

Fateme Montazeri

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Applying for:

The Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

FACULTY OF ARTS & SCIENCE

Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies

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June 28, 2025

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF ARTS & SCIENCE
Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies

Dear Members of the Search Committee,

I am writing to apply for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies. I received my PhD from the Department of Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures at the University of California, Berkeley, in 2022. My dissertation, titled *The Reception of Hafiz: Cultural History of a Persianate Controversy*, is a multidisciplinary study of the historical, religious, and sociopolitical dimensions of the early modern period through the afterlives of Hafiz's poetry. It explores the evolving reception of Hafiz (d. 1390) in tandem with the changing religious claims of the Safavid house, and challenges the often-assumed static status of Hafiz as the unrivaled master of Persian poetry. The project aims to fill a critical gap in Western scholarship on Hafiz and his role in shaping Persianate identity.

Having taught Persian language and literature as a lecturer in the same department for the past three years, I am now eager to dedicate focused time to developing my dissertation into a monograph. The Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship presents an ideal opportunity to do so. I have long admired the Institute's contributions to the field and would be honored to pursue my research in such a stimulating intellectual environment.

Enclosed please find my curriculum vitae and a synopsis of my monograph and research interests. I would be glad to discuss how my work may support the goals of your program. I can be reached at (510) 283-4226 or montazeri@berkeley.edu.

Thank you for considering my application. I look forward to the opportunity to contribute to your program.

Sincerely,

Fateme Montazeri

Fateme Montazeri, PhD (she/her/hers)
Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures
University of California, Berkeley
Social Sciences Bld, #292

Fateme Montazeri

EDUCATION

- 2022 Ph.D. Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures (concentration: Persian Literature), University of California, Berkeley
Dissertation: “The Reception of Hafiz: Cultural History of a Persianate Controversy”
- 2013 M.A. Islamic Studies, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley.
Thesis: “Why Death? An Inquiry into Text and Context of Persian Painting in Nizami’s *Leili va Majnun*”
- 2008 M.A. Advanced Studies of Art, University of Tehran
- 2005 B.A. University of Tehran. 2005

PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS

- 2022-2025 Lecturer, Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures, UC Berkeley

TEACHING EXPERIENCE, UC Berkeley

Pers.103: Approaching the Ghazal: Mystical Lyricism in Persian Tradition (Spring 2025; Fall 2020)
Literary Analysis of Islamic and Jewish Texts (co-taught-Spring 2025), GTU.
MELC162A: History of Persian literature (Fall 2024)
Pers.100: Advanced Persian: Miscellaneous Texts (Spring 2025; Fall 2024; Spring 2020; Spring 2016; Fall 2019)
Pers. 298: All for Change: Persian Fiction of mid 19th to mid 20th century (Spring 2024)
Pers. 20: Intermediate Persian (Spring 2024; Spring 2023)
Pers. 200: Reading Hafiz (Fall 2023)
Pers.11: Reading and Composition for Persian-Speaking Students (Fall 2023; Fall 2022)
MELC 11: Middle Eastern Worlds (Spring 2023)
Mysticism in the Islamic and Jewish Traditions (co-taught-Spring 2023), GTU.
Pers.103: Persian Quatrains (Fall 2022)
Pers.104: Women and Contemporary Persian Short Story (Spring 2022)
Pers.101: Indian or Persian? An Introduction to the Safavid-Mughal Poetry (Spring 2021)
Introduction to the *Shahnamah*, Teachers’ Institute at ORIAS (Summer 2015)

PUBLICATIONS

Book

- 2024 *Gharb-i Arezou* [collection of short stories in Persian], London: Mehri Publications

