u Musāfir) and Pīr, Javān

503 Alternatively, Ākhūnd as in Musāhibah-i Islāmīyyah and, increasingly, in post-constitutional periodicals.
(old and young in Nūshdārū) are archetypal embodiments of distinct yet complementary classes of elites (e.g. shaykh and vizier), of opposing societal factions of the traditional and the emerging middle class (e.g. shaykh and the graduates; scribe and commoner in Mirzā u ‘Avām), or of the antithesis between new and old (e.g. the old man and the youth), static and dynamic (e.g. resident and traveller). While apparent in nomenclature and existing to some extent in reality, exclusive diametric antagonism does not account for the palimpsestic fusion of discourses in the munāzirah. As mouthpieces for these overlapping discourses, the character-types display a comparable overlaying of identities. We have seen, for example, how the character type vizier can alternate between being a hindrance to reform (as in Rafīq u Vazīr) or a tireless advocate of the same (as in Shaykh u Vazīr). We have also seen that a certain character type can disrupt the stock qualities associated with its role. The shaykh, for instance, can alternatively represent the reactionary obstinacy of the clerical class (as in Shaykh u Vazīr) or appear as a wise figure outwitting his Europeanized opponent in knowledge of modern rhetoric (as he does in both versions of Shaykh u Shūkh). Similarly, the Europeanized reformist can impersonate a foolish figure of rootless excess (Shaykh u Shūkh) or a sober patriot attempting to promote the status of his homeland in the civilized world through reform (Rafīq u Vazīr). The figure Islām in Musāhibah-i Islāmīyyah (Islamic Interview) itself becomes the agent of change and of the hostile attitude towards regressive clergy. Such in-between identities explain the existence of lone figures that do not apparently fit the binary of opponents but whose very existence signifies the convergence of otherwise disparate discourses. The figures Friend and Hātaf-i Ghaybī (unseen angel) in Yak Kalimah (One Word) exemplify this category. Both the Friend and the unseen angel advocate western style reform. We are reminded, however, that the Friend is well-versed in Islamic tradition (9) and that his views represent those of a learned Muslim. The unseen angel, himself a supporter of reform, is at the same time a figure of divine inspiration. These reform-minded agents of a religious character personify the split subject of Iranian modernity which finds various expression in the characterology of the constitutional and post-constitutional munāzirahs.

The liminal figure of the Friend continues its existence into the munāzirahs of the constitutional and post-constitutional periods as a functionally similar yet increasingly distinct character. Whereas the earlier Friend was a shadowy figure sometimes merging with the voice of the author-narrator, in later narratives he is increasingly represented as a distinct, literally in-between
character. This is not to suggest that this shift marks a process of evolving narrative sophistication according to some pre-conceived theory of fictional characterization. For the figure plays a functional rather than an aesthetic role: that of the in-between space through which the views of the two contending figures are mediated. Where no such character exists, its function is carried out by the setting of the story, as we will shortly see. In the anonymous *Shaykh u Shūkh*, for example, the host and his house become the meeting place of the clergy and the graduates. Whereas the house accommodates the convergence of contending discourses, the host, as we saw, himself becomes the subject of the act of reading and of interpretation. Incidentally, the entire story is narrated by the clergy’s “friend.” The host in *Muqīm u Musāfīr* (Resident and Traveller) plays a similar role when he supplements the Traveller’s arguments with fragments of the social text. In *Suhbat bā Sar-i Rafīqam* (Conversation with My Friend’s Skull), the Friend, while given a proper name, still furnishes the purpose of the link for the synthesis of various discourses: mysticism (of which the Friend himself and later the author are representatives), nationalism, and religiosity, all filtered through the liminal space of the diaspora. A similar strategy of spatio-anthropomorphic liminality is at work in *Mukālimah-i Sayyāh-i Īrānī bā Shakhṣ-i Hindī* (The Conversation between an Iranian Traveller and an Indian Person) where India becomes the meeting place of the Magna Carta and “oriental despotism” and where ethno-religious identities are concentrated in the Indian person, a “friend of the Iranian state and a coreligionist of the rulers of Iran” (42). The Iranian Traveller himself embodies the figure of the traveller whose itinerary includes a departure with no definitive arrival in sight.

Indeed the figure of the traveller, the linkage between two worlds, reappears elsewhere, as in the debate between the religious teacher of Bukhara and the European person (*Munāzirah-i Mudarris-i Bukhārā’ī bā Yak nafar Farangī*) where the two meet in India, the temporary space of residence before the narrator makes his way to Mecca. The Farangī, as we earlier saw, comes across as the true “friend” of Islam in that munāzirah. The Traveller re-emerges, as the connector of two otherwise incongruous worlds, in *Muqīm u Musāfīr*. Not surprisingly, his argument throughout the debate centres on the commensurability of Islamic principles with constitutionalism, the merger of spatially segregated discourses best linked through his in-between figure. The Traveller in *Ā’inah-i Mashrūṭah* (Mirror of Constitutionalism) joins with the Farmer to mediate between the extreme positions occupied by the Shaykh and the Europeanized Youth years after the establishment of the second Majlis and to signify the persistence of the old
debate. The Farmer, whose farm symbolizes the homeland upon which foreigners and insiders alike lay claim, marks yet another split in the intermediary figure of the third person (friend, host, traveller) resulting in the depiction of the homeland as an afflicted figure on whom contending discourses converge. This figure is most visible as the Hajji in Suhbat-i Sang u Sabū (The Conversation between Stone and Pot) and in Fārsī Shikar Ast (Persian Is Sugar). In the former munāzirah, the opium addicted Hajji represents an ailing nation in need of a cure. Hamid and the two doctors, Khān Hakīm Bāshī and Hajī Hakīm Bāshī, each have their own designs for the Hajji. Mirza ‘Arif, a traveller, arrives as the linkage between the remedies of the rivals. His is the speech merging at times with the author’s and appropriated at others for Hamid’s evil plans. His is also the voice echoing other contending voices. The nameless traveller-narrator in Fārsī Shikar Ast as well occupies a similar position to that of Mirza ‘Arif. He stands in the liminal space next to the confused youth, Ramazān, focalizing the odd excesses of the Shaykh and the Farangī Maʿāb. 504 The existence of these in-between figures does not negate the hybridity of the other characters on either side of the continuum. For as we have seen they, in turn, are figures of discursive plurality. As the two sides of the debate gradually became associated with increasingly divergent and opposing discourses in the constitutional and post-constitutional periods, the third figure began to germinate as the link formerly provided for by the mediating role of Islam.

The inclusion of real life personalities as characters in (semi) fictional accounts equally provides for a link in which the synthesizing function of the munāzirah, but not characterization as such, is foregrounded. In Malkum’s Muzākirah dar bārah-i Tashkīl-i Bānk (Negotiation about the Establishment of a Bank), the characters are real court ministers convening in a futural time-space to discuss the establishment of a national bank. As such, they are individualized character archetypes accommodating not only the merger of archetypes (idealized future deputies) with individual consciousness, but also the space of present experience with the horizon of future expectation. In Nadā-yi ‘Adālat (Proclamation of Justice), similarly, Muzaffār al-Dīn Shah addresses real-life courtiers and ministers on the necessity of establishing a consultative assembly within the fictional space of the munāzirah. As we have seen, there are no debating

504 The term “European Mannered” is in later periods increasingly replaced by the term fukulī, particularly in the periodical Habl al-Maṭīn.
characters in this piece; however, its composition around the headings “I say” (mīgūyam) and “you will respond” (khwāhīd guft) reveals the extent to which characterization in the munāzirah is tantamount with the synthesis of discourses. In the anonymous munāzirah containing three (re)enactments of the same narrative (including the dramatic piece, grocer’s play) this is put on literal display when the third and final rendition enacts the debate between the character-headings “question” and “answer.” It will be remembered that the first two versions involved real-life court personalities and the actual grocer’s play was performed before the Shah.

As mentioned earlier, there is no linear progression in this characterological itinerary. In other words, there is no linear evolution from character archetypes to social types and then on to individualized characters in the munāzirahs of the three periods under discussion. Shifts in characterization mentioned above do not follow a chronological order that would allow for convenient posthumous theorizing or taxonomies. While there clearly are some detectable changes in the casting of characters (such as the emergence and increasing prominence of a third figure, the giving of proper names to social types, or the transformation of the types clergy and Farangi ma’āb), these changes serve a functional rather than a narrative purpose. Arguing for an aesthetically evolving narrative, therefore, suppresses the cyclical appearance of these elements in favour of a linear argument underlying the grand narrative of progress. These “devices” do not follow a specific chronology in order of appearance. The character archetypes “old” and “young” (pīr, javān), for instance, appear in a post-constitutional text (Nūshdārū) while characters with proper names (which would provide evidence for a progressive argument) appear in several pre-constitutional munāzirahs. What is important to note, then, is that characterization in the munāzirah serves the sole purpose of fielding opposing points of view and their synthesis through some intermediary element, a process that, due to its ongoing and inconclusive nature, became the defining feature of the munāzirah.

505 In early munāzirahs, the terms ‘ulamā and mullah are alternatively used to refer to the clerical class. The former, literally meaning “scholars,” is a term of veneration, while the latter carries almost a derogatory sense. These terms were alternatively used to refer to the significance of the clergy as spiritual leaders and protectors of the word of god or to the regressive practices or corruption wielded by the same class thanks to the immense social power they possessed. Similarly, the neutral term farangi ma’āb (European mannered) was later increasingly replaced by the term fukulī (bow-tie sporting person) carrying a more pejorative sense. In later periods the term munavvar ol-fikr (lit. enlightened minded) or its Persian equivalent rowshan fikr were also used.
5.2 Setting in the Munāzirah

The setting of the munāzirah is a contributing factor in this process. However, speaking of a “setting” in its modern sense of a specific time and place where the action unfolds would be misleading. Indeed, there is no action in its modern narrative sense in the munāzirah. The metaphorical sense in the word “unfold” with its linear temporal overtones would distort what really “happens” in the munāzirah. For, as we have seen, the main “action” in the munāzirah is ideation – with a circular rather than a linear trajectory. Given these considerations, it would therefore be more accurate to refer to thematized space as the backdrop against which the munāzirah is set. It is in this sense that the word setting will be used here. The most salient feature of setting in the munāzirah is ambiguity. Closely associated with the motif of the ghaybī (unseen), setting in the munāzirah acts as the thematization of ambiguity. As such setting accommodates, as we have seen, several significations: as an abstract space where the ancient and the modern, the physical and the ideational, the here and the there, the now and the then converge, where the yet-unseen state of a past-future associated with Farangistān can symbolically be realized, a space for ideation, idealization, anticipation, and abstraction, a space, finally, where the discourses of Islamic tradition, of the national past, and of the modern can find simultaneous coexistence.

This ambiguous setting provides the abstract time and space in the munāzirah. The setting in Rafīq u Vazīr, Shaykh u Vazīr, Yak Kalimah, and in Musāhibah-i Islāmiyyah is unmistakably vague, with the first three texts making explicit references to the motif of the ghaybī.⁵⁰⁶ It is impossible to determine the physical coordinates of an actual place in these munāzirahs. In others, it is possible to ascertain the existence of an actual space which nevertheless remains ambivalent or else functions as a space of liminality. Hosting spaces, cities, and foreign countries belong to the latter category. In Guftigū-yi Mīrzā va ‘Avām, for example, the first part of the conversation takes place at the official scribe’s house and the second part at the commoner’s residence. Textual clues provide vague details in respect to the city which could possibly be either Tehran, the seat of the crown, or Tabriz, the abode of the crown prince. Similarly, in the anonymous munāzirah containing the grocer’s play, the setting alternates between the city and

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⁵⁰⁶ In many other munāzirahs the motif is either implicitly present or exists in relation to characters such as in Mīrzā va ‘Avām and Nūshdārū, among others.
the court, while the setting of \textit{Ganjīnah-ī Ansār} could either be Tehran or Isfahan. The host’s house provides the space for the meeting of the contenders in the anonymous \textit{Shaykh u Shākh}, in \textit{Suhbat-i Sang u Sabū}, in ‘Āīnah-i Mashrūtah, and in \textit{Muqīm u Musāfir}, while in \textit{Fārsī Shikar Ast} the setting is the liminal space of a government jailhouse. Foreign lands likewise function as the liminal space where the fusion of discourses is made possible on a literal rather than a merely symbolic level. Interestingly, these lands often happen to be India (as in \textit{Mukālimah-i Sayyāh-i Īrānī bā Shaks-ī Hindī} and \textit{Munāzirah-i Mudarris-i Bukhārā ‘ī bā Yak Nafar Farangi}) or in the Caucasus (such as \textit{Suhbat bā Sar-i Rafigam}), themselves in-between spaces hosting a dominant foreign power within the cultural domain of tradition. \textit{Nadā-ī ‘Adālat} is the only text that makes implicit reference to being set somewhere in Europe as it was presented to Muzaffar al-Din Shah during his visit there. However, the space of \textit{Farangistān} here functions as an idealized rather than an actual space, for the \textit{munāzirah} includes the text of a constitution yet to be granted. Such a futural projection in association with a space also features in Malkum Khan’s other piece, \textit{Muzākirah dar bārah-i Tashkīl-i Bānk}, where the imaginary space of a future \textit{Majlis} forms the fictional setting of the story, an imaginary locus which as we saw is populated by real-life court officials.

There are only two \textit{munāzirahs} that specify what would pass for setting in its modern sense: \textit{Muqīm u Musāfir} and \textit{Nūshdārū}. The former text provides a specific date and a village around the city of Isfahan, while the latter specifies a coffeehouse on Lālah Zār (lit. Tulip Field) Avenue in Tehran as the meeting place of the contenders. However, placed in their historical contexts, even these physically unambiguous places were in reality spaces of liminal experience. Isfahan at the time was a quasi-independent city state in whose governance the author of \textit{Muqīm u Musāfir}, Nurullah Najafi Isfahani, was a main participant through the executive powers of the Sacred National Assembly of Isfahan (\textit{Anjuman-i Muqaddas-i Millī-yi Isfahān}) which he had himself established (this after the city had expelled the official governor Zill al-Sultan).\textsuperscript{507} In the aftermath of the bombardment of the \textit{Majlis} by Muhammad ‘Ali Shah, Najafi Isfahani was

\textsuperscript{507} Besides ending Zillal Sultan’s reign in Isfahan, Najafi Isfahani and his \textit{Anjuman} organized and trained volunteers to advance on Tehran. Vanessa Martin, \textit{Iran between Islamic Nationalism and Secularism} (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 173-4. George Curzon makes a reference to this event in his usual hostile manner; however, his statement confirms the status of the city as a semi-independent state: “The arrogance of the clerical order has been very much augmented since the fall from high estate of the Zil-es-Sultan,” \textit{Persia and the Persian Question} (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1892), 43.
instrumental in organizing an army of national volunteers to join the Bakhtiyārī tribal forces who would eventually conquer the capital and depose the Shah. As such, the setting of this munāzirah, Isfahan, though specified, would still constitute a liminal space. Nominally subject to a distant sovereign yet independently implementing the principles of a constitutional state, the in-between status of the city functions as the societal field for the rivalry of the very contending discourses narratively fielded in Muqīm u Musāfīr. A similar historical condition of liminality applies to the setting of Nūshdārū. Often hailed as the locus of Iranian modernity, Lālah Zār Avenue was born by order of Naser al-Din Shah who, impressed with the design of Chemps-Élysées during one of his trips to Farangistān, intended to create a street in the capital in its image.

