

Appalling Tehran

Translation of the French Serial Story and Its Effect on the Persian Serial Story

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Abstract: This article examines French-Iranian literary interactions in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, which arguably had ongoing effects in Iran on attitudes towards links between morality and social and economic inequality. Some of the earliest fictional stories published in Persian-language newspapers, in the 1850s, were French. This trend continued, through Iran's Constitutional Revolution (1906), into the early decades of the twentieth century. During this period, Morteza Moshfeq-e Kazemi began writing the first Persian serial story and novel, *Tehran-e Makhuf* (*Appalling Tehran*). The present study investigates the effects of the translation of French serial stories on Persian ones, with a specific focus on the impact of the novel *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842–1843), by Eugène Sue, on the Persian novel *Tehran-e Makhuf* (1924).

Keywords: literary anthropology, Persian journalism, Persian translation, serial stories, social morality, twentieth-century Iran, *Tehran-e Makhuf*

To understand the complexities of contemporary life, it is necessary for scholars to draw on increasingly diverse sources. Among these sources, historical representations, both fictional and non-fictional, have retained their significance, as they inform us of the ways sociocultural elements have been popularly viewed and suggest implications for long-term effects on popular attitudes. In the case of Iran, its turbulent history and complicated transnational relations provide complex and informative settings for these representations. This article examines an important example, the first Persian serial story published in Iran, Morteza Moshfeq-e Kazemi's *Tehran-e Makhuf* (*Appalling Tehran*), and the influences on it of the translation of French serial stories into Persian.¹ Unlike the poetry that had previously dominated Iran's literary world, this and



subsequent forms of literary prose sought explicitly to reflect some of Iran's socio-political conditions. As Houra Yavari (2006: 344) observes:

The impulse to modernize the concept of literature and make it reflective of social conditions also surfaced in the last decades of the nineteenth century and manifested itself in the works of a group of intellectuals and political activists who submitted various facets of Iranian culture, literary or otherwise, to unsparing criticism. They denounced, among other things, ornate styles and conventional mode of expression, prevalent in the classical tradition, and advocated the use of clear and vigorous language, the living language of the people.

The translation and publication of French serial stories in Iran was arguably one of the most significant influences on the particular development of the Persian serial story. As well as the important shifts in literary styles and tastes, this development invited readers and listeners (serial stories would be read aloud at social gatherings) to reconsider popular ideas about the causes of perceived immorality and links between poverty and crime, as well as between those who enjoyed economically privileged lives and those who suffered from disadvantage and powerlessness. These ideas were significant in a range of developments throughout the twentieth century in Iran and they remain important in twenty-first-century lives.

A serial, in literature, refers to a single large work, often a narrative, which is broken down chronologically into instalments and published in a newspaper or periodical at regular intervals, for example every day or once a week. What is common in such writing is that inside a complete story, there are numerous short, episode-like stories and the writer is good at finishing the episode at a point when the reader is left suspended. In France, following the repeal of official censorship, serial writing began in 1836, when rival publishers Emile de Girardin and Armand Dutacq decided to publish stories serially to promote the financial status of their respective newspapers *La Presse* and *Le Siècle* (Hagedorn 1995: 30). This also enabled them to reduce their subscription rates. Thus, the works of Honoré de Balzac, Alexandre Dumas (father), Victor Hugo and others found their way into affordable, popular newspapers. From then until 1848, after the deposition and abolition of the Bourbon monarchy by Napoleon II, serialised fiction became very popular in France and then the rest of Europe. The most famous examples were the work of Eugène Sue (1804–1857). In France, *Les Mystères de Paris* (The Mysteries of Paris) was first published in the *Journal des Débats* from June 1842 to October 1843 (Sue 2015). It achieved immediate success and, as Hagedorn (1995: 31) observes, attracted not only 'businessmen and lawyers' as consumers but also 'chambermaids, domestic cooks, shopkeepers, and day laborers.'