Journal Articles

- Forthcoming Sufi, Ash‘arite, or Shi‘i?
Theological appropriation of Hafiz in the Early Modern Period, *Iranian Studies*.
- 2025 “Hafiz’s Flaw-covering *pir*: Theodical thought on a poem verse,” *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* (2025): 1–24
- 2021 "Who Says Only Men Have a Beard? Revisiting the Question of Gender Ambiguity in Persian Poetry." *Anthropology of the Middle East* 16, no. 2 (Winter 2021): 128-147.
- 2020 “Gum-shudah dar Tarikh ya Bar-rasidah bar Awj? Hashiyah va Matn dar Halqah-yi Sha'iran-i Qarn-Hashtum” (Buried in History or reached the zenith of fame? Text and Margin in the poetic circles of the eighth/fourteenth centuries) [in Persian], *Iran-Namag* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 95-115

Book Chapter

- 2018 “A Predestined Break from the Past: *Shi‘r-i Naw*, History, and Hermeneutics.” In *Persian Literature and Modernity: Production and Reception*, edited by Hamid Rezaei Yazdi, Arshavez Mozaffari, 141-161. London and New York: Routledge.

Manuscripts in preparation

“Wine Drinking in the fasting month? The semiotics of sin in the poetry of Hafiz,” *Islamic Studies*

Mustajab-zadeh (in Persian)

AWARDS/CERTIFICATES

- 2024 Conference to Journal Award, Association for Iranian Studies
- 2021 Certificate in Teaching and Learning in higher education, Graduate Division, University of California
- 2020 Certificate in Remote Instruction, GSI teaching and Resource Center, Graduate Division, University of California, Berkeley

2017-2018	Outstanding Graduate Student Instructor Award, UC Berkeley
2007	Exceptional Talented Award, Iran's National Elites Foundation
2002	Entrepreneurship Competition Award, University of Tehran, Iran
2000	First rank in the national entrance exam of the Arts in Iranian universities

GRANTS/FELLOWSHIPS

2024	Bahari Visiting Fellowship in the Persian Arts of the Book, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford
2023-2014	IDEA: Co-mentorship grant to support pedagogical approaches to Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access", UCOP
2022-2024	First Step Discovery Teaching Fellowship, UC Berkeley
2021	Andrew Mellon Research Grant, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, UC Berkeley
2020	Graduate Remote Instruction Innovation Fellowship, GSI Teaching & Resource Center, University of California, Berkeley
2018-19	Doctoral Completion Fellowship, Graduate Division, University of California, Berkeley
2015 & 2018	Summer Grant, Graduate Division, University of California, Berkeley
2018	Near Eastern Studies Fellowship, University of California, Berkeley
2012-2013	Presidential Scholarship, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley

CONFERENCE ACTIVITY

Papers Presented

2024	"Sufi, Ash'arite, or Shi'i? Theological appropriation of Hafiz in the Early Modern Period" Fourteenth biennial of Iranian Studies Conference, New Mexico.
2023	"Contempt for Hafiz? A Forgotten Historical Approach," Association for the Study of Persianate Societies, Yerevan
2022	"Zikr and 'Aqd-i Nikah: Some Forgotten functions of the Persian quatrain," Great Lakes Adiban Society Workshop, Chicago, October

- 2022 “Whose serving is Grandeur? Religious transformation reflected in Isfahani inscriptions of Hafiz’s poetry,” Iranian Studies Biennial Conference, Salamanca,
- 2022 “Deciphering Poetry: A Neglected Philosophical Function,” Forms and Functions of Islamic Philosophy, Bard College
- 2020 “Contempt for Hafiz?: A forgotten Historical Approach” Ninth Biennial Convention of the Association for the Study of Persianate Societies, New Delhi [postponed]
- 2019 "Genuine or Illusion? Safavid-Mughal Exchange of Epigraphy," New Perspectives on Cultural Contact & Exchange Colloquium, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, March
- 2018 “Hafiz in his Lifetime: Narrated by Medieval Anthologies,” Iranian Studies Biennial Conference, University of California Irvine
- 2014 “Scripture or Art Instruction? A Study of Fakhr al-Ashraf’s Lithographed Quran and its Calligraphy Treatise,” Historians of Islamic Art Association Biennial Conference, Aga Khan Museum, Toronto
- 2012 “Sermon in the Mosque or Socio-Religious Critique? Analysis of a Safavid Illustration of a Hafez’s poem,” Historians of Islamic Art Association Biennial Conference, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,
- 2012 “Mysticism in Persian Book Illustration,” American Association of Religion, Chicago