In its heyday, Lālah Zār was an upscale neighbourhood, boasting the very first western style cafes, restaurants, and showrooms frequented by local fukulis and foreigners alike. As the epicentre of the latest western trends in the country, it was also the focus of angry criticism by the opponents of western emulation for its corrupting influence. In its second transformation during the reign of the second Pahlavi monarch, it became increasingly associated with an enclave of cheap cafes, lowly music, thugs and brotherls. With its once glorious cinemas, shops and grand hotels dismantled or laying in ruin after the revolution of 1979, today Lālah Zār Avenue is a cramped and dull commercial neighbourhood housing unkempt shops selling electronic devices and mobile phones. The historical transformation of Lālah Zār says much about its status as the liminal space for the convergence of competing discourses, for its surface has literally been the palimpsest of successive inscriptions.

As with characterization, the tropology of setting in the munāzirah does not readily yield to convenient posthumous taxonomies. The motifs employed as, and in, the setting do not follow along an aesthetic axis charting the path from primitive to more sophisticated uses, such that a


510 Ibid., 5-15.

511 See for example such views towards Lālah Zār Avenue in Ganjīnah-yi Ansār (discussed in this study). The sentiment continued well into the mid twentieth century. The novel Bā Sharafhā (The Honourables) first published in 1946 is a case in point.

certain motif identified in the preconstitutional period may (and does) reappear in a postconstitutional text and vice versa. If, for the sake of theorizing, any degree of certainty can be dictated on its function as a topos, it is the fact that setting in the munāzirah serves a purpose similar to the other elements of the genre: an intermediary space between, and for the convergence of, contending positions.

5.3 The Temporal Logic of the Munāzirah

Closely associated with setting is the issue of time. As conceived of in narratology, the time of the story, the time frame within which events unfold, however, is in most cases either non-existent or at best utterly ambiguous in the munāzirah: ambiguous not in the novelistic sense of condensed, extended, or muddled time, but as a temporal vacuum, a non-time. The time of the story in the narratological sense must therefore be distinguished from the temporal logic governing the narrative’s universe. It is in this latter context that the treatment of time in the munāzirah should generally be placed, particularly in pre-constitutional texts. In line with the principal style of indigenous dynastic histories, the temporal logic of the munāzirah draws from a cyclical temporal logic necessitated by an understanding of time as a vehicle of self-contained episodes.\(^{513}\) This is particularly the case in pre-constitutional munāzirahs. In almost every text from this period, the futural state of Farangistān and the idealized Islamic past are folded onto the present. The linear distance separating actuality and possibility is in this way disrupted. As actualities, the already-experienced Islamic utopia and the anticipated advances of Farangistān conjoin in the present. Memory and prophecy, former and future times are in this way commensurate in a present pregnant with both possibilities. All the rulers of the country need to do is to realize and activate the link between the two temporal categories. It is in this context that blind emulation of the Farangīs becomes such a hotly debated issue in the constitutional and post-constitutional periods: it disrupts this temporal link.

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Arguably the most elaborate rendition of this temporal logic in the pre-constitutional munāzirah is Mustashar al-Dawlah’s *Yak Kalimah*. In it, as we have seen, the author presents a detailed polemic on the commensurability of *Farang* and Islam, equating each and every clause in the French Codes with a Quranic verse or a prophetic tradition, often with both. The “one word” referred to in this treatise, law, is also the word that Malkum Khan, arguably one of the pioneers of constitutionalism in Iran, so vehemently advocates in almost every work he produced beginning with his seminal *Kitābchah-i Ghaybī* (The Unseen Booklet). As the argument goes, law and its implementation will provide the missing link that completes the historical cycle of commensurability. The motif of the unseen (*ghaybī*), present in both Mustashar al-Dawlah’s and Malkum’s work, is closely connected with the unfulfilled non-time of the present: the idea of *Farangistān*, as the external manifestation of an ideal Islamic past, corresponds with the notion of *ghaybī* as the yet-unseen version of that state. In both *Yak Kalimah* and *Rafīq u Vazīr*, the Friend reminds us of the simultaneity of European laws with what Islamic principles have “established … for the Islamic peoples 1280 years ago” (*Yak Kalimah*, 23). The association of spatial categories (*Farangistān*, the “there” of progress) with temporal ones (a “foretaste” of what is anticipated-yet-experienced) in *Yak Kalimiah* and in other texts in this period points to the interconnectedness of time and space which as we saw in the case of setting above make the munāzirah a narrative of in-between and inconclusive becoming. India, the liminal stage of *Mukālimah-i Sayyāh-i Īrānī bā Shakhs-i Hindī*, provides the spatial context for the redeployment of a cyclical time in that narrative. In it, too, the simultaneity of Islam’s past with Europe’s futural state is reiterated through numerous references to Quranic verses that are said to be commensurate with Europe’s civilizational progress and in opposition to current despotic practices in the East. An important shift, however, is discernible in the later texts of this period: implicit challenges to Islamic principles as uncontested sources of authority. In the conversation between the Iranian and the Indian, for instance, certain Quranic verses are invoked in a dual capacity, each contender appropriating the same verse to advance his own views. “*Lā tajassasū*” (Do not spy [on one another], Quran 49:12), therefore, provides both ammunition for the Indian to criticize Iran’s legal system and justification for the Iranian to defend the same (101-7). Similarly, in *Guftigū-yi Mīrzā va ʿAvām* Europe’s progress is said to be based on (even plagiarized from) Islamic principles throughout the narrative. However, when the discussion turns to the Quranic concept of jihad, it is alternatively upheld and questioned: first as the principle upon which Prussian military training is based (49) and then as ineffective in the
Russo-Persian wars which ended in the humiliating defeats for the Persians (15, 33, 37). This shift, together with emerging references to Persia’s national past as an alternative to Islamic heritage (such as in Malkum’s Rafīq u Vazīr), gathered increasing momentum in the munāzirahs of the following periods.

In general, the munāzirahs of the constitutional period become more and more present-oriented and display a confused temporal consciousness. While the supremacy of Islam still holds sway over the discourse of the munāzirah – particularly in repeated invocations of the Quranic phrase *amr-i bih ma’rūf va nahy az munkar* (enjoining to virtue and forbidding from sin) as the spirit of constitutionalism – emphasis on the commensurability of Islam with European civilizational values becomes less frequent while reference to the national past appears more frequently. This shift, however, does not conveniently accommodate the stock assumption about the “development” of a regressive religious discourse into a “secular” national one, for it coincides with a manifest shift in viewing Faranistān as an undisputable utopia. No longer unquestionably idealized, Europe and its advances continue to function, however, as a chrono-topia. The anonymous Shaykh u Shūkh best exemplifies this shift. Composed approximately in the final decades of the pre-constitutional period, the text nevertheless marks the beginning of this gradual transformation. The Shaykh’s continuous invocation of traditional texts that “initiated” many sciences (history, geology, military science, physics, etc.) ahead of Europe, his rejection of empiricism as a valid method of knowledge production, and his elevation of gnosis over modern knowledge are noticeable examples scattered throughout that munāzirah. He, however, has a more sophisticated understanding of modern European sciences than his contenders, the graduates, and time and again laments the lack of attention to their application in Iran. While he continually calls the graduates apes (*būzinah*) for emulating Farangi manners, he nevertheless derides government officials for their lack of attention to progress and to learned scholars. Similar sensibilities in other narratives of this period mark the shift from an idealized past/future approach to time towards a more presented-oriented attitude. In Ganjīnah-i Ansār, for example, the main focus of the contenders is the country’s existing problems and the necessity to mend them, with a view however of curbing foreign influence. The confused narrative of Suhbat bā Sar-i Rafiqam, similarly, is not anchored in a specific timeframe. It is, nevertheless, mainly focussed on the present problems in Iran which are filtered through parallels with the horrific conditions of Iranian émigrés in the Caucasus. Mourning for the nation in this munāzirah takes
precedence over mourning for Imam Husayn, a subtle sign of the gradual foregrounding of national over Islamic discourse. Besides the now familiar equation of constitutionalism with Islamic principles, *Muqīm u Musāfīr*, as well, departs from the practice of equating the time of *Farang* with Islamic time, common in the pre-constitutional texts, by instead focussing on the current crisis crippling the country. The equation of constitutionalism with Islamic principles, in other words, serves a more pragmatic than a philosophical purpose: rebuking the proponents of *mashrūʿah* (sharia based governance) who worked hard to legitimize the Shah’s suppression of *mashrūtaḥ* (constitutionalism) after the bombardment of the first Majlis.

The *munāzirahs* of the post-constitutional period continue to be mainly present-oriented, though still alternating between *Farang* and tradition as the supreme code. The utterly tangled plot of *Suḥbat-i Sang u Sabū* provides for a fitting example. Composed around the central, and presently existing, problem of opium addiction in the country, the concentric narratives of this *munāzirah* display the confusion of a liminal presence. We have seen how this condition is reflected in the characterization. A similar pattern applies to the treatment of time. While the time of tradition lags behind modern time in discussions of a final remedy for opium addiction, the transformation of Hamid into a *Farangī Maʿāb* at the end corresponds with the apocalyptic destiny of the Haji-homeland. The very structure of *Nūshdārū* mirrors this pattern. Through a pre/post comparison, the affairs of the country before and after the modernization project are analyzed with all evidence pointing to a deterioration of the state of the country. It is in this way, for example, that the substitution of the *Farangī* calculus for the traditional *sīyāq* has only produced disorder and lengthy bills (457, 466). This does not however deter the contenders from advocating the establishment of modern institutions throughout the narrative. The coexistence of distinct temporalities in a frozen present also finds symbolic expression in *Fārsī Shikar Ast* where the jail houses all three times: the Shaykh (the embodiment of tradition), the *Farangī Maʿāb* (the impersonation of European time) and Ramazān (the in-between present). Here, too, the representatives of both temporalities are criticized as figures of excess resulting in the confusion of the youth, Ramazān, who, along with the narrator, represents national time. Only one *munāzirah* explicitly and persistently fields the mythic time of the national past as commensurate with Europe’s futural time (*Āʿīnah-i Mashrūtaḥ* – Mirror of Constitutionalism), an equation, however, that does not preclude the portrayal of the traditional Shaykh and the Europeanized youth as culprits. Thus in general, unlike the pre-constitutional period, the narratives of the two
later periods do not unequivocally embrace Farangistān as a utopic space of perfection. Instead, they engage in a debate about whether a wholesale adoption of European values is an effective strategy in addressing the persistent problems in the country. In a rhetoric bordering on technocracy, western advances are still admired, but the supremacy of European values, mannerisms, and practices are increasingly challenged, as is hard headed adherence to tradition. The time of the munāzirah is situated between these extremes.

5.4 What Is at Issue in the Munāzirah?

The issues fielded and discussed in the munāzirah follow a similar pattern whereby the simultaneity of the traditional and the modern is filtered through a present of lack – a present lacking both the purported glories of a mythic past and the progress of an anticipated future, a present nonetheless that is pregnant with the possibility of both. The synthesis of the two lies at the core of discussions over the implementation of other, more pragmatic issues. The issue of emulation is so energetically and emphatically debated precisely because the emulator disrupts the coexistence of the two discourses which ceaselessly compete for expression in the debate over the necessity and implementation of modernizing projects. The anxiety of emulation underlies the myriad of practical issues deliberated on in the munāzirah so much so that often the implementation of a certain modernizing venture is not a matter of serious contention (we have seen how the contenders may agree on several issues). What is at issue, instead, is the elevation of one discourse over the other.

The many issues of contention, then, are as follows: Law and order, establishment of a parliament, reform of infrastructure (railroads, national army, tax revenue), repatriation of land lost to Russia (Rafig u Vazir); lack of law and order due to corruption of officials, feudal tyranny, promotion of meritocracy through education, establishment of a professional army (Mīrza va ʿAvām); the reform of “Islamic alphabet” (Shaykh u Vazir); distinguishing customary from public law, separation of religious and civil law, promotion of the vernacular, promotion of meritocracy, freedom of speech and assembly, suffrage, taxes, revenues and government accountability, modern education, orderliness and cleanliness of towns and cities, standardization of coinage and measures, exploration of mines, reform of the military (Yak Kalimah); modern reforms viewed as “false emulation” (Anonymous); separation of civil and religious laws, taxes, language simplification, reform of customs, reform of the legal system, matrimonial registries,
journalism and poetry, the publishing industry (*Mukālimah-i Īranī u Hindī*); reform of the regressive clergy, reform of alphabet, simplification of language, modern education, promotion of ethical behaviour and condemnation of *taqīyah* (*Musāhibah-i Islāmīyyah*); establishment of a parliament guaranteeing the security of life and property, freedom of speech, legal rights, compulsory education, and human rights (*Nadā-yi ‘Adālat*); the efficacy of implementing western-inspired reforms (*Shaykh u Shākh*); establishment of a national bank (*Muzākirah-i Bānk* and *Ganjīnah-i Ansār*), reform of finances through foreign loans, establishment of a legal apparatus, improvement of military and trade and industries, resistance to foreign influence (*Ganjīnah-i Ansār*); establishment of modern schools, protection of Islamic heritage under Russian rule (*Mudarris-i Bukhārā’ī u Farangī*); the miserable state of Iranian émigrés in the Caucasus, denunciation of the clerical class (*Suhbat bā Sar-i Rafīqam*); establishment of a house of justice, reform of the penal system, liberty, import/export, national income, national treasury, national industry, mining, national investment and banks, security of life and property (*Muqīm u Musāfir*); rampant corruption of officials, opium addiction (*Suhbat-i Sang u Sabū*); the sham of language purification, the adverse effects of replacing traditional sciences with modern ones, *Farangī Ma’ābī*, the inclusion of Persian and Islamic ethics in national education (*Nūshdārū*); foreign influence, opium, establishment of modern institutions (*Āīnah-i Mashrūtah*); and national language and emulation (*Fārsī Shikar Ast*).