In Iran, the publication of serial writing began almost simultaneously with the emergence of the first Iranian newspapers in 1851, as this period coincided with the translation of French novels into Persian (although French was not

the only language from which serial stories would later be published). It also coincided with the emergence of the short story genre, which played a part in the development of Persian prose fiction.² In 1876, the newspaper *Jame Jahan Nama* started publishing *A Thousand and One Nights* serially, which was translated from Arabic to Persian. In 1880, *Ettela'at* newspaper published the story 'English George in love with Mademoiselle Marathi', which became so popular that other newspapers such as *Tarbiat* began to publish translations of French novels in the form of serial stories. One of the most popular stories was Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*, which was rendered into Persian by Muhammad Tahir Mirza in 1921. The first story written in Persian that was published serially was *Tehran-e Makhuf*. It was first published in 1921 in the newspaper *Setareh-ye Iran* (Star of Iran), a journal published by Hossein Saba from 1914–1924 in Tehran, where it became so successful that the circulation of *Setareh-ye Iran* increased dramatically. Later, especially after the era of Reza Shah, different newspapers began publishing serial writing. From 1941 to 1978, during the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, publishing serial stories was widely prevalent.

A full discussion of the development of literary genre in Iran is beyond the scope of this article, but the shifting social attitudes simultaneously reflected in the serial story and the short story are relevant to anthropological perspectives on Persian literature and Iranian society. The early 1920s was significant because serial writing appeared in Iran; this decade also saw the publication of Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh's collection of short stories *Yeki Bud Yeki Nabud* (Once Upon a Time) in *Kaveh*, a Persian monthly magazine released by a group of Iranian scholars in Germany (Moayyad 2002: 11). According to Homa Katouzian, *Yeki Bud Yeki Nabud* was 'written in simple, idiomatic (but not folkloric) Persian' and combined Jamalzadeh's 'peculiar talent for storytelling with social and political criticism, wrapped in a humorous and, occasionally, satirical garb'. Katouzian reflects on the short story *Farsi Shekar Ast* (Persian is Sweet), in which Jamalzadeh 'pokes fun both at the artificial Arabicisms of the mullah and the Franco-Persian babblings of the Europeanist. The story brilliantly exposes the contradictions of a society in the process of natural and unplanned transition, where the common man is at a loss to know how to communicate with either the mullah or the pseudo-modernist intellectual in ordinary Persian' (2002: 9). Jamalzadeh's work, like that of some serial stories, allows audiences from across social classes to consider contemporary social problems in new ways. Although there are significant differences between Jamalzadeh and Moshfeq-e Kazemi, both authors share this concern with 'ordinary' people, solutions to social problems and new perspectives on who should take responsibility for such problems. Moshfeq-e Kazemi's *Tehran-e Makhuf* would go from being Iran's first serial story originally written in the Persian language to one of the country's first novels, thus bringing some of these characteristics with it into the genre of the popular Persian novel and, arguably, other forms of popular entertainment.³

Moshfeq-e Kazemi became acquainted with French language and literature in *Dar-al-fonun* and *Alliance Française*. (After the publication of *Tehran-e Makhuf* in *Setareh-ye Iran*, he left Iran for Germany, where he studied political economy for two years and became even more familiar with the culture of 'the West'.) *Tehran-e Makhuf* appears to be one of the many novels of the time imitating the French 'city mysteries' genre begun by Eugène Sue. Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* follows its hero, Rodolphe, a noble benefactor who inhabits Paris' underworld seeking out those in need and deserving of his charity, and its heroine, Fleur-de-Marie, a teenage prostitute who is 'rescued' by Rodolphe from the dire circumstances unjustly imposed on her, as well as many other characters and complicated, melodramatic plotlines. As Peter Brooks (2015: xiv) suggests, Sue 'began his exploration of low-life Paris largely from sensationalistic motives', but:

as he went on, particularly in creating Rigolette, the virtuous seamstress whose earnings are scarcely sufficient to keep her from dire poverty and the slide into prostitution, and the unfortunate jewel-cutter Morel, on whose family disaster after disaster accumulates, he began to deal with the realities of contemporary society. Reader reaction was intense, and it changed the course of the novel. The letters written to Sue demonstrate how he altered its themes and its scope as he began to discover that there was a true melodrama to the precarious existence of the working classes.

