

A Tale of Grief or the True Novel *

Shahrokh Meskoob

Through a detailed recounting of the autobiographical memories of the Qajar princess, Taj al-Saltaneh, and a number of other literary works by Persian authors in the early twentieth century, the author describes the unjust and degrading life of Iranian women prior to the constitutional revolution. In the period prior to the Constitutional Revolution, Iranian literature, particularly its poetry, depicted ethical and social behavior only in abstract and general forms since the individual was an integral part of the family, tribe, village and class. It was, according to the author, the Constitutional Revolution which bestowed individuality on Iranian citizens and, therefore laid the ground for Iranian poets and writers to portray the protagonists in their works as specific individual beings.

To illustrate his point, the author elaborates on the characters and thematic literary structures of two short stories written by Moshfeq Kazemi and Mirza Abolqasem Aref Qazvini in the decades following the Constitutional Revolution. He recounts the tales of parental greed and ambition, forced marriages and moral decadence that mark the characters in these stories. Despite the simplistic plots and roughly-hewn structure of the story lines, the author believes that these works, along with a number of other similar short stories, for the first time in Persian literary tradition, directly and unabashedly reveal the many social and moral ills that afflicted the Iranian society at the turn of the century.