The persistence of most of these issues across the three periods under discussion attests to the urgency with which reformers advocated modernization as essentially tied with the very existence of the country. Thus it is that issues related to the implementation of law, language reform, modern education, and official corruption, to cite a few examples, span all three periods. This pragmatism, however, is gradually supplied with an evaluative attitude in the constitutional and post-constitutional periods. No single *munāzirah* in the pre-constitutional era directly or mainly engages with the issue of foreign influence (except the anonymous *munāzirah* containing the grocer’s play which revolves around the issue of emulation). Several *munāzirahs* in the constitutional and post-constitutional periods, however, narrativize the growing anxiety of foreign influence (*Shaykh u Shākh, Ganjīnah-i Ansār, Mudarris-i Bukhārā’ī u Farangī, Nūshdārū, Ā‘īnah-i Mashrūtah, Fārsī Shikar Ast*). It was as a result of this shift in attitude that extreme elements, from the right or from the left, were perceived as threats to national sovereignty and emphatically eliminated. The leading clerical proponent of *mashrū‘ah* (sharia-
based governance), Shaykh Fazlullah Nuri, was hanged by the mujahidin shortly after the 
deposition of Muhammad ‘Ali Shah for his direct involvement in thwarting the constitutional 
cause.\textsuperscript{514} Likewise, the career of Taqi Zadeh, a tireless constitutionalist from the start, was 
temporarily undone after leading constitutionalist clerics demanded his expulsion from the 
\textit{Majlis} when he was perceived as an advocate of wholesale adoption of western values and 
amostly declared an infidel.\textsuperscript{515} Taqi Zadeh proceeded to do just that in his Berlin based journal 
\textit{Kāvah} but his advocacy (or that of the opposing camp) did not end ceaseless attempts for an ever 
ilusive synthesis of the competing discourses of tradition and modernity.

\section*{5.5 Competing Discourses}

The quest for this synthesis is reflected in yet another element of the \textit{munāzirah}: the fielding of a 
myriad of narratives. The perpetual search for an authoritative account, a final verdict, the “one 
word” that would settle the debate makes the \textit{munāzirah} a compendium of competing texts. This 
textual polyphony is enacted through the fielding of an assortment of rival genres, styles, and 
other textual species along with their attendant languages and discourses. A polyphonic array of 
narratives partake in the animated and ongoing debate over a final account – from texts of 
authority (Islamic Sharia, the Quran, prophetic traditions or \textit{hadiths}, royal decrees, religious 
fatwas, French codes, the text of a constitution) to compositional styles (travelogues, journalism, 
autobiography, biography, religious sermons or \textit{khutbah}, \textit{risālah}, \textit{inshā’}, \textit{chīstān}, didactics, 
allegory, advice, witticism, satire, direct address, footnotes, parallel texts), epistemological 
approaches (geography, physics, politics, history, linguistics, science, statistics, ethnography, 
archeology, astronomy, zoology, etymology, autopsy, medicine), literary genres (drama, novel, 
\textit{hikāyat}, poetry, \textit{qissah}, short story), official documents (a bank constitution, petitions, a letter to 
the shah, a complaint sent to the Russian emperor, telegraphs), languages (Persian, Turkish, 
Arabic, Russian, English, French), and even images. Teeming with rival texts and discourses, the 
\textit{munāzirah} itself becomes the ultimate account of this process.

That the \textit{munāzirah} is composed of a corpus of rival texts we have amply seen above. A few 
particular examples will however demonstrate the way in which these rival texts competed in the


\textsuperscript{515} Ibid., Vol. 6, 1337.
very process of discourse formation. To this category belong the following disputes: translation (*tarjumah*) versus adaptation (*ta’līf*), prophecy (*istikhārah, tafa‘ul*) versus rationality, reliance on divine assistance (*tavakkul*) versus action, and healing (*shafā*) versus medication. Each binary presents a pair of solutions which, though apparently opposed, find simultaneous joint application. The narrative nature (hence the discursive significance) of these binary oppositions is discernible when we heed the fact that each pair can be (as they are) *inscribed* on the national body.

The translation of foreign texts is a central concern in the *munāzirah*. It is implied through a mixed attitude towards its necessity. On the one hand, the corpus of western laws are said to be translations of the sharia and of the Quran in a majority of the *munāzirahs* (particularly in *Yāk Kalimah* and *Muqīm u Musāfir*) and therefore their re-translation equates a return to the original narrative of Islam. On the other hand, translation of foreign texts is viewed as the vehicle through which foreign values penetrate the nation, thus animating an anxiety of influence (also in several *munāzirahs*, particularly in *Shaykh u Shūkh, Anynmous*, and *Nūshdārū*). One *munāzirah* in particular takes up the explicit discussion of translation and adaptation in its prologue: *Mukālimah-i Sayyāh-i Īrānī bā Shakhsh-i Hindī* (The Dialogue between an Iranian Traveller and an Indian Person). Initially serialized in the periodical *Habl al-Matīn*, this *munāzirah* presented itself as a translation of a foreign text. In the prologue to the book rendition, however, the author addressed the very same issue of translation by purporting that its only utility is “to waste time and to ruin [national] habits,” suggesting adaptation (*ta’līf*) as the appropriate alternative which takes into account “national taste and indigenous morality” (21-3). *Nūshdārū*, a post-constitutional text, also deems the novel to be a corrupting influence and recommends resorting to traditional tales (the author’s earlier work, *Ganjīnah-i Ansār*, had of course been subtitled “a novel”). The fact that the aforementioned *munāzirahs* continually oscillate between conceiving of themselves as, alternatively, a novel and a traditional *hikāyat* points to the extent to which “national taste” was being inscribed upon through the narrative competition between translation and adaptation.

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516 The first instalment appeared in the periodical on 12 Rabī‘ul Avval 1316 (2 August 1898) and the final episode was posted on 5 Jamādīl Avval 1316 (11 September 1899).

517 See the prologue to the first instalment in *Habl al-Matīn*. No. 34, 12 Rabī‘ul Avval 1316/2 August 1898.
A similar *double entendre* applies to the employment of prophecy and rationality. Time and again, the traditional practice of consulting the Quran (*istikhārah*) or the poetry of Hafiz (*tafa‘ul*) before taking action is condemned in the *munāzirah* while reliance on rationality is applauded. This is most explicitly put forth in *Suhbat-i Sang u Sabū* where the attendants to the ailing Haji-nation are advised that this is a time for rational, not scriptural, consultation (*īn muqa‘ taklīf istishārah ast nah istikhārah*, 148). When put in the larger context of the *munāzirah* as a narrative of endless citations, however, this apparently categorical promotion of one discourse over the other disintegrates, for as we have abundantly seen one of the most prominent narrative strategies in the *munāzirah* is seeking Quranic (and other traditional forms of) sanction before (and in justification of) implementing the proposed modernizing projects. Copious allusions, citations, and invocations of the Quran, prophetic traditions, *istiftā’s* (seeking fatwas), and Persian poetry testify to the simultaneity of the discourses of prophecy and of rationality. Augury and reliance on divine assistance, so often verbally censured as backward traditions (*Mukālimah-i Īrānī va Hindī, Guftigū-yi Mīrzkā va ‘Avām, Suhbat-i Sang u Sabū, Suhbat bā Sar-i Rafīqam, Ā‘īnah-i Mashrūtah*), nonetheless ideologically inscribe themselves upon the very narrative of the *munāzirah*. A similar conjoining of the discourses of tradition and modernity and their simultaneous convergence on the national body is enacted through the coexistence of the rival discourses of healing (*shafā*) and medical treatment. The doctors called upon (by means of *istikhārah*) to visit the ailing Haji in *Suhbat-i Sang u Sabū* each prescribes his own remedies of traditional herbs or of chemical compounds. Combined with the author’s evaluations of the two as well as his own recommendations, the three discursive prescriptions are inscribed upon the body of the Haji-nation who nevertheless meets his death at the end of the story. The rivalry between the discourses of modern medicine and *shafā* was not limited to fictive accounts. The periodical *Al-Islām* reported in one of its issues on two women whose condition had been deemed hopeless by both Iranian and *Farangī* doctors. The aforementioned persons then proceeded to seek healing from the shrine of Imam Riza (eighth Shiite Imam) in the city of Mashad on “2 May” and “May 4th [1925]” respectively. They both, reports the journal, “found complete healing” (*shafā-yi kāmil yāfiyā*) by “the alchemic attention of the Glorious Doctor” (*nazar-i kīmiyā asar-i tabīb-i subhānī*). Following the report, the written, dated, and signed testimonies of “doctor Frank of Germany” and of “doctor Lughmanul Mulk” are presented as to
The truth of this incidence.\textsuperscript{518} The \textit{munāzirah} thus dramatizes the inscription of contending discourses upon the body national, the narrative enactment of the contested process of discourse formation.

The synthesis among heterogeneous discourses lies at the core of the process of discourse formation in the \textit{munāzirah}, a procedure that is not only at work within each individual text but also governing the interdiscursive orientation of the genre at large.\textsuperscript{519} In other words, concepts, statements, and narrative strategies peculiar to the genre are reconceptualised in individual textual productions. It is in this context that the concept of \textit{amr-i bih ma ‘rūf} as the essence of constitutionalism or the liminal issue of adaptation-emulation are continuously and variously invoked in different texts. Other instances abound in the \textit{munāzirah}. Frame narratives in Malkum Khan’s writings, for example, couch the text of what is to be presented (e.g. prologue frames text of Ottoman minister’s dialogue in \textit{Shaykh u Vazīr}). \textit{Yak Kalimah} and its emphasis on a single solution (law) stands in an intertextual relation to Malkum’s promotion of law.\textsuperscript{520} \textit{Musāhibah-i Islāmiyyah} also invokes Malkum’s “perfect human” (ādāmiyyat) several times, as does the European person in \textit{Mudarris-i Bukhārā’ī u Farangi} in which the European double of Malkum’s narrator in \textit{Shaykh u Vazīr} employs an identical approach to the \textit{Mudarris} in convincing him of the necessity of modern education. In the same text, the ākhūnd’s self-parodic statements are identical to the Iranian traveller in \textit{Mukālimah-i Īrānī va Hindī} in terms of the narrative strategy through which the voice of opposition doubles as the voice of the reformer. In both \textit{Shaykh u Shūkh} and \textit{Guftīgū-yi Mīrzā and ‘Avām}, the teaching of French to Iranian students is deemed

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\textsuperscript{518} Al-Islām. Muharram 1344/July 1925, 14-17.
\textsuperscript{519} Interdiscursivity in the \textit{munāzirah} is present in all the three dimension articulated by modern theory: as intertextuality, as generic relationality, and as linkage between disparate discursive formations. For an outline of these interpretations of interdiscursivity, see Marc Angenot, “Social Discourse Analysis: Outlines of a Research Project.” \textit{Yale Journal of Criticism}, 17:2 (Fall 2004), 199–215; Mikhail Bakhtin, \textit{Speech genres and other late Essays} (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986); Norman Fairclough, \textit{Analysing Discourse - textual research for social research} (New York: Routledge, 2003); Michel Foucault, \textit{The Archaeology of Knowledge} (New York: Vintage Books, 2010).
\textsuperscript{520} See Hamid Algar on an intertextual relation (not simply a question of “influence”) between Malkum Khan and Mustashar al-Dawlah, a relation about no “influence from Malkum to Mustashar al-Dawlah: \textit{Yak Kalimah} “may be defined as commentary on French constitutional law in terms of Islamic precepts: its principles are explained and vindicated with reference to Qur’ānic verses and traditions of the Prophet and the Imams. The establishment of a similar equation between Western and Islamic concepts was one of Malkum’s concerns. But for simple chronological reasons \textit{Yak Kalima} cannot be accepted as the result of discussions between the two men in London … Nonetheless, Malkum’s more remote influence on the composition cannot be discounted … They had in common a sympathetic friendship with Ākhūndzāda and an interest in alphabet reform,” \textit{Mīrzā Malkum Khān} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 139-40.
unnecessary. However, in the former case the opponent, the Shaykh, represents the voice of a wise and well-informed opposition who attacks blind emulation, while in the latter the opposition is a regressive element within the oppressive oligarchy. The angelic figure in *Yak Kalimah*, the Unseen Angel, also visits the author of *Suhbat bā Sar-i Rafīq* in his dream and speaks of the rule of law. The in-between figure of the host appears in a number of texts as the ideological double of the main contender (*Muqīm u Musāfir*, *Yak Kalimah*, *Musāhibah-i Islāmīyyah*, *Shaykh u Shūkh*). Traditional healing, as noted above, is frequently fielded in relation to modern medicine in the quest for a final remedy for the ailing body national – in *Shaykh u Shūkh* it takes precedence over its rival; in *Suhbat-i Sang u Sabū* it lags the latter. Opiumists impersonate the corrupted members of the nation in *Suhbat-i Sang u Sabū* and in *Ā`īnah-i Mashrūtah*. In *Nūshdārū*, however, they are the wise arbiters of the state of affairs in the country (the main characters, Pīr and Javān, it will be recalled, discuss the country’s condition over a roll of opium). Unbridled liberties in the form of emulation of western mannerisms are censured (*Ā`īnah-i Mashrūtah*, *Nūshdārū*) while the necessity of national unity is preached (*Ā`īnah-i Mashrūtah*, *Ganjīnah-i Ansār*) in an attempt to balance the excesses of the archetypal figures *Shaykh* and *Farangī Ma‘āb* who disrupt and defer its realization (*Ā`īnah-i Mashrūtah*, *Shaykh u Shūkh*, *Fārsī Shikar Ast*). These handful of isolated examples illustrate the extent to which interdiscursivity defines the narrative of the *munāzirah* in various capacities: as a web of intertexts, as a compendium of rival genres, and as the narrativized account of the contested process of discourse formation.