Indeed, this interactive experience with his audience apparently played a role in Sue's declaration that he was a socialist as he wrote the final sections of *Les Mystères de Paris* (xiv). Brooks cites an unnamed reviewer of the period, who wrote that it was the first time a novel had 'penetrated so deeply into the miseries of the people ... and that it has descended into these somber abysses where human suffering seems forever cast away from the pity of man and the justice of God' (xv).

Somewhat similarly, with *Tehran-e Makhuf*, Moshfeq-e Kazemi presents a complex, melodramatic morality tale set in a Tehran that the privileged sections of Iranian society may have preferred not to see or understand. The aristocratic, wealthy and powerful are broadly represented as resisting any form of change that might bring relief to those who suffer poverty and degradation. The misfortunes of the poor are largely represented as resulting from an unjust social order, sustained by the actions of decadent, hypocritical and greedy characters with economic and social power. Those without power are characterised by their 'purity' of heart, loyalty and long-suffering patience. For sections of its audience, *Tehran-e Makhuf* served to arouse new sympathies with Iran's disadvantaged, including those previously seen as immoral themselves, rather than as victims of others' immorality. The narrative resonated in Iran not only because of its links with a literary trend originating in France, but also because its central ideas were significant to Iranians. This was especially true for Tehran, a city that was undergoing a form of polarisation

on social, cultural and economic levels, and where questions of morality and responsibility were crucial, as well as issues around the roles of women and the ignorance of Iran's upper classes of the realities of their compatriots living in urban poverty. Homa Katouzian (2002: 11) reflects on *Tehran-e Makhuf's* impact in Iran:

[I]t was Morteza Moshfeq-e Kazemi who shocked the reading élite and political public by publishing his voluminous novel *Tehran-e Makhowf* (The Terrible Tehran) in 1922 [*sic*].⁴ In it, he produced a romanticized, though not unrealistic, critique of the social ills resulting from the attitude and behaviour of high society, and introduced the theme of prostitution, which had increasingly become an affront to the sensibilities and social aspirations of modern middle-class Iranians. It caught on, and was used by others, especially Mohammad Hejazi, Mohammad Mas'ud and Jahangir Jalili.

This combination of 'imported' elements of style and local relevance was a factor in the capacity of Moshfeq-e Kazemi's work to 'catch on' quickly. Sahar Allamezade (2015: 95) also notes the significance of changing urban environments and related popular attitudes towards the notion of the city: 'the emerging modern cities at the turn of the century were deemed places of vice and corruption. The best representation of such literature is *Tehran-e Makhuf* (Horrible Tehran), written by Moshfeq Kazemi, where the capital of Iran is depicted as a place filled with opium dens and red-light districts.'

While questions around 'modernity', the West and urbanisation are central to the rise of Persian-language serial stories, Omid Azadibougar (2014: 90) warns against the limitations of a 'linear approach to literary historiography' and presents a slightly different approach to the 'importation' of the novel into Persian literature. Azadibougar (95) focuses on the roles of translators and the significance of Iranian notions of literature:

We should also consider the literary expectations of early translators because pre-existing notions of literariness undoubtedly conditioned their relationship with the novelistic text. The complexity of establishing the differences between the literary notions of classical Persian literature and the novelistic is one of the main reasons for the ongoing debates in Persian literary theory over the concept of the novel and the conditions of its importation.

Azadibougar (95) emphasises the importance of the reader-text relationship, as well as epistemological differences between 'the classical and the novelistic'. He goes on to outline aspects of the literary context that shaped the reception of the novel in Iran, 'the two master-texts that preexisted the novelistic in Persian were the canon of classical literature and the Koran. A common feature in the reception of both texts is that an absolute relationship is conceived to exist between language and reality. As a result, they establish the text as the goblet of truth and moral lessons'. Despite the common generic features of the

novel in Europe and in Iran, the two contexts were dissimilar in many crucial ways, as Azadibougar (98) explains:

This genre, and specifically the realistic novel, is by many accounts the literary form of a bourgeois individualized society where written communication is possible ... Its transfer under pressure for modernization and aspiration for the status of Europe into a society that hardly shared any of these features (i.e., a non-individualized society dominated by other-worldly values) meant that the novel had to change so much as to fit predetermined literary notions.

