



JONG-E ESFAHĀN

JONG-E ESFAHĀN (Isfahan anthology), an independent, avant-garde literary periodical, established in Isfahan in 1965 by a circle of literary men, irregularly producing 11 issues from 1965 to 1973. After a break of approximately 8 years, the 11th and final issue of the periodical was published in 1981 (see [Figure 1](#) for covers of first and last issues).

The formation of this literary circle can be traced back to the socio-political atmosphere of the years following the August 1953 coup d'état and the nationalization movement of Iran's petroleum industry, under Moḥammad Moṣaddeq's leadership, which marked the end of a 12-year period of relative freedom of speech and press (August 1941-August 1953). During the post-coup d'état years, non-governmental progressive literary gatherings were virtually banned and faced censorship and state prosecution. Except for a very few moderate magazines with conservative outlooks (based in Tehran), little of note was published in the area of literature and culture. The only cultural institutes permitted to operate were traditional literary societies that were essentially concerned with classical rhetoric and poetical imagery, and which were content to repeat and replicate traditional forms of poetry. They demonstrated little interest in modern progressive poetry and, naturally, in modern literary and artistic prose. As a result, they were intrinsically unable to respond to the needs of large sections of the dynamic, inquiring younger generation, and were therefore perceived as no threat to the state.

In such an atmosphere, a number of innovative Isfahani youth, who had little inclination towards traditionalist literary societies, and had at times been



exposed to the disregard and even jibes of the older generation of composers of ghazals (ġazal) and qaṣīdas, set out to lay the foundations of “a new design,” attempting to redirect the literary trend more towards what was, in their view, the requirements of the time. Therefore, they turned to the Ṣā’eb Literary Society, which held its meetings at the site where the eminent poet Ṣā’eb of Tabriz (d. 1676; see [ṢĀ’EB TABRIZI](#)) was buried. Not many traditionalists participated in these meetings, allowing the modernists to use the gatherings as a base for new literary activities. The participants not only read modern poetry, but also presented and discussed, often in innovative ways, novels, literary criticisms and translations from foreign languages. However, since such modern matters were bound to include opinions and remarks deemed “inappropriate” in the eyes of the security agents, the Ṣā’eb Society was accused of being a “cover” for non-literary activities; hence, the country’s security apparatus (SAVAK) closely monitored their activities and often hampered their work on various pretexts.

Consequently, the society’s members were forced to transfer their meetings to their own homes in an attempt to negate the interference by authorities. This was the starting-point for the formation of what was dubbed *Jong-e Esfahān*, in time gaining fame with the publication of the periodical *Jong*. Some of the original members of this enterprise were poet/literary critic Mohammad Ḥoquqi (d. June 2009); novelist/critic [Hušang Golširi](#) (d. June 2000); translator/literary critic Aḥmad Golširi; poets Awrang Kažrā’i and Mortažā Rostamiān; poet/folklore researcher Rowšan Rāmi; poet/literary critic and architect Amir-Ḥosayn Afrāsiābi; Fereydun Moḳtāriān, historian; Majid Naficy, poet and literary critic; and Jalil Dustkāh, scholar/literary critic. Later, Abu’l-Ḥassan Najafi, scholar, linguist, literary critic and translator; [Aḥmad Mir-‘Alā’i](#) (d. Oct 1996), translator/critic; Ḥamid Mošaddeq, poet/literary critic; Hormoz Šahdādi and Režā Farroḳfāl, fictionists and literary critics; and ‘Abd-al-Ḥosayn Āl-e Rasul, translator. Other members that later joined the *Jong* circle included Žiā’ Movahhed, poet, literary critic and logician; Yunos Tarākemeh, novelist and literary critique; Režā Farroḳfāl, novelist and literary critic; Borhān Ḥosayni, novelist; Moḥammad Režā Šīrvāni, poet; Maṣur Kušan, novelist and literary critique; Bahrām Sādeqi, novelist; Keyvān Qadarḳāh, poet; ‘Abd-al-Ḥosayn Āl-e Rasul, translator; Maḥmud Nikbaḳt, literary critic and translator; Moḥammad Raḥim Oḳovvat, novelist and literary critic; and ‘Ali Koḳdā’i, novelist, joined the *Jong* circle ([Figure 2](#)).

A noteworthy aspect of the *Jong* circle was that, in contrast to traditional

literary societies, it was not dominated by a hierarchy, and its periodical—again in contrast to other newspapers and magazines—had no “director” or “editor-in-chief.” In the *Jong*, all were of equal standing and enjoyed equal opportunity to express their views and critical assessments regarding the works reviewed. Only after thorough examination and unreserved criticism was any work accepted into the journal. This system prefigured the formation of educated criticism in Iran’s modern literary area, which is characterized by impartiality, realistic perspective, and true assessment. Regardless of its thematic values, the *Jong*’s very reorientation of approach to literary criticism was innovative.

After the publication of its first two issues, the *Jong* was no longer a solely provincial journal, drawing the interest and cooperation of renowned men of letters from Tehran and other cities, such as Aḥmad Šāmlu, M. Aḳavān-ṭāleṭ, Maḥmud Mošref Tehrāni, nicknamed M. Āzād, Foruḡ Farroḳzād (q.v.), Sirus Ṭāhbāz, and others. Furthermore, *Jong-e Esfahān* inspired progressive, innovative youth in other Iranian cities, such as Rašt, Ahvāz, and Korramābād, to create their own *jongs*. It would not be inappropriate, therefore, to call the 1960s and early-1970s a period of “literary *jongs*” in the history of modern Persian literature. Their impact on the development of Iran’s contemporary literature and culture is acknowledged by literary scholars.

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