5.6 The Topoi of the *Munāzirah*

In general, then, it will be possible to speak of topoi and tropes characteristic of the *munāzirah*. If we conceive of the rival interpretations of Iranian modernity leading to and following the constitutional movement as a purely binaristic enterprise involving the strife between the traditional (“royalist” despots, “religious” reactionaries, etc.) and modernist (“secular” nationalists, “radical” democrats, etc.) camps, then the *munāzirah* as the account of this conflict will certainly fail our *a posteriori* presumptions. While there indeed are explicit and vivid indexes of both persuasions within the narrative of the *munāzirah*, they are far from well-defined, mutually exclusive camps. The Shah, for instance, is persistently absolved of any responsibility for the country’s dismal condition in the pre-constitutional *munāzirahs*. In the constitutional and post-constitutional narratives, a shift is discernible where the monarch begins
to be subtly held accountable, though always with the qualification that he is either unaware of the mismanagement of his realm or is the victim of the designs of corrupt courtiers. Beginning with Shaykh u Shākh, this conflicted feeling towards the monarch finds expression in declarations of reverence that portray Iranians as “king-worshipping slaves” (Muqīm u Musāfir, 125) and “Shah-worshipping” subjects (Suḥbat bā Sar-i Raftiqam, 15) – this in narratives that both appeared after the bombardment of the first Majlis by order of Muhammad ʿAli Shah and that elsewhere denounce the monarch’s despotism, injustice, and lust for power. While this can be attributed to the anxiety about the Shah’s support of the nascent parliament in the constitutional era, the sentiment continues to exist in some post-constitutional narratives which still harbour a similar sentiment. Suḥbat-i Sang u Sabū written from the viewpoint of a constitutionalist celebrating the national zeal of the victorious mujahidin, is a case in point. Reverence for Persian monarchs of yore persists across the three periods, not to mention the bitter dispute over the establishment of a republic (proposed by the future Pahlavi monarch, Reza Khan) and a resilient opposition demanding the continuation of the monarchy (upheld by the clerical deputy Mudarris). 521 Neither was the promotion of monarchy limited to the challenges of this “reactionary” cleric. “Secular-nationalist” journals such as Kāvah, Farangistān and Irānshahr deemed the heavy-handed guidance of an enlightened dictator as the only sure way to steering Iran towards modern civilization.522

The concept of Farangistān did not enjoy a similar loyalty, however. While Farang was universally acknowledged as an indisputable utopia in the pre-constitutional texts, the narratives of the following periods display a gradual but considerable departure from this type of idealism. Whereas the former distinguished between the decadent Farangīs (people of Europe) and the abstracted ideal of Farangistān (e.g. Guftigū-yī Mīrzā va ʿAvām and Yak Kalimah), the latter gradually unseated the sentiment in a rhetorical move that began to view wholesale adoption of either traditional or European values as excessive (Shaykh u Shākh, Ganjīnāh-i Ansār, Nūshdārū, Āʿīnāhī Mashrūtah, Fārsī Shikar Ast) revolving around an anxiety of emulation (taqlīd), resulting in the promotion of adaptation (taʿlīf) over adoption (e.g. Mukālimah-i Īrānī va Hindī,


Ganjīnah-i Ansār, Nūshdārū) and the necessity of national unity (Āʿīnah-i Mashrūtah). These concerns in turn led to an increasing foregrounding of the national discourse and the search for a national identity. Islam, of course, had a conspicuous presence in the gradual forging of the national identity. We have already seen abundant instances of the equation of Islamic principles with European progress (Gufīgū-yi Mīrzā va ‘Avām, Muqīm u Musāfīr, among many others). In the constitutional and post-constitutional eras the equation of Islam with modern progress is rarefied and increasingly supplanted by references to Persia’s pre-Islamic past (Ganjīnah-i Ansar, Suhbat bā Sar-i Rafīqam, Suhbat-i Sang u Sabū, Āʿīnah-i Mashrūtah), but, significantly, Islam is still viewed as the perfect religion and integral to Iranian identity so much so that a western educated reformist or a devout cleric may, alternatively, equate western principles with Islamic teachings (Yak Kalimah and Muqīm u Musāfīr, respectively). As the focal point for the coalescence of these competing discourses, the Iranian identity in question becomes an amalgam of ideologies characterized by ambiguity, inconclusiveness, overlapping orientations, liminality, and parallel discourses.

The split subject of Iranian modernity is thus articulated through a variety of narrative strategies. One such strategy is multi-layered focalization. This may be projected through an “unseen” author (Shaykh u Vazī), an overlapping author-narrator (Rafīq u Vazīr), the merging of multiple focalizers into one narrator in the form of an implied author, a host, or the unseen angel (Yak Kalimah, Shaykh u Shūkh), shifting alliances whereby an opponent echoes the sentiments of his adversary either explicitly or through the use of parody (Gufīgū-yi Mīrzā va ‘Avām, Shaykh u Vazīr, Mukālīmah-i Īrānī u Hindī, Mudarris-i Buhkārāʾī u Farangi), or the coexistence of parallel texts through numerous citations, allusions, translations, invocations, a plurality of genres and styles, and metanarrative interventions (in almost every munāzīrah). The natural result of this admixture is, as we have seen, unfinished narratives. This is also effected in a variety of ways: the ending of the story on a lack of consensus between the contenders (Shaykh u Vazīr), the repetition of a single story in parallel narratives (Anonymous), appeal to readers, the monarch, or the clerical class through direct address even when a false sense of closure has been imposed on the story (Mudarris-i Buhkārāʾī u Farangi), and promise of future instalments which never appear (several munāzīrah). The combination of these strategies creates a narrative characterized by the coexistence of contending voices and by the resulting ambivalence and lack of consensus. Simultaneity, heteroglott interdiscursivity, and ambiguity are thus the central topoi.
of the munāzirah. Essential to the vocalization of these narrative enactments of ambivalence and liminality are split subjects. In fact, the anxiety of liminal identities becomes so manifest in the later periods that narrativizing the liminal subject of Iranian modernity becomes a central theme in post-constitutional munāzirahs, either as one of the narrative’s main themes (Suhbat-i Sang u Sabū, Āʾīnah-i Mashrū tah, Nūshdārū) or as the only theme (Fāršī Shikar Ast).

5.7 The Munāzirah in Historical (Con)text

Lest the topoi of the munāzirah might be perceived as fictional-narrative fineries with little basis in actuality, it would be useful at this point to prove the historical groundedness of the munāzirah as discursive practice by demonstrating how the liminality characteristic of the genre was indeed the reflection of its socio-cultural context. Presenting isolated socio-political events reflecting the topoi of the munāzirah would be a tedious and at any rate endless task, though of such events there are infinite examples. It would be a more manageable approach to group disparate historical events under general while apparently contradictory headings in an attempt to show that the normative readings of Iranian modernity as a telos alternatively promoted or suppressed by two diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive fronts (the stock binaries “religious” versus “secular,” “traditionalist” versus “modernist,” “reactionary” versus “progressive” and so on) fall apart when put in the historical context of Iranian modernity as the ongoing, inconclusive, and overlapping munāzirah of contending discourses. The headings include the discourses of law versus sharia (qānūn – shari’at), rational action versus divine guidance (’aql / istishārah – tavakkul / istikhārah / tafa’ul), and healing versus cure (shafā – darmān). These generic

523 One such instance occurred after the bombardment of the Majlis at the hands of Muhammad ‘Ali Shah’s Russian-officered Cossacks. The sheer number of the people of different classes who poured out in support of the Shah was undeniable even to unsympathetic eyewitnesses: “‘the reactionaries packed the expansive [Cannon] square to full capacity’ … Nazem al-Islam Kermani noted in his journal that the ‘common people’ at the time of the coup tended to sympathize with the court. Malekzadeh admitted grudgingly that Shaykh Fazallah had had considerable effect on the uneducated masses. And Malek al-Shua’ra Bahar, a leading poet and a participant in the revolution, wrote years later: ‘During the upheavals, the upper class and the lower classes supported despotism. Only the middle class remained true to constitutionalism” (Abrahamian, 94-96). After the dethroning of Muhammad “Ali Shah and the establishment of the second Majlis, Dehkhoda relates his meeting with two staunch constitutionalists who savagely attacked religion to the point of infidelity and atheism. He then left with one of the two, a sayyid. The latter asked Dehkhoda to wait for him for a few minutes near a mosque. The few minutes turned into twenty. Anxious about his friend’s disappearance, Dehkhoda started to look everywhere to no avail. The least likely place was inside the mosque. As a last resort, Dehkhoda looked inside the mosque where he actually found his friend saying his prayer, prostrating himself in an ultra devout way. “In those days there were many cowardly Muslims of this class who hid their religious practice from others and pretended to be irreligious in gatherings fearing the constitutionalists.” ‘Abdullah Mostowfī, Sharh-i Zindagānī-yi Man (Tehran: Hermes, 1386/2007), Vol. 1, 317.
categories are useful analytical tools because they enable the inclusion of a vast array of ideologies, discourses, and practices that participated, as the elements of discursive practice, in the contested process we term Iranian modernity. It will be seen that in each case the nature of the interaction between the opposite sides of the equation is not one of well-defined, organic opposites but of antithetical yet simultaneous, overlapping, and inconclusive liminality.

Iran’s adaptation of modernity was from the start a collaborative yet contested process involving the participation of disparate social strata comprising elites (princes, court officials, the ‘ulama, western or locally educated reformers, even the shah himself\(^{524}\)), middle, and lower classes (preachers, guild members, merchants, luti,\(^{525}\) graduates of modern or traditional schools, peasants, artisans, and women) alike\(^{526}\) who entertained a myriad of ideologies drawing from liberalism, socialism, nationalism, Iran’s monarchical tradition and its Islamic heritage.\(^{527}\) The participation of such diverse socio-cultural orientations meant the engagement of a polyphony of ideologies and discourses in the ongoing debate about the reasons for Iran’s backwardness and the elucidation of necessary steps for its joining the bandwagon of modernity. It is safe to assert that most of the numerous issues debated in this process (alphabet reform, railroads, establishment of banks, education, and translation of European books, among many others)

\(^{524}\) Naser al-Din Shah, for example, was an avid supporter of modernization, particularly in the first half of his reign. He “established two military colleges, two official journals … a translation school, and a new government printing office … [which] published in the course of the century over 160 titles.” Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 58. He supported the establishment of the first assembly of ministers, the Supreme Assembly or the Dār al-Shurā-yi Kubrā, which would act as a nascent legislative assembly prior to the constitutional revolution. Kurosh Noruz Moradi, “Majlis-i Shurā-yi Dawla‘ī.” *Payam Baha‘estan*, 2:7 (1389/2010), 969-977. He also gave his strong support to the establishment of The Assembly of the Merchant Deputies of Iran (*Majlis-i Vukalā‘-yi Tujjār-i Irān*), established 1301/1884, a consultative body that would oversee, discuss, and recommend policy for the regulation of national and international trade. Fereydun damiyat and Homa Nateq, *Afkār-i Sīyāsī va Ijtima‘ī* (Tehran: Agah, 1356/1977), 369.

\(^{525}\) Lutis were a recognizable group in urban centres known for their chivalrous codes, honesty, and sacrifice. Self proclaimed guardians of their respective town quarters, they were the main participants in religious mourning rituals but also acted as the guardians of the honour and integrity of their respective quarters. For information about the luti code of ethics, see Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 23 and Naser Najmi, *Tihrān-i ‘Ahd-i Naṣirī* (Tehran: Attar, 1364/1985), 558-64. For their role in the constitutional movement, see Willem Floor, “The Lūtis.” *Die Welt des Islams*, 12:½ (1971), 103-119; and George Curzon, *Persia and the Persia Question* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1892), 43, among others.

\(^{526}\) See, among others, Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). For the collaboration of social strata, see pages 22-3, 44. For the active participation of women, see pages 177-203.

\(^{527}\) See Vanessa Martin, *Iran between Islamic Nationalism and Secularism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 127, though Martin, citing Afary, does not include the royalist or Islamic inclinations in her list of competing ideologies.
revolved around the compatibility, or else contradictions, inherent in the overarching discourses of law-sharia, rationality-reliance (on divine assistance), and cure-healing.

Sometime between the years 1275 and 1282 (1859-1866) a western educated civil servant at Naser al-Din Shah’s court wrote, after having spent fourteen years in the lands of the Farang, an anonymous treatise entitled *Sharh-i 'Uyūb wa 'Alāj-i Navāqis-i Mamlakatī-yi Īrān* (Explanation of the Deficiencies and Remedy for the Defects of Iran) for the perusal of the foreign minister Mirza Sa‘id Khan.528 The treatise, according to the editors, is a “bizarre admixture” because in it the author calls for the implementation of European laws while also admonishing the shah for implementing the same; attacks Malkum Khan as a “wine selling Christan boy” who has incited the sultan of Muslims to adopt “the laws of the farangīs” while at the same time drawing on Malkum’s writings; and finally equates modern socio-political structures with traditional astrological systems, a “bizarre admixture” of “contradictory statements [that] reflect the discomposure of the author’s mind.”529 This editorial appraisal falls within the tenets of a larger discourse that tends to impose a posthumous requirement for coherence on the history of the period, calling for a clear-cut opposition between dialectical opposites. Far from a sign of “the discomposure of the author’s mind,” this otherwise disturbing lack of coherence (of which there are many other examples)530 is indeed characteristic of a history replete with ruptures, threshold positionings, discontinuities, uncertainties, and liminality. The purported lack of coherence in *Explanation of the Deficiencies and Remedy for the Defects of Iran* was indeed echoing the anxiety over the uncomfortable, yet essential, commensurability of law and sharia, shared by both the “traditional” ‘ulama and the “progressive” intellectuals alike. The pivotal point of this synthesis was often the Quranic aphorism *amr-i bih ma’rūf va nahy az munkar* (conjoining to the right and prohibiting from the wrong) which was variously and alternately appropriated for advancing different viewpoints.531 This pivotal point meant the simultaneity and

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529 Ibid., 58-9.
commensurability, or else opposition, of law and sharia and ensured the participation of multitudes of perspectives.

The undeniable, energetic, and leading role of the ‘ulama in the reform movement – before, during, and after the constitutional revolution\textsuperscript{532} – meant that the majority of the clerical class perceived little essential opposition in the principles of law and of sharia. This is attested to by the active participation of a majority of the clerical class, of all ranks, in the reform movement. The famous clerics Mirza Sayyid Muhammad Tabataba’i and Sayyid ‘Abdullah Bihbahani were “two strong supporters and two significant forces of constitutionalism”\textsuperscript{533} who were popularly viewed as the “proofs” and “founders” of the constitutional cause.\textsuperscript{534} A majority of seminary students and ‘ulama of Najaf along with their leaders, Haji Mirza Husayin son of Haji Mirza Khalil and Mulla Kazim Khurasani who were the spiritual leaders of most Iranians at the time all supported the constitutional cause.\textsuperscript{535} In fact, if it weren’t for the Najaf ‘ulama’s fatwas, constitutionalism would have lost popular support, for “in those days the majority of Iranian people, especially in the towns, followed religious doctrine. Since the mullas in Tabriz and other cities had risen against constitutionalism and called the constitutionalists apostates or ‘Bābīs,’ if it weren’t for these ‘fatwas’ of the Najaf ‘ulama few would have supported constitutionalism.”\textsuperscript{536}

In almost every city and town in the country the leader of the movement was a cleric.\textsuperscript{537} The widespread participation of the clergy might, as some historians have pointed out, have been partially due to the philosophical Shi‘i view that all forms of government prior to the just

governance of the Hidden Imam are “inherently illegitimate” and “a contradiction in terms.”\(^{538}\) However, this does not negate the shared vision of the commensurability of law and sharia that drew non-clerical intellectuals and the masses, besides the powerful ‘ulama, into its fold. Neither does such evidence have to be interpreted as the portrayal of the clerical class as the lone heroes of the reform movement in Iran. For the “secular” elements of the reform movement shared a similar sentiment of the fundamental compatibility of sharia and law or the view that western law was in reality derived from Islamic principles.