INVITED LECTURES/PRESENTATIONS/WORKSHOPS

- 2018 “Introduction to Persian-Arabic Calligraphy,” Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures, University of California, Berkeley
- 2018 “Hafiz chegunah Hafiz shud?” (How did Hafiz become Hafiz?), Symposium of Mystics and Mysticism, Avecina Cultural and Educational Foundation, Irvine, [in Persian]
- 2017 “Faith, Art, and Life,” Symposium, Center for Islamic Studies, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley
- 2016 “*Layla and Majnun*: Cultural Resonances,” Reaching for the Stars Conference, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, Berkeley
- 2012 “Introduction to the Nastaliq Style of Calligraphy and Sacred Geometry,”

Doorways to Islamic Civilization by Zawaya, Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California (ICCNC), Oakland, CA

- 2012 “Connecting the Worlds with Words”, Calligraphy exhibit and demonstration with Rabbi David Cooper, Hebrew calligrapher and Masaki Matsubara, visiting scholar at UC Berkeley, Annual Faith Trio Harvest Dinner, Kehilla Community Synagogue, Oakland, CA

Panel Participation

- 2016 “*Layla and Majnun*: Universal Truths from a Story of Unrequited Love,” Round table discussion with Aida huseynova and Karen Barkey, Moderated by Sabrina Klein, Cal Performances at Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive
- 2012 Moderating “Mirror to the Invisible World” Panel Discussion as part of Doorways to Islamic Civilization by Zawaya, Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California (ICCNC), Oakland, CA

Discussant

- 2025 Medieval Sufi Poetry, Biennial Conference of ASPS, Tashkent (Forthcoming)
- 2024 “Have you met Hafiz? Introductions and afterwords“ by Gary Cach, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, UC Berkeley

LANGUAGES

Persian (native)
Arabic (advanced reading)
French (reading)
German (reading)
Ottoman Turkish (elementary)
Latin (novice)
Pahlavi (novice)

TRANSLATIONS

Persian to English:

MOJTABA DOROODI, MOHAMMAD JAVAD OWLADHOSEYN, ARASH ZEINI , “A newly discovered Middle Persian funerary inscription from Mount Zaneh” Berkeley Working Papers in Middle Iranian Philology, No. 1, May 2023.

APPRENTICESHIP & EXTRA-ACADEMIC TRAINING

- 2016 “Introduction to Pahlavi (Old Persian) series,” by Ali Amini, PhD, University of California, Berkeley.
- 2013 “Islamic Codicology” short course, by Adam Gacek, Stanford University, CA
- 2009 Certificate in Persian Calligraphy *nasta‘liq* style

Synopsis of Monograph and Research Interests

The book project I propose to pursue at the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies at the University of Toronto builds on my doctoral dissertation, *The Reception of Hāfiz: Cultural History of a Persianate Controversy* (UC Berkeley, 2022). This project explores the contested afterlives of Hāfiz’s poetry across early modern Persianate societies. While modern readers often celebrate Hāfiz as a timeless mystic and master of the lyric ghazal, my research traces how this image was constructed over time. Specifically, it examines how the Safavids (r. 1501–1722) appropriated Hāfiz not as a fixed canonical figure but as a pliable source of poetic and religious authority.

Drawing on diverse sources—including historiographical, biographical, and bibliographical accounts; architectural inscriptions; codicological evidence; and close textual analysis—I show how perceptions of Hāfiz’s persona and poetry were shaped by political ideologies and shifting religious norms. In turn, these perceptions played a formative role in shaping early modern Persianate identity. My research demonstrates that the early Safavid shahs strategically engaged with the characteristic ambiguity of Hāfiz’s language—its mystical, lyrical, and courtly registers—to draw legitimacy from both his poetic prestige and his perceived Sufi affiliations. This allowed the Safavid court to simultaneously emphasize their spiritual lineage and regal authority, thereby claiming Hāfiz as a cultural icon.

