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Wali Ahmadi

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Re: Letter of Recommendation for
Dr. Fateme Montazeri

July 1, 2025

Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies
University of Toronto
Faculty of Arts & Science
Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations
4 Bancroft Avenue
Toronto, ON M5S 1C1 CANADA

Dear Colleagues:

It is my distinct pleasure to write this letter of reference in support of the application of Dr. Fateme Montazeri, who is applying for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowships in Iranian Studies at the University of Toronto.

I've known Dr. Fateme Montazeri for many years, since she chose to attend Berkeley after completing her BA and MA degrees at the University of Tehran and the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, respectively. I served as Dr. Montazeri's principal teacher and chaired her dissertation committee. During her doctoral studies, she took a variety of Persian literature classes with me, from a comprehensive history of Persian literature to reading classical Persian poetry and prose, from modern poetry and fiction to the exploration of contemporary theories of Persian poetics, aesthetics, literary criticism, and cultural studies. She also completed several graduate seminars with me where she would engage in immensely stimulating intellectual discussions with fellow Berkeley doctoral students coming from such disciplines as Comparative Literature, South Asian Studies, History, and Jewish and Islamic Studies.

Supervising Dr. Montazeri's doctoral studies convinced me that, in terms of depth, range, and extent of scholarship in Persian studies, Dr. Montazeri is one of the sharpest emergent scholars of Persian in academia today. She has already proven herself an exemplary scholar of Persian literature, an expert teacher/instructor of Persian language, and an excellent comparative literary and cultural historian of the Persianate world. In addition to her expertise in language and literature, she received a first-rate education in art history from the University of Tehran.

Fateme Montazeri's doctoral dissertation, entitled "Hāfiz and the Safavids: Cultural History of a Persianate Controversy" problematizes both the formal textual and the historically dynamic appropriation and reception of the poetics and personae of the 14th Century Persian poet Khwāja Shams al-Dīn Muhammad Hāfiz (Hāfez). Critics and scholars of Persian poetry nearly universally acknowledge that Hāfiz is arguably the greatest lyricist in the entire history of Persian literature. In fact, he may well be the greatest Persian poet of all time. Dubbed "the spokesman of the collective unconscious of the Persians" or "the last sacred poet in the pantheon of Persian literature," Hāfiz's poetry is highly revered by readers throughout the Persian-speaking milieu. In her innovative and original dissertation, Dr. Montazeri argues neither for nor against such claims. She takes a different and exceptionally novel route in approaching Hāfiz. In exploring what she terms "the contested afterlives of Hāfiz's poetry across early modern Persianate societies," she maintains that the canonical status of Hāfiz throughout history is itself a product of history and is informed by historical context(s). In particular, she recognizes the importance of the Safavid cultural stratagems in the practical formation and subsequent utilization of certain protonationalist modalities at the time. She pays particular attention to the Safavid emphasis on such imaginaries as a distinctive, integral Shi'a nation of Iran at a time that its own *raison d'être* was being challenged by such rival dynasties as the Ottomans. Furthermore, Dr. Fateme Montazeri concentrates on the poetry of Hāfiz and the oscillation of his generally accepted Sufi delineation throughout the pre- and early modern Persianate literary and cultural ecosphere. Drawing on codicological evidence, historiographical, biographical, and bibliographical accounts, architectural inscriptions, and close textual analysis of the *ghazals*, her project offers a truly novel understanding of the poetry of Hāfiz and its impact on the formation and consolidation in the early modern identity of the Persianate cultural and, to a large extent, intellectual milieu.

Dr. Fateme Montazeri is currently engaged assiduously in turning her unique dissertation into a book. As part of her efforts, she has consulted a number of new manuscripts at the Bodleian Library (Oxford) as well as additional textual materials at Manchester, Istanbul, and Tehran. She intends to conduct further parallel research on various Hāfiz manuscripts in Central Asia when she attends the upcoming Iranian Studies Association Biennial meeting in Tashkent. A generous postdoctoral fellowship through the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute at the University of Toronto will greatly enhance Dr. Montazeri's ability to effectively bring this valuable scholarly project to its full fruition and publish it as a book.

Allow me to add that Dr. Montazeri is not only an outstanding scholar and teacher but is also a first-rate creative writer. Her collection of stories, *Gharb-e Arezou*, is a welcome contribution to contemporary diasporic Persian literature. She has proven herself an excellent teacher of Persian language and a consummate scholar of Persian literature. The courses that she taught at Berkeley include all levels (beginning, intermediate, and advance) of the Persian language. To see in person her skillful use of most recent theories of language pedagogy, I have attended a few sessions of Persian language courses that Dr. Montazeri has taught. I have been exceedingly impressed by her knowledge of the dynamics of language instruction as well as her knowledge of methodologies of language acquisition and instruction at university level.

In addition, during the time that I served as the Chair of MELC and had reduced teaching responsibilities, she was given the task of teaching several undergraduate Persian literature content courses as well as graduate level seminars in Persian studies. She did a splendid job teaching these courses and gained the unique experience of covering various aspects of Persian at all levels. I found Fateme's course syllabi fascinating, well-thought, well-planned, and well-executed.

In sum, Fateme Montazeri is a first-rate scholar of proven merit, a devoted and experienced teacher of Persian language and literature, and a most valuable and esteemed colleague. I strongly and unreservedly recommend Dr. Montazeri for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions regarding her application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wali Ahmadi', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Wali Ahmadi
Associate Professor of Persian Literature