Revolutionaries considered as the most radical among constitutionalists (such as the mujahedin of Tabriz) drew moral courage from the ‘ulama’s support and from a belief in the sharia basis of their struggle for a constitution: “Even Sattar Khan would repeatedly say that ‘I am implementing the command of the Najaf ‘ulama.’ Also, those affluent merchants who sent ‘charitable offerings’ to Tabriz, mostly [did so] following the ‘fatwas’ of the ‘ulama. Such was the great benefit of the telegraphs of Najaf ‘ulama.”\(^{539}\) Historians of a binaristic persuasion have also conceded that the most reportedly secular and radical intellectuals drew on a mixture of law and sharia. One such historian, Mehdi Malekzadeh, whose own father the revolutionary cleric Malek al-Mutekallemin had headed one such radical group,\(^{540}\) refers to “the minority intellectuals” (aqaliyat-i munavarul fikr) as a secularist group who had to hide their real inclinations to avoid charges of apostasy but whose “teaching sessions [nonetheless] was an elixir of Islamic jurisprudence [fiqh] and principles [of Islamic catechism] and philosophy” (68). Even pioneering figures such as Sayyid Jamal al-Din Asadabadi (Afghani) and Mirza Malkum Khan, whose reference to Islamic principles has often been seen as an “agreed-upon political tactic,”\(^{541}\) display sensibilities indicative of the liminal space of sharia-law. In denouncing the

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\(^{538}\) As Ervand Abrahamian observes, “Although some members of the ‘ulama, particularly the state-paid imam jom’ehs and shaykh al-islams were willing to identify with royal authority, most prominent mujtaheds remained aloof from the court and interpreted the early texts of Shi’ism to argue that the state was at worst inherently illegitimate and at best a necessary evil to prevent social anarchy. As Hamid Algar has succinctly noted in his work on Religion and State in Iran, many mujtaheds viewed the Shi’i state a contradiction in terms.” Iran between Two Revolutions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 40.

\(^{539}\) Ahmad Kasravi. Ţārīk̄h-i Mashrûṭah-i Īrān (Tehran: Seda-yi Mo’aser, 1380/2001), 687.

\(^{540}\) Ervand Abrahamian, Iran between Two Revolutions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 78.

\(^{541}\) Janet Afary, The Iranian Constitutional Revolution (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 23. Afary is not alone in this assessment. It is the mantra of the historians of the binaristic “awakening” persuasion. Besides the example cited above from Malekzadeh, for more examples of similar claims see Fereydun Adamiyat, Fikr-i Azâdî (Tehran: Sukhan, 1340/1961), 104; AA. Seyed-Gohrab and S. McGlinn, Yak Kaleme (Amsterdam & West
Persian monarch to the Ottoman sultan, Jamal al-Din displayed a mixture of religious and secular tendencies: “He is incapable of governing, or managing the affairs of his people, and hath entrusted the reigns of government in all things great and small to the hands of a wicked freethinker, a tyrant and usurper, who revileth the Prophet openly, and heedeth not God’s law.”

In his political writings, as well, there is little that would count as a secularist promotion of constitutionalism and liberalism. Malkum Khan’s career follows a similar trajectory. In his 1891 lecture in London about Persian civilization, laid bare his rhetorical approach (evident in a majority of his writings) in terms that reveal both a polemical strategy and a genuine belief in its truth:

We have found the ideas which were by no means acceptable when coming from your agents in Europe were accepted at once with great delight when it was proved that they were latent in Islam. I can assure you that the little progress which you see in Persian and turkey, especially in Persia, is due to this fact that some people have taken your European principles and instead of saying that they come from England, France, or Germany, they have said, ‘We have nothing to do with Europeans; but these are the true principles of our religion (and indeed, this is quite true) which have been taken by Europeans!’ That has had a marvelous effect at once.”

Malkum’s proposition might indeed have been perceived as a “political tactic” by an orientalist, but in actuality it echoed a discursive practice widespread among the most traditional and the most left-leaning segments of the society.

Mirza Quli Khan Hedayat (1863-1955) – a translator, author, instructor at the Dār al-Funūn, governor, prime minister, and a constitutionalist whose education and career fits every

Lafayette, Indiana: Rozenberg Publishers & Purdue University Press, 2008), xii; Vanessa Martin, Iran between Islamic Nationalism and Secularism (London : I.B. Tauris, 2013), 42-3; and to a lesser extent Hamid Algar, Mīrzā Makum Khān (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 140-41. These representative examples reflect the views of like-minded scholars who consider reliance on Islamic principles in enunciations of western law by preconstitutional reformers such as Malkum Khan and Sayyid Jamal al-Din as well as by postconstitutional reformists Sayyid Jamal al-Din Va‘iz Isfahani and Malek al-Mutakallemin was a “political tactic” for advancing purely secular agendas. Interestingly, of these four personalities, the latter three were turbaned preachers with an Islamic education.

542 Quoted in Ervand Abrahamian, Iran between Two Revolution (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 64.


conceivable requirement of a “secular” reformist – reflected on Malkum Khan’s promotion of law in his journal of the same title (qānūn) in this way: "We had law [qānūn]; we have the best law; we just don't have executives." This was after the establishment of the parliament and reflected the public disillusionment with the stagnating, in some cases deteriorating, state of the country. Prior to the granting of the constitution, however, when Mirza Quli Khan acted as the ambassador between the court and the protestors who were demanding the establishment of a Majlis in 1906, he displayed a similar shifting sentiment. When he took the demands of the protestors to the court, the dismissal of Monsieur Naus, the infamous Belgian minister of customs, was agreed to but not the granting of a constitution. "I said [to the court] if you think it is expedient I can tell them what is the meaning of constitutionalism in an Islamic land? It must be sharia law [mashrū’ah]. Everyone was happy [with this statement]. In my personal opinion if mashrū’ah [sharia based law] is implemented in its true essence, it is the father of constitutionalism (not the one that the ignorant clerics have said).” Commenting on the state of anti-constitutionalist protestors who had congregated elsewhere in town, he opined, “A group [of protestors] have taken bast [sanctuary] in 'Abd al-'Azim [shrine] pronouncing that Majlis is against Islam; they are mostly preachers and people of the pulpit and ignorant of [the Quranic verse] ‘and order them to consultation among themselves.’” Such shifting and overlapping attitudes towards the monarchy, the constitutional government, and the sharia are indicative of an understanding of constitutionalism as a field for the convergence of the discourses of law, sharia, and even monarchy, a perspective that was shared by “traditionalists” and “modernists” alike.

The Iranian adaptation of modernity has been characterized by such liminal positions from the start. In 1910, for example, when Mirza Quli Khan was posted by order of the constitutional government as the governor of the important province of Azerbaijan in the northwest, he was approached by a Fakhrul Sadat who asked him, “This new form of governance is constitutional or despotic? I said it is a state between the two states and closer to despotism. He said they say you are a constitutional leader. I said they are right. He asked how is it possible to be a constitutional leader but rule with despotism? I said the people are not ready and do not understand constitutionalism.”

545 Mirza Quli Khan Hedayat, Khātirāt va Khatarāt (Tehran: Zavvar, 1389/2010), 85.
546 Ibid., 147.
547 Ibid., 210. Emphasis added.
This “lack” of understanding resulted, in fact, from a polyphony of competing interpretations of sharia-law, also noted by other contemporary historians. In the brief moment immediately after the granting of the constitution when sharia and law had finally and symbolically conjoined in the sacred space of the Majlis (majlis-i muqaddas: which designation is itself composed of the conjoining of the “sacred” and the “legal”), there was no “contention between ‘sharia’ and ‘qānūn.’”548 Otherwise, “everyone had their own interpretation of constitutionalism and law and elaborated on it, and this was one of the astonishing aspects.”549 And in fact every socio-political event after, as it had been prior to, the establishment of the Majlis was a re-enactment of the shifting polyphony of interpretations: during the sugar crisis of 1905 in Tehran and the subsequent mass protests,550 the protestors sent four main demands to the government: “replacement of the governor; dismissal of Naus; enforcement of the shari’a; and establishment of a House of Justice.”551 The coexistence of sharia and a House of Justice (demands for which later metamorphosed into a demand for, and the granting of, a consultative assembly) in the protestors’ demands was not a matter of straightforward “religious” wish. It was part of a new sensibility that perceived of modernization as a space in between sharia and law, a sentiment that manifested itself after the establishment of a parliament as well. The Supplemental Law of 1907, recognizing Twelver Shiism as official state religion and effectively giving birth to the first Guardian Council of clerics who would oversee the compatibility of proposed laws with the sharia, was drafted on such liminal perception of law-sharia.552 In the words of one historian,

549 Ibid., 296.
550 During the sugar crisis in Tehran in 1905 the much hated governor of Tehran, ‘Ain al-Dawlah, bastinadoed importers, one of whom was a highly respected elderly gentleman of seventy nine years. The news of the disrespect spread rapidly and a general strike and a bast led by the clerics Tabatabai and Behbahani ensued. It was from their bast in the sancturary of ‘Abdul ‘Azim that the protestors sent their demands for the establishment of a House of Justice to the court. Ervand Abrahamian, Iran between Two Revolutions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 82.
551 Ibid., 83.
552 Article 2 of the Supplementary Fundamental Laws of October 7, 1907 reads as follows: “At no time must any legal enactment of the Sacred National Consultative Assembly, established by the favour and assistance of His Holiness the Imam of the Age (may God hasten his glad Advent), the favour of His Majesty the Shahinshah of Islam (may God immortalize his reign!), the care of the Proofs of Islam [i.e. the ‘ulama] (may God multiply the like of them!), and the whole people of the Persian nation, be at variance with the sacred principles of Islam or the laws established by His Holiness the Best of Mankind [i.e. Prophet Muhammad] (on whom and on whose household be the Blessings of God and His Peace!). It is hereby declared that it is for the learned doctors of theology (the ‘ulama) – may God prolong the blessing of their existence! – to determine whether such laws [which] may be proposed are
“The traditional gospel of Shi‘ism had been incorporated into a modern structure of government derived from Montesquieu. The spirit of society, to paraphrase Montesquieu, had helped formulate the laws of the constitution.”^553 The massive popular support, after the bombardment of the parliament in 1909, for the view that constitutionalism is against Islam attests to the ever shifting readings of sharia-law. After the deposition of Muhammad ‘Ali Shah and the establishment of the second parliament, the Democrats, the so-called radical secular intellectuals (five of whom were leading clerics), formed a minority in the Majlis. This handful of examples (the latter of which has never ceased to shock historians of the binaristic school for obvious reasons) demonstrates, but is not limited to, popular imagination alone. The simultaneity of sharia-law was, as mentioned earlier, also present in the most radical persuasions within the reform movement.

Established in the now Russian controlled Baku in 1904, the Social Democratic Party of Iran consisted of Iranian expatriates who had been active in or influenced by the Social Democratic Party of Russia. Members met at the party’s club Hemmat (Endeavour) and their agenda – virtually a translated copy of the Russian School Democrats and disseminated within Iran by the

or are not conformable to the principles of Islam; and it is therefore officially enacted that there shall at all times exist a Committee composed of not less than five mujtahids or other devout theologians, congnizant also of the requirements of the age, [which committee shall be erected] in this manner. The ‘ulama and Proofs of Islam shall present to the National Consultative Assembly the names of twenty of the ‘ulama possessing the attributes mentioned above; and the Members of the National Consultative Assembly shall, either by unanimous acclamation, or by vote, designate five or more of these, according to the exigencies of the time, and recognize these as Members, so that they may carefully discuss and consider all matters proposed in the Assembly, and reject and repudiate, wholly or in part, any such proposal which is at variance with the Sacred Laws of Islam, so that it shall not obtain the title of legality. In such matters the decision of this Ecclesiastical Committee shall be followed and obeyed, and this article shall continue unchanged until the appearance of His Holiness the Proof of the Age (may God hasten his glad Advent).” Cited in Edward Browne, *The Persian Revolution* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1966), 372-3. The coexistence and simultaneous application of sharia and law in this important and historic article are unmistakable: the law grants the sharia legal authority which will in turn grant enacted laws legality.


affiliate society, the Secret Centre – “called for the right of workers to organize and strike; an eight-hour day; old-age pensions; a progressive income tax; distribution of land among those who tilled it; housing for the homeless; free schools; reduction of consumer taxes; freedom of speech, press, and public meetings; and the toleration of all religions ‘acceptable to the shari’a’.”