By the late Safavid period, as the state shifted its patronage from Qizilbash Sufism toward Imamite Shi‘ism, the court’s engagement with Hāfiz evolved. Mystical readings of his verse became less ideologically useful, giving way to exegetical efforts aimed at aligning his poetry with contemporary Shi‘i theology. These transformations are evident in alterations to the poet’s very words, as seen in different versions of the same line inscribed on the Takyeh-ye Mir and the Shaykh Lutf-Allah Mosque in Isfahan, the capital under Shah ‘Abbās I (r. 1588–1629). The reinterpretation of Hāfiz extended into commentarial traditions that attempted to render him a “true” Shi‘i poet, reshaping his theological ambiguity to serve emerging doctrinal needs.

The project also examines how rival powers, particularly the Ottomans and the Mughals, responded to the Safavid cult of Hāfiz. For example, the Ottoman commentator Sūdī (d. ca. 1590) offered a literary reading of Hāfiz’s *Divān*, while Shaykh al-Islam Ebussuud (d. 1574) issued a fatwa warning against the indiscriminate recitation of his poetry. I plan to add a chapter on the reception of Hāfiz in the Indian subcontinent, drawing on manuscript marginalia that record Mughal practices of prognostication with the *Divān*. Together, the Safavid, Ottoman, and Mughal approaches offer a comprehensive cultural history of the Persianate world—one that was shaped by, and in turn helped shape, the evolving reception of Hāfiz.

My project, therefore, traces the historical intimacy between Persianate societies and Hāfiz back to the early modern period, when Iran’s first nation-state redefined its religio-political identity while appropriating the poet as a figure of ideological legitimacy. By foregrounding the role of extra-textual factors in the reception of his poetry, the project highlights an understudied phase in the historical processes that elevated Hāfiz to his current iconic status. More broadly, it advocates for a critical approach to historicizing even those cultural figures who appear timeless.

Parts of this project have already been published or accepted for publication. A forthcoming article, “Sufi, Ash‘arite, or Shi‘i? Theological Appropriation of Hafiz in the Early Modern Period,” which won the

Conference Paper to Journal Award at the 2024 Iranian Studies Association Biennial in Mexico, is one such example. With the support of the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Fellowship, I hope to develop this work into a full-length monograph that not only rethinks the legacy of the most celebrated Persian poet, but also offers a cultural history of the Persianate world—from Anatolia to Mughal India—through the lens of his reception.

As a distinct but related line of research, I am also preparing a critical edition of the *Divān* of Mānī (d. 1507 or 1517), a little-known early modern Persian poet. I first encountered his works alongside those of Hāfiz while serving as a Bahari Fellow at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. For the purpose of the critical edition, I am consulting additional manuscripts housed at the University of Manchester, the Majles Library, the National Library in Tehran, and the Millet Genel Kütüphanesi in Istanbul. Mānī's surviving corpus of approximately 150 ghazals remains entirely unpublished. In a forthcoming paper to be presented at the Biennial Conference of the Association for the Study of Persianate Societies (Tashkent, August 2025), I examine historiographical ambiguities surrounding Mānī and his poetry. This study will serve as the introduction to the edited volume.

Another area of my research that aligns with the initiatives of the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute is my commitment to women's literature. At UC Berkeley, I designed and taught the first course dedicated to Persian literature by women. The course introduced students to contemporary Persian-speaking women writers and their creative efforts to voice their needs, desires, and existence within patriarchal and often censorial structures. I am also preparing an entry for *Women Poets Iranica*. As a writer myself, this subject is personally and professionally meaningful.

My first collection of interconnected stories, *Gharb-e Arezou*, explores the life of an Iranian woman working in U.S. academia, addressing themes of immigration, identity, and belonging. The book was denied publication by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (Ershad) in Iran and was eventually published in London in 2024. I am currently developing a second collection of short stories that explore the emotional and structural challenges faced by professional women in various fields. This creative project is grounded in lived experience and enriched by my academic interests.

I look forward to the opportunity to contribute to the vibrant intellectual community at the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute and to pursue these interwoven projects within its dynamic environment.