Another such radical society was the Revolutionary Committee headed by the cleric Malek al-Motakallemin. It worked with leading clerics some of whom (Sayyid Jamal al-Din Isfahani) were members at the committee. Its membership, comprising fifty seven activists, reflected the heterogeneous character of the discursive plurality that participated in the Iranian modernization project: “The fifty-seven included fifteen civil servants, eight educators, four translators and writers, one doctor, fourteen clergymen who had some knowledge of modern sciences, one tribal chief, three merchants and four craftsmen.” In the aftermath of the bombardment of the Majlis and the clampdown on dissidents, at the gallows before the Shah, the head of the Revolutionary Committee, Malek al-Motakallemin, defended his action as a sign of his allegiance to the monarchy. His opposite number, the prominent constitutionalist-turned-anticonstitutional Shaykh Fazlullah Nuri, attempted to justify some of his anti-constitutional activism by invoking the constitution as well as duty as a Muslim. Each man’s claim was a polyphonic statement simultaneously defending his own discourse and invoking that of his prosecutors. Their execution followed similar course. Malek al-Motakallemin was hanged, by a despotic ruler, on charges of conspiring against the king and of violating Islamic principles. Syakh Fazlullah was tried and hanged, not with reference to a ruling by a constitutional

556 Ervand Abrahamian, Iran between Two Revolutions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 76. Emphasis in original.
557 Ibid., 78. Abrahamian assesses this heterogeneity as the “ideological homogeneity and the sociological diversity of the early intelligentsia,” suggesting that there was a consistent and well-defined philosophy on which there was an unquestionable consensus. It might indeed have been so in respect to the society’s agenda, strategies, or tactics. But as we have seen, official consistency did not always reflect hermeneutical uniformity.
558 Nazem al-Islam Kirmani, Tārīkh-i Bīdārī (Tehran: Bonyad-i Farhang-i Iran, 1357/1978), Vol. 4, 162. See also Mehdi Malekzadeh, Tārīkh-i Inqilāb-i Mashrūfiyat-i Īrān (Tehran: Elmi, 1371/1992), Vol. 2, 781. Each historian has a different reading of Malek al-Motakallemin’s execution. The former considered Motakallemin a hypocrite after personal gain. In this rendition, Motakallemin had said that he would be useful for the monarchy if the shah decided against his execution. The latter historian who was Motakallemin’s son portrays the execution as the mythic scene of the martyrdom of a national hero. In this account, Motakallemin tells the Shah that his activism was meant for the elevation of the image of the king as an enlightened monarch supportive of a constitutional monarchy. Without passing judgement on the accuracy of these statements, it is important for our purposes to note the discursive plurality that informed Malek al-Motakallemin’s assertion.
560 Ibid., Vol. 2, 780.
government, but by relying on Islamic jurisprudence: “According to the fatwa of the mujtahids of Najaf a copy of which has been published around Iran, Haji Shaykh Fazlullah is a corruptor of earth [mufsid-i fil ‘arz] and according to the laws of Islam the same punishment must be given him as is given corruptors on earth.” Both men were clerics.

Such shifting and overlapping appropriations of sharia-law certainly served a legitimizing function, but their very deployment in this manner drew on a larger discourse oscillating between rational decision making and reference to the writ of sacred jurisdiction. The conjoining of divine jurisprudence and legal reasoning was not limited to political discourse. It found its cultural equivalent in the ceaseless dialogue between traditional astrology and modern astronomy. Traditional astrology had its basis in Ptolemaic geocentrism while modern astronomy was premised on Copernican heliocentrism. The former consisted of divinations of the influence of planets and stars on events and on human affairs, whereas the latter engaged in the empirical study of the composition and movement of celestial bodies. Astrology used the position of heavenly bodies to make prophecy about auspicious (sa’d) or ominous (nahs) events; astronomy studied the physical and chemical properties of stars and planets with mathematical certainty. The cultural expression of the former was the practice of augury (fāl, tafa’ul, jafir), of reliance on divine guidance (tavakkul), and of consulting the Quran for divine guidance before taking a course of action (istikhārah). The social import of the latter was the initiation of a dialogic interaction between the two discourses, one that had important implications in the socio-political context of Iranian modernity. It led, as in the case of sharia-law, to the simultaneous fielding of rationality and wisdom, of empiricism and speculation, of superstition and science.

The introduction of modern astronomy into Iran challenged the geocentric and Iran-centric astrology of yore and prompted different responses in support or rejection of the novel discourse. One important opponent of astronomy was Muhammad Karim Khan Kermani (1810-1871), a leader of the Shaykhi movement. In his treatise Risālah fī Javāb al-Hajji Khusrāw Khan (Treatise in Response to Hajji Khosraw Khan, 1853), written in response to his brother’s promotion of astronomy, Kermani examined the Ptolemaic, Copernican and synthetic approach of the Danish chemist and astronomer Tycho Brahe (1546-1601), concluding that the Ptolemaic

561 Ibid., Vol. 3, 1270.
paradigm was superior to the others. Kermani deemed the Europeans living in Iran, including both travellers and instructors at the Dār al-Funūn, to be low status technicians who had not found proper employment in their own countries and had thus posed as scientists in Iran. He equally attacked translators of their works as “ignorant persons” who transmit their imperfect and incomplete understanding of modern science through translation. He referred to modern astronomy as “an absurd compendium [of knowledge]” and dismissed telescopic evidence of a heliocentric solar system by questioning the reliance of empirical approach upon the fallibility of human senses, thus favouring gnosis over knowledge. Kermani was not alone in assessing translations of European works as indigenous understandings of modern science, for the French charge d’affaires (1855-1858) Arthur Gobineau’s commissioning of the translation of Descartes’ Discours in Iran was to “instruct” Iranians in modern methodology rather than in modern science: “Iranians returning from Europe and those [of them] who have studied there have understood all that has been taught to them and all that they have observed and studied, but [they have done so] in their own peculiar way which has nothing to do with novel methodologies.”

What both Gobineau’s orientalist assessment and Kermani’s challenge reveal is not so much the opposition between traditional and modern science but attempts to synthesize the two through competing acts of reading. This important consideration disrupts the traditionalist-modernist divide and is indeed supported by ample evidence, for epistemological opposition to astronomy was not limited to clerics like Kermani only.

563 Ibid., 56-7. We have also seen how the Shaykh in the munāzirah Shaykh u Shūkh attacks the graduates on a similar premise.
564 Quoted in Ghulam Husayn Zargarinejad and Muhamad Amir Ahmadzade, “Taqābul-i Sitārah Shināsī-yi Sunnātī va Mudīrīn dar Jafīyān-i Tarjumah-i ‘Ulūm-i jādīd.” Iran History, 66:5 (Autumn 2010), 57. See also Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi’s “Early Persianate Modernity” in which the questions a binaristic East-West approach to astronomy: “Viewing modernity as a belated repudiation of Western models, historians of Iran often invent periodizations that are analogous to standard European historical accounts. Recognizing Descartes’s Discours sur la Méthode and Newton’s Principia as two founding texts of modern thought in Europe, Iranian historians have the same expectations for the Persian rendering of these texts. In a modularized periodization of the Iranian ‘discovery of the West’ and the ‘dissemination of European ‘new learning’,” Mangol Bayat, a historian of modern Iran, writes that a Persian translation of Descartes’s Discours was commissioned by Arthur Gobineau and published in 1862. Referring to l’ìtizad al-Saltanah’s Falak al-Sa’adah (1861), she adds that only one year earlier Isaac Newton and the idea of heliocentricity had been ‘introduced to the Iranian public.’” In Sheldon Pollock, Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 262.
Muhammad Vali ibn Muhammad Ja’far was a physicist and the author of a treatise on natural geography entitled Shigirf Nāmah (Book of Wonders, 1862). In 1852, he had been appointed chief state physician and headed the newly established State Hospital (marīzkhanah-i dawlatī).

As such, he was well versed in the modern sciences, though like Kermani he opposed modern astronomy. In Shigirf Nāmah he tried to show the truth of the Ptolemaic model by drawing on Quranic verses; however, importantly, he also made use of the Ptolemaic, Copernican, and Brahean paradigms in calculating the movements of the celestial bodies, believing that no single method is perfect and that the Copernican model is a reiteration of the findings of the Greek philosopher Aristotle and the fourteen-century Muslim historian, sociologist and economis Ibn Khaldun. The heteroglossia of approaches, ideologies and references underlying Vali’s methodology mirrors the larger socio-cultural munāzirah of rival but overlapping discourses which involved the participation of elites, clerics, “secular” intellectuals and other social classes alike. Within this context, it is no longer surprising that a prominent cleric, Muhammad Husayn Shahrestani (1839-1897), would endorse the Copernican model – albeit with reference to the Quran and traditions. In his Al-Mavā’īd (Dates) and Mavāqi’ al-Nujūm (Sites of Stars) he undertook the task of elucidating modern astronomy and in a later treatise in 1874, Āyāt-i Bayyināt (Verses of [or on] Evidences), he rejected geocentrism and upheld the truth of the new heliocentric model. Another proponent of modern astronomy was Prince Mirza ‘Aliquli Khan I’tizad al-Saltanah (1819-1880). He was appointed as the principal of the Dār al-Funūn in 1858 and as minister of science in 1859. He was also the editor of the first scientific periodical, the state gazette Rūznāmah-i ‘Ilmiyyah-i Dawlat-i ‘Ilmiyyah-i Īrān. A member of the team commissioned to translate Discours sur la Méthode, I’tizad al-Saltanah based his own Falak al-Sa’ādah (Firmament of Fortune, 1862) on the Newtonian model to reject Ptolameic astrology. He reminded his readers that Islam is against the practice of astrology and that the association of stars with ominous or auspicious events through the practice of augury is the fruit of ignorance.

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566 Ibid., 59.
567 Ibid., 60.
and superstition. All three invoked the Quran and the discourse of tradition in their disparate readings of modern astronomy.

Such a polyphonic approach was not limited to treatises written by the elite. With their much larger public audience, the periodicals, too, embarked on the introduction of the new science to the public. In doing so, however, they drew on a traditional understanding of progress as a cyclical rather than a linear movement. Countless references in the periodicals to the “golden age” of Islam (or of Iran) as the future-past of European-like progress attest to this episodic conception of time whereby advancement of virtue and justice would relocate in endless historical cycles. It will also be remembered that the deployment of time in pre-modern historiography had been premised on a cyclical (dynastic) conception of time. The synthesis of the discourses of tradition and modernity was not only evident in the ideology of the periodicals but also in their practice of including various points of view. Acting as a public forum for debate where proponents and opponents of the new science engaged in refutation, periodicals became the vehicle for the expression of a dialogic approach to modernity. It was in this vein, for example, that the cleric Haj Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Tabrizi refuted Mirza Shuja’ al-Din (an instructor at the Dār al-Funūn) on modern geometry, or that a group of Dār al-Funūn instructors submitted a critical response to Muhammad Baqir Hamedani’s geocentric treatise Dar Sukūn-i Zamīn va Harikat-i Āfīāb (On the Stasis of the Earth and the Movement of the Sun). It is of utmost importance for the purposes of this study to note that these polemics were often presented in the form of munāzirah, either between real-life personalities or as fictionalized accounts. The debate was so pervasive that it found its way into official policy. In 1861, on orders from Naser al-Din Shah, astrological determinations of ominous or auspicious dates were eliminated from official calendars and the writing of modern almanacs (sālnāmah) were encouraged by the

568 Ibid., 62-3.
570 See notes 395 and 513 above.
same monarch, though the discourse of astrology never entirely left the pages of the almanacs or the slates of public imagination.

I’timad al-Saltanah, the French-educated royal translator and author of the new almanacs based on modern astronomy, himself consulted the Quran (tafā’ul) for important decisions and resorted to special prayers deemed to be auspicious on the fifteenth of each month, doing so “even when I was studying in farangistān.” The Farang-educated Mehdi Quli Khan Hedayat – translator, Dār al-Funūn instructor, reformist, and constitutionalist governor – had a meeting with the Imam jum'ah (leader of Friday prayers, often appointed by the court) during which the latter took him to the sanctuary of Hafiz and performed augury (fāl) on a difficult matter. After the episode, Hedayat observed, “We have stooped so low to appease ourselves with augury.” A few days later, however, the author himself, feeling gloomy, consulted the Quran and performed istikhārah, the auspicious result of which alleviated his concern. I’timad al-Saltanah and Hedayat were Western-educated and progressive-minded intellectuals by all accounts. It was, however, a cleric, Sayyid Jamal al-Din Va’ez, who in one of his many speeches at the Shah Mosque in Tehran condemned “superstition and [belief in] genies and the trajectory of celestial bodies [i.e. astrology]” all the while equating modern concepts with the principles of Islam.

Neither was this liminal position in relation to astronomy-astrology limited to intellectuals or orators. Muhammad ‘Ali Shah consulted the Quran (istikhārah) for almost every important decision, including the bombardment of the Majlis, the killing of captured constitutionalists, and the exile of pro-constitutionalist ‘ulama from the capital. The monarch’s requests for the performance of istikhārah were often sent to Haji Sayyid Abutalib Musavi Zanjani, a notable member of the ‘ulama during the shah’s reign. Malek al-Mutakallemin, the emiment constitutionalist whose ominous fate had been sealed by Muhammad ‘Ali Shah’s istikhārah, had himself consulted Hafiz (fāl) to find out about his future in the wake of popular calls for his

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573 Muhammad Hassan Khan’s Sālnāmah-i Dawlat-i ‘Illiyah-i Īrān (The Almanac of the Exalted State of Iran) is the product of the royal decision.


577 Ibid., Vol. 1, 534-545.
banishment from his native Isfahan. He was not sure whether he should stay or leave the town. Hafiz told him to leave, which he proceeded to do. Mirza Salim Khan Adib al-Mamalek, private physician to General Muhammad Vali Khan Sipahsalar conquerer of Tehran in 1909, was entrusted with the task of coining a phrase that would summarize the spirit and the date of the granting of the constitution (1324/1906). His first thought was to consult Hafiz which act provided him with the phrase “‘adl-i muzaffar” (Muzaffar’s justice), implying the granting of the constitution by Muzaffar al-Din Shah. General Muhammad Vali Khan Sipahsalar had himself consulted Hafiz, and received confirmation from the same source, before mobilizing his troops that would shortly after conquer the capital and re-establish the Majlis. Meanwhile, a group of young enthusiasts who were awaiting the news of a final constitutionalist victory in 1909 consulted Hafiz for a prediction of the outcome of the strife. Hafiz predicted an auspicious end. Among the group of youngsters was the future prime minister Muhammad ‘Ali Furughi Zaka‘ul Mulk. The great Malkum Khan, the “founder” of the discourse of law and rationality in Iran, consulted Hafiz before founding his freemason organization (the farāmūshkhānāh) in the capital. Hafiz’s response was positive. Of course, he had, in his Firqah-i Kaj Bīnān (The Party of the Ignorant), deemed it to be a type of madness to resort to traditional scriptures for the cure of physical ailments or to consulting the stars to determine one’s fate.

Such liminality was not limited to philosophical perspectives or personal practices alone. It was also discernible in the very sites of the dissemination of modern ideas, drafting of reformist agendas, and production of revolutionary strategies: the anjumans, the mushrooming societies found in every provincial town, for every guild, and at every town quarter, of which there were one hundred and eighty in the capital alone during the years 1907 and 1909. In many of these societies religious rituals such as the custom of salavāt (uttering greetings and respect to Prophet Muhammad and his descendants) was widespread while “some even held rawzakhwānī [ritual

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578 Ibid., Vol. 1, 547.
579 Ibid., Vol. 1, 548.
580 Ibid., Vol. 1, 549.
581 Ibid., Vol. 1, 549.
582 Ibid., Vol. 1, 548.
Muharram mourning] sessions.”\(^{585}\) The purported ‘Azali reformer and future deputy Haji Mirza Yahya Dawlat Abadi likened the assembly of the constitutionalists on the eve of the bombardment of the Majlis to the night of ‘Ashura and the assembly of Imam Husayn and his followers,\(^{586}\) revealing not only the deep seated belief in the truth of Islam in the mind of one of the most “liberal-minded” reformist intellectuals but also in the simultaneity and commensurability of Islamic thought with modern ideas. A similar liminal attitude towards mysticism characterized the Iranian imaginary.

Often denounced as tradition’s regressive adherence to pacifism, renunciation of worldly affairs, and idleness, mysticism (\(\textit{tasavvuf}\)), much like astrology, was associated with superstition, irrationality, and even apostasy and condemned by secular and religious figures alike.\(^{587}\) The penetrating reach of mysticism in society brought common people, princes, the ‘ulama, statesmen, and even the monarch himself into its fold and meant that its influence had to be curtailed.\(^{588}\) As often was the case, the ‘ulama led the way, though their main concern was the defiance of Islamic philosophy in Sufi doctrine.\(^{589}\) As early as the eighteenth century, Mirza Qumi (1739-1816), arguably the most prominent mujtahid of his time, had advised Fath ‘Ali Shah (r. 1797-1834) against mysticism because the latter had Sufi tendencies.\(^{590}\) Qumi even identified mysticism as a Christian plot to subjugate the Muslim monarch to foreign influence: “The origin of the the Sufi persuasion [\(\textit{mazhab-i tasavvuf}\)] is taken from Christianity, and the

\(^{585}\) Ibid., Vol. 2, p.252.


\(^{587}\) There are numerous disapproving references of this type. It suffices to remember that mysticism as the purveyor of idleness and irrationality is the subject of many a newspaper article and \(\textit{munāzirah}\). Two examples from sources cited in this study include: \textit{Akhtar}, No. 43, 27 July 1887 and \textit{Ā‘īnah-i Mashrūṭah}, 61.

\(^{588}\) Mystics had great influence in the courts of Fath ‘Ali Shah and Muhammad Shah whose vizier, Hajji Mirza Aqasi, was known for his Sufi tendencies. Mysticism had its reach into the rank of ‘ulama as well. Prominent Sufis such as Mulla ‘Abdulsamad Hamedani and Majzub ‘Ali Shah Qaragozlu had undertaken seminary education. Alireza Abazari, “\textit{Sih Risālah-i Naqdi Sūfiyyah az Dawrān-i Qājār.” Payam Baharestan, 4:15 (Spring 1391/2012), 43-57.

\(^{589}\) See, for example, the treatise written by the leading mujtahid of his time Mulla ‘Abdulvahab Qazvini (a contemporary of Fath ‘Ali Shah and Muhammad Shah), entitled \textit{Tazkīratul Ikhvān li Shīrīn al-Shaytān} [The Biography of the Brotherhood on the Apostasy of Satan], in Alireza Abazari, “\textit{Sih Risālah-i Naqdi Sūfiyyah az Dawrān-i Qājār.” Payam Baharestan, 4:15 (Spring 1391/2012), 60-87. Part of this treatise was written in the form of a \(\textit{munāzirah}\).

Farangīs and Christians will take pride in making the Shiite Shah one of their disciples."**591**

Almost a century later, Malkum Khan, a Christian, displayed the same attitude towards mysticism. In his Sirātāl Mustaṣqīm (The Right Path, itself a Quranic phrase) he considered Sufis as being only concerned with the spiritual cleansing of their own selves and never took an active role in instructing the society.**592** The sentiment continued into the twentieth century with writers and intellectuals such as Ahmad Kasravi, Sadeq Hedayat and ‘Ali Dashti all opposing Sufism as an anti-social and, much like astrology, irrational practice.**593** During the formative years of Naser al-Din Shah’s reign, the king “fearing antigovernment rumors, unsuccessfully tried to shut down the many teahouses of Tehran on the pretext that ‘storytellers and [Sufi] dervishes encouraged idleness and other vices among the lower classes’.”**594** When one considers the immense influence of mystical teachings in the popular perceptions of javānmardī (chivalrous manliness), however, a completely different narrative emerges: the enduring and pervasive persistence of mystical values alongside the anti-mystical sentiments cited above.

The zūrkhānah (lit. house of strength, a traditional gymnasium for the performance of ancient forms of wrestling) was the locus of the much revered code of javānmardī. In the popular imagination the “symbolism contained within each zūrkhāna ranges from Shi‘ite to nationalist and Sufi elements.”**595** If the political value of mysticism had been the subject of sustained criticism, its moral code of ethics pervaded social imagination and praxis. The same shah who had attempted to close teahouses for fear of the infiltration of Sufi dervishes was a great patron of the zūrkhānah, so much so that during his reign “the zūrkhāna and the ancient sports reached the pinnacle of their popularity,” well attended by the lower and middle classes, clerics, and princes alike.**596** One such prince was ‘Ali Khan Qajar Zahir al-Dawlah (1864-1924), son-in-law to Naser al-Din Shah and future constitutionalist governor. He was a devoted disciple and follower of the grand Sufi master Safi ‘Ali Shah (1835-1899) and was even appointed as his

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591 Ibid., 135.


596 Ibid., 177-8.
spiritual heir.\(^{597}\) As late as 1956, Jamalzadeh, “the founder of the Persian short story,” nostalgically described the physical, moral, and spiritual values associated with the \(z\̲ü\̲rkhān\̲ah\) with great awe.\(^{598}\) Such sentiments were not limited to the despotic king, princes, clerics, the lower classes, or the “founder of the Persian shorty story” alone. In different shapes and forms, they were woven into the very texture of social practice. A case in point was the obstinate persistence of the ancient style of bookkeeping known as \(s\̲ī\̲yāq\). The esoteric quality of the \(s\̲ī\̲yāq\) script, which was known only to the scribal class, made it similar to mystical gnosis which in turn was understood only by the initiated few. In 1911 the constitutional parliament decided to appoint the American Morgan Shuster as the treasurer-general of Iran and granted him sufficient power to reform the country’s finances. On the reform agenda was the replacement of the traditional methods of the \(s\̲ī\̲yāq\) with modern accounting. \(s\̲ī\̲yāq,\) however, continued to be preferred to modern accounting despite all the official promotion of the latter, and most people continued to use it except when they had to deal with state bureaus. Even so, they had their own balances in \(s\̲ī\̲yāq\) and a separate one copied from it in accordance with the official system for presentation to state auditors. Additionally, \textit{mustawfīs} (traditional accountants) were deemed to be more skilful in keeping a balanced budget than modern accountants.\(^{599}\) As in the case of law-sharia and astronomy-astrology, Iran’s mystical heritage was overlaid with simultaneous and competing discourses of rationality-spirituality, idleness-virtue, and tradition-modernity. It was reflected in a society where some “traditional” ‘\textit{ulama} embraced and even opened modern schools,\(^{600}\) “progressive” intellectuals viewed constitutionalism with suspicion and advised caution in its implementation,\(^{601}\) and where appropriations of modern ideas followed too heterogeneous a path to warrant the designation “intellectuals” as a well defined class for

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\(^{598}\) Lloyd Ridgeon, \textit{Morals and Mysticism} (New York: Routledge, 2010), 167.

\(^{599}\) ‘Abdullah Mostowfi, \textit{Sharh-i Zindagānī-yi Man} (Tehran: Hermes, 1386/2007), Vol. 2, 335-340. It will be remembered that the question of the efficacy of \(s\̲ī\̲yāq\) was also one of the issues discussed in the \textit{munāzirah} titled \(Nūshdārā\̲ū\) which was discussed above.


proponents of reform. The Iranian intellectual was a hybrid of many ideologies, interpretations, and appropriations.

It was this brand of intellectuals who set out, in their writings and activism, to cure the ills of the country. It has previously been shown how in the early modern era the nation was increasingly imagined as a body in need of treatment. Medical discourse, then, was from the start linked to the politics of modernization, nation building to national healing. Participating in this project were the competing discourses of shafā (healing) and darmān (medical cure). While the latter drew on rationality and empirical evidence, the former was premised on a belief in the miraculous healing powers of sacred shrines and of special prayers singly or in conjunction with traditional remedies. Thus the coexistence of davā (drugs) and duʿā (prayer) in medical discourse reflected the careers, approaches, and ideologies of medical practitioners. It also mirrored the extent to which the rival discourses of tradition and modernity were pronounced in the process of Iranian modern making. Sometimes this rivalry was expressed in open confrontation, but often through treatises and lived experience.

A contemporary observer reports that “Minister of Science, Jahangir Khan, had contracted gangrene. Doctor Tholozan and other famous doctors judged it to be past cure and wanted to truncate the leg. The women cried and said let Mirza Hasan the surgeon [a traditionally trained doctor] try too. They brought him and he said I will cure it in eleven days. He performed

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602 In the words of Ervand Abrahamian, “Although … intellectuals developed during the twentieth century into the salaried middle class, they constituted in the nineteenth century a mere stratum, for they were too few and too heterogeneous to form a social class: some were aristocrats, even royal princes, others civil servants and army officers, and yet others clerics and merchants.” Iran between Two Revolutions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 61.


604 See, for example, Monica Ringer, Education, Religion, and the Discourse of Cultural Reform in Qajar Iran (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, Inc., 2001), 101: “According to Najmabadi, doctors trained in traditional medicine openly quarrelled with those trained in European medicine.” 101.

605 Monica Ringer notes that the challenge to European drugs and their instruction at the Dār alFamān was led by Hajj Mirza Baba Shirazi, known as Malek al-Atebba (The King of Doctors). He wrote a treatise entitled Jawharīyyah (The Essences) in which he questioned the validity of Western medicine. Monica Ringer, Education, Religion, and the Discourse of Cultural Reform in Qajar Iran (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, Inc., 2001), 101.
bloodletting through applying leeches and used a special oil which cured the leg after fifteen days.”

I’timad al-Saltanah, a French-educated intellectual and Naser al-Din Shah’s minister of publications, had less than a favourable view of the traditional doctor Malek al-Atebba whose verbosity and Arabic-punctuated Persian was only a cover for his lack of medical learning: “His knowledge is limited to this, otherwise he does not have much knowledge in medicine.”

However, to remedy his nagging stomach problems, the sickly I’timad al-Saltanah trusted Malek al-Atebba’s prescriptions (or else traditional remedies) over doctor Tholozan with whom he was personally acquainted: “In my personal opinion for this type of sickness Iranian doctors are better.” On another occasion he sent for both Tholozan and Malek al-Atebba and implemented both prescriptions.

Vacillating between a traditional doctor and a European physician trained in modern medicine was a recurring episode. For his dizziness, one morning I’timad al-Saltanah visited doctor Tholozan; in the afternoon of the same day, he still opted to apply leeches, a traditional form of bloodletting believed to remove toxins from the body. The episode was re-enacted when I’timad al-Saltanah first visited doctor Tholozan for a headache but found it necessary later to complement the latter’s remedy with a traditional mixture of purgative manna (shīrkhisht) and watermelon. Such beliefs and practices were not limited to the elites. They were also an integral part of the lived experience of common people. A contemporary witness notes that the “most popular doctors in this era were the old Hakim Bashis [i.e. traditional doctors]. Their knowledge drew from the Tuhfah-i Hakīm of Mu’min and the Law [Qānūn] … of Avicenna and Barā’ al-Sā’ah of Muhammad Zakariya Razi … and their remedies came from the book Makhzan al-Advīyah.”

Foreign or foreign trained as well as Dār al-Funūn trained doctors

609 For a complete biography of Doctor Tholozan and his activities during his long appointment as royal physician at the court of Naser al-Din Shah, see Mohammad Reza Behzadi, “Pāyān Nāmah-i Duktur Tuluzān Hakīm Bāshī-yi Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh.” Payam Baharestan, 2:6 (Winter 1388/2010).
611 Ibid., 50.
612 Ibid., 55.
613 Ibid., 101.
did not have much popularity except for a few who were skilful sergeons and “people had more belief in traditional doctors … There were a few Farangī doctors among whom Doctor Tholozan, the old and long standing physician of Naser al-Din Shah’s court, was the most famous.” He had recently been replaced by Doctor Feuvrier who did not enjoy popularity and did not stay in Iran more than two years.614 We have previously seen how the journal al-Islām reported on two women whose condition had been deemed beyond cure (darmān) by European and Iranian doctors but who purportedly sought and found complete healing (shafā) in the shrine of Imam Reza.615

Alternating between traditional remedies, healing, and modern medicine did not involve a simple case of precedence (of shafā over darmān or vice versa). It was woven into the very fabric of an interdiscursive (and intertextual) understanding of treatment (of the body or of the nation). It affected both the “rationalist” and the “traditionalist” practitioners of medicine who appropriated elements of the rival discourse in their arguments. Interdiscursivity was manifested in the simultaneous deployment of healing-cure: “Almost all medical books refer[ed], to some extent, to faith healing and all treatises on prayers claim[ed] somehow to have healing effect.”616 It was also manifested in the careers of many medical practitioners as “cleric-doctors” whose education included both medical and religious sciences and who often simultaneously practiced as doctors and religious scholars. One such cleric-doctor was Mehdi Malek Afzali (later known as Buqratul Hukama, the Hippocrates of Doctors) who first undertook seminary education with Ayatullah Burujerdi, studied traditional medicine with Hajji Mirza Muhammad Baqer, and finally pursued a course of studies in modern medicine at the Dār al-Funūn.617 Afzali’s work reflected his hybrid education. In his medical treatise he drew on both contemporary medical research and prophetic traditions. He proved the adverse effects of alcohol and meat consumption and endorsed the use


615 Al-Islām. Muharram 1344/July 1925, 14-17.

616 Hormoz Ebrahimnejad, “Religion and Medicine in Qajar Iran.” In Robert Gleave, Religion and Society in Qajar Iran (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 404. Though Ebrahimnejad’s excellent chapter describes the complex and contested formation of a medical discourse in Iran, his use of the word “religion” in the title reduces the process to a simple binaristic opposition. See, for example, 406-7.

of the traditional practice of bloodletting for removing bodily toxins.\textsuperscript{618} The outbreak of a cholera epidemic in Iran in 1860 and the establishment of “Health Councils” by royal decree provides a succinct example of the participation of competing discourses in the healing of the nation. Two of the collaborating members at the council were doctors Tholozan and Mirza Muhammad Taqi Shirazi, an eminent royal physician. Collaboration with doctor Tholozan, however, did not impede doctor Shirazi from authoring \textit{Risālih-i jawhariyyah} (Treatise on [against] Essences) which disapproved of Western drugs and their introduction in the capital.\textsuperscript{619} Shirazi was trained in modern medicine, but his attitude toward Western drugs had been informed by traditional medicine in the same way that the views of cleric-doctors were influenced by modern medical discourse.

A student of Muhammad Taqi Shirazi, Astarabadi was a cleric-doctor whose education included studies in religious and medical science. Following the views of his teacher, he wrote a treatise against the use of Western drugs, arguing that what had been produced according to European climes would not have an effect on the Iranian disposition.\textsuperscript{620} However, in a later treatise on the 1892 epidemic entitled \textit{Safīnah-yi Nūh} (Noah’s Ark), Astarabadi made ample use of discoveries and terminology (such as \textit{atulujiyā} for pathology and \textit{fsulujiyā} for physiology) drawn from modern medical science. \textit{Safīnah-yi Nūh} still denounced modern medicine, but it did so by appropriating elements of the rival discourse. Fittingly, Astarabadi’s treatise was divided into two sections titled, respectively, \textit{duʿā} (prayer), which listed prayers to be used for protection against disease, and \textit{davā} (medication), which discussed ways to cure (\textit{raf'}) disease. In an uncanny similarity to the simultaneous condemnation and promotion of an ideology in the \textit{munāzirah}, Astarabadi first condemned but, a few lines later, prescribed quinine as a remedy for cholera.\textsuperscript{621} It was this dialogical interaction between cure and healing which found expression in treatises that defined the modern hospital as a site of healing, effectively endowing a modern

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{618} Ibid., 402.
\item \textsuperscript{619} Ibid., 411.
\item \textsuperscript{620} Ibid., 411.
\item \textsuperscript{621} Ibid., 415.
\end{itemize}
institution with the magical powers of an old one (the shrines or Imamzādahs). Others did the opposite: attributing to sacred shrines the therapeutic authority of the clinic.

The synthesis of the modern and the traditional is characteristic of the discourse of Iranian modernity, dialogue an indispensable element in its formation. The most radical promotion of, or opposition to, the adoption of the modern (in respect to the implementation of law, establishment of modern institutions, national education, improvement of infrastructure, introduction of modern sciences, military reform, journalism, among a myriad of other such issues) was in effect an instance of discursive rivalry among competing interests, ideologies, and interpretations. As such, Iranian modernity was, and continues to be, a process of adaptation, a continual redefinition and transformation of the old and the new. Its liminal reach is evident in every text, every treatise, every argument, and every practice in the recorded history of the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth centuries. If I’tizad al-Saltanah – the reform-minded Minister of Science during Naser al-Din Shah and a co-translator of Descartes’ Discours – condemned astrology and consulting the stars as a form of superstition, he did so with simultaneous reference to traditional and modern learning. If he wrote a treatise promoting modern astronomy, he also composed mystical poetry. If Mustashar al-Dawlah promoted the French Codes, he did so in a point-by-point reference to Quranic verses. And if Mirza Sulayman Khan Adib al-Hukama questioned the efficacy of traditional remedies for healing the national body, he also discredited the figure of the modern doctor. His ideal healer was the figure of the mystic-physician. The dialogue of genres, ideologies, and discourses in the careers of these figures, their liminal

622 I owe this insight to Hormoz Ebrahimnejad’s chapter in Religion and Society in Qajar Iran (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005). His conclusion, however, is radically different from mine. For Ebrahimnejad, the synthesis of the discourses of cure and healing (which he erroneously terms “health-faith”) result in the separation of religion and medicine: “What is noteworthy here is that the [anonymous] author presents an entirely rational perception of the health-faith relationship, which has been understood in purely magical terms for many centuries. This illustrates the budding intellectual process of the separation between religion and medicine” (406–7). As we have seen in this study, however, the “opposition” or “separation” of purportedly a priori and well-defined categories such as “religion” or “medicine” fail to accommodate the synthesis of the two in modern Iranian discourse.

623 Reference has previously been made to the case of the two women who were reportedly cured by visiting the shrine of Imam Reza, as reported in Al-Islām. Muharram 1344/July 1925, 14–17. In that article, the written and signed testimonies of a European and an Iranian doctor are included as testimony to the proof of the incidents.


625 I’tizad al-Saltanah’s treatise on modern astronomy is entitled Falak al-Sa’ādah (Firmament of Fortune). His mystical poetry, written in the form of Masnavi, is entitled Tanbīḥ al-Khavās fi Maqām al-Ikhlās.

626 See the discussion on the figure of Mirza ‘Arif in Suhbat-i Sangu u Sabū above.
position in relation to the traditional and the modern, is extendable to every important figure in the history of Iranian modernity, from Sayyid Jamal al-Din to Jamalzadeh, as it is observeable in social practice and in the alternating and successive shifts in attitude towards constitutionalism among the masses and intellectuals alike. The *munāzirah* is the account of the dialogue among (and between) the discourses of law-sharia, astronomy-astrology, and healing-cure.
Postscript

The history of ideas usually credits the discourse that it analyses with coherence. If it happens to notice an irregularity in the use of words, several incompatible propositions, a set of meanings that do not adjust to one another, concepts that cannot be systematized together, then it regards it as its duty to find, at a deeper level, a principle of cohesion that organizes the discourse and restores to it its hidden unity. This law of coherence is a heuristic rule, a procedural obligation, almost a moral constraint of research: not to multiply contradictions uselessly; not to be taken in by small differences; not to allow too much weight to changes, disavowals, returns to the past, and polemics; not to suppose that men’s discourse is perpetually undermined from within by the contradiction of their desires, the influences that they have been subjected to, or the conditions in which they live … But this same coherence is also the result of research: it defines the terminal unities that complete the analysis; it discovers the internal organization of a text, the form of development of an individual oeuvre, or the meeting-place of different discourses.

Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*

In 1881, Sayyid Jamal al-Din Asadabadi (also known as Al-Afghani) – considered, along with Malkum Khan, a pioneer of the reform movement in Iran – published his *Risālah-i Naycharīyyah* (Treatise on Materialism) in Bombay. In it, he used Islamic precepts to attack the materialist worldview. Sayyid Jamal al-Din (1839-97) was a tireless advocate of the union of Islamic nations against the onslaught of European imperialism. He was also a staunch supporter of modernization and reform policies within the Islamic world. His *Treatise on Materialism* is framed in a dialogic question and answer form. Following the style of the *tawzīh al-masā‘īl* (Exposition of Matters, the indigenous clerical genre for the elucidation of religious matters), the treatise starts with a “question [posed to] our lord Sayyid Jamal al-Din” and continues with “the answer by the reformer of the East the late Saayid Jamal al-Din.” Much scholarship considers Sayyid Jamal al-Din to belong to the ranks of “secular reformers” and to have entertained “secular and modernist views.” Besides writing treatises against materialism, Sayyid Jamal al-Din also contributed articles to Malkum Khan’s London-based periodical *Qānūn* (Law). Taking this fact into account, the most balanced scholarship acknowledges the dual role of Sayyid Jamal

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628 This treatise was serialized in the journal *Ā‘īn-i Islam*, starting with number 180, 8 Aban 1326/31 October 1947.


al-Din as a “Muslim reformer and pan-Islamist” but still hails him as an “architect of [a] historically unusual alliance between religious and radical elements,” betraying a deep-seated belief in an organic difference between the diametrically opposed polarities “religious” and “secularist,” “traditionalist” and “reformist.”

The case of Sayyid Jamal al-Din and the scholarship on him mirrors the assumptions and contradictions latent (often apparent) in posthumous readings of the history of Iranian modernity at large. It also reflects the extent to which ahistorical categories have been imposed on complex processes of historical transformation often characterized by heterogeneities, overlaps, and continuities (or discontinuities). It has been the intended goal of this study to address this significant gap in scholarship on the history of modern Iran. I have tried to demonstrate that what is conceived as the opposition between mutually exclusive fronts towards distinct, and differing, goals (that of the establishment of a “modern” Iran or, alternatively, that of preserving a regressive status quo) were in fact facets of a contradiction-ridden common goal of lifting the country out of its undesirable state by adapting and synthesizing various propositions. What are conceived as conflicting antagonisms were in fact conflicted interests. What is conceived as opposition was in fact contradiction (as opposed to a state of being contradictory).

I am aware that my proposition may be perceived as replacing one set of generalizations with another, supplanting dialectical conflict with dialogical synthesis. In point of fact, however, it is not so. For binaristic readings take as their point of departure dialectic conflict in the course of Iranian modernity as a historical principle, “as the principle of its historicity.” Such a methodological approach succeeds in presenting satisfactory interpretations and convenient taxonomies backed by sufficient archival evidence. In doing so, however, it mistakes the effect of a contested process for its cause. It has failed, therefore, to historicize Iranian modernity as an object of study. It has become, not surprisingly, a mere chronicle of episodic conflict due to the flawed premise on which it is based. My analysis departs from these preconceived principles by describing contestation and adaptation as objects of study without dictating on their historicity a priori assumptions. What emerges as a result of this shift in approach is a quite different account of Iranian modernity, one that problematizes the assumptions behind the normative readings.

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described above. It liberates hitherto overlooked social practices, discounted anomalies, and silenced texts.

It was through this approach that the munāzirah presented itself as the narrative of Iranian modernity. Its pervasive presence in the extant corpus of historical documents (either as a textual product or as discursive practice) is so conspicuous that I often felt shocked that it had not previously been noticed and fortunate, at the same time, that I was provided with ample material for my analysis. I then proceeded to take account of the different capacities in which it was deployed in the three periods under investigation: variously in the form of chīstāns, direct address, questions and answers, quasi-dramatic dialogue, and munāzirah proper as they appeared in contemporary periodicals, topical monographs, and publically displayed leaflets. Alongside these methods of production and dissemination, I also took note of its employment as discursive practice in official policies, social praxis, and shifting political alliances. These observations led to the conclusion that the munāzirah and its evolving usages were factors in a process of discourse formation. Therefore, the topoi and tropes of the munāzirah, in its capacity as a discourse and not merely a literary or political genre, reflect the sociocultural attitudes towards adaptations of modernity.

Firstly, the characterology of the munāzirah reveals an overlaying of identities and of overlapping discourses. We have seen how characters do not always faithfully echo stock qualities associated with the social types they represent. Thus it is that, for example, the character of the vizier can appear alternatively as a patriotic reformer or as a regressive element within the narrative. The figure of the Shaykh, equally, can represent a reactionary or a wise figure well versed, but still critical of, the modern sciences. We have also seen how certain character-archetypes can find various representation such that the figure of the doctor can appear in three incarnations as a western-educated doctor, as a traditional hakim, or as a mystic-doctor who is a hybrid of both discourses, all of whose prescriptions converge upon the national body. This type of liminality, as we have seen, was a mirror image of the rivalry between the discourses of healing (shafā) and medical treatment (darmān) in the contemporary society. Doctors educated in modern medicine wrote treatises denouncing the use of Western drugs, while cleric-doctors simultaneously rejected and prescribed chemical compounds. It was also reflected in the mixed attitude towards astrology and astronomy: reform-minded intellectuals and statesmen who condemned astrology as a form irrationality but who nevertheless conducted istikhārah
(consulting the Quran) or fāl (consulting the poetry of Hafiz), and seminary-educated clerics who upheld the truth of astronomy with reference to the Quran. Such in-between identities, the split subjects of Iranian modernity, appear not only as fictional characters in the narrative of the munāẓirah but also as actants in the social text. The presence of the figures of the host and of the traveller, it will be remembered, personified the liminal loci for the rivalry of contending ideologies.

Setting in the munāẓirah serves a similar purpose. The setting of the munāẓirah is almost invariably either an ambiguous space or foreign lands. The tropological function of setting in the munāẓirah is that of a thematized space, a thematization of ambiguity. Space in the early modern imaginary was indeed an ambiguous locus. The sacred space of shrines (such as the famous ‘Abd al-‘Azim shrine near Tehran), for example, alternatively hosted constitutionalists or anti-constitutionalists who took sanctuary (bast) within its walls as a symbolic gesture of dissent or of refuge. When the conditions were not suitable for making the rather long trip to the shrine, contenders took sanctuary on a foreign embassy’s grounds. Thus it was that protestors took bast in the British embassy in 1906 and Muhamma ‘Ali Shah took refuge in the Russian embassy in 1909. India or the Caucasus acted as the setting in some munāẓirahs, as lands where the Magna Carta and “oriental despotism” found simultaneous expression (as in India) or where a dominant foreign power ruled over the cultural territory of tradition (as in the now Russian-controlled Caucasia). The notion of Farangistān, as well, was perceived as a chronotopia where the futural space of Europe actualized the golden age of tradition (whether ideal Islam or an idealized pre-Islamic Persia). Within the country itself, the enclosed spaces of provincial towns were ambiguous loci where the central government had only nominal sovereignty. This was especially the case before the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 when a major demand (also a major theme in the munāẓirahs of this period) was the implementation of a universal and unambiguous law. But even after the Constitutional Revolution and the drafting of such laws, important provincial centres such as Isfahan and Tabriz were ambiguous spaces where the local Anjumans (Societies) formed the equivalent of semi-independent city-states.

Yet another narrative feature of the munāẓirah is its temporal logic: a cyclical rather than a linear conception of time. It is with reference to this logic that realizing the advances of European civilization is not perceived as taking a step forward along a linear axis of time but indeed a look back at Islamic principles from which Europe’s civilizational tenets are so often said to have
derived in almost every munāzirah. In the social text, this was manifested through a strong belief in the commensurability and simultaneity of sharia and law. Its most apparent outward manifestation was in the very designation given the first consultative assembly established in 1907: The Sacred National Assembly (majlis-i muqaddas-i millī). Its designation (as did its space) accommodated the coexistence of religious, national, and secular discourses, a simultaneity that was also reflected in its constitution as well as in its diverse membership which included secular reformists, clerics, merchants, bureaucrats, and princes. Sharia-law was thus comprised of a host of competing ideologies, reflected in the fielding of a myriad of narratives, genres, and discourses in the munāzirah: law, prophetic traditions, modern sciences, traditional sciences, histories, biographies, travelogues, poetry, prose, Quranic references, rationality, prophecy, among many others.

Whether it was the question of the implementation of law (constitutionalism, reform of the legal apparatus, administrative centralization), the promotion of rationality (espousing modern sciences, national education, alphabet reform), or the treatment of the national body (encouragement of empirical certainty, elevation of davā over duʿā, improvement of infrastructure, reform of the army), Iranian adaptation of modernity was from the start a contested yet dialogical process. The rival discourses participating in this dialogue were products of conflicted rather than essentially conflicting ideologies. Narrativizing the history of Iranian modernity as the conflict between mutually exclusive binaries overlooks its hyphenated, liminal identity. The munāzirah is the account of Iranian modernity – a narrative of adaptation rather than wholesale adoption, of heterogeneity rather than homogeneity, of dialogics rather than dialectics.
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