Azadibougar (99) therefore concludes that, because of the different ways the novel developed in Europe and Iran, 'the genre in Persian might be formulated by interests (e.g., class, religion, etc.) that may have concealed themselves under the dominant European notions of the genre'.

While the sociocultural contexts of Europe, particularly France, and Iran differed, the historical contexts underlying the emergence of *Tehran-e Makhuf* and *The Mysteries of Paris* shared some comparable events, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Similar Elements of Social Context around the Writing and Emergence of *Tehran-e Makhuf* and *The Mysteries of Paris*

<i>Tehran-e Makhuf</i>	<i>The Mysteries of Paris</i>
Constitutional Movement: 1906	French Revolution: 1789
The fall of the Qajar dynasty: 1921–1925	The fall of the royal family: 1848
The first Iranian publication of serial writing: 1851	The first French serial writing: 1836
Publication of <i>Appalling Tehran</i> : 1924	<i>Les Mystères de Paris</i> : 1842

The social contexts behind the writing of this era promoted the emergence of such novels. During the first half of the nineteenth century, following the enormous changes that had occurred in French society, authors tended to move closer to the masses. They tried to introduce new ideas to the public by showing their opposition to the old traditions of corrupted society and by articulating wishes to abandon or abolish the French monarchy. In fact, in addition to opposing the strict laws of the classical era, the authors emphasised freedom of expression in communicating their inner feelings, providing the grounds for the emergence of romanticism. This great change stems from the French Revolution in 1789. The first French social novels, published at this time, specifically target the function of traditional government and its wrongdoings. They tend to promote ideas of freedom, equality and civil rights. With the spread of urbanisation and the influx of rural workers to the cities,

seeking to benefit from the industrial society, there emerge the lower classes, who risk being afflicted by poverty, alcoholism and prostitution. Social novels and authors reflect these 'misfortunes' in their works.

The same issues are present in the novel *Tehran-e Makhuf*. In 1906, the Constitutional Movement occurred in Iran, as people sought freedom, the rule of law and an end to the tyranny of kings. As Yavari (2006: 340) explains, the Constitutional Revolution was 'the first of its kind in the Islamic world' and it 'converted the country from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional one, and reflected, among other things, its growing engagement with the West and modernity'. Yavari (2006: 341) outlines some of the consequences:

The commercialization of agriculture, a general shift from agriculture to industry, the introduction of capitalist modes of production, increased mobility across class lines and a growth in the middle class, and increasing contacts with the West, all propelled Iran's social, political, and cultural spheres away from its past at a speed unprecedented in the country's history. In tandem with these fundamental changes the struggle for women's rights, begun before the Constitutional Revolution, developed and intensified.

Katouzian (2002: 2) reflects on the implications of these changes for readers and writers:

When the Constitutional Revolution broke out, the traditional uses of prose and poetry were still predominant, although change had been creeping in for some time ... The revolutionary process led to the transformation of the functions and purpose, and – especially in the case of prose – the form of Persian literature. The proliferation of popular newspapers played a crucial role in determining the style and direction of these literary developments. The newspapers were read by the ordinary literate public, who in turns [sic] read them out to the illiterate in public places. The authors had little choice but to be simple in style, use common vocabulary, and write on social and political issues. On the other hand, younger writers and poets were themselves in the mood for such popular and progressive developments, responding at once to the growing influence of Europe and the vigour of the revolutionary movement. There was thus a coincidence of purpose on the part of readers and writers.

Azadibougar (2014: 93) also comments on the timing of 'the importation of the novel into Persian' and the significance of translation:

[T]he transfer occurs at a historical moment when socio-cultural transformations had created needs which classical literature could not gratify and, as a result, translation became the means of response ... Iran's political system was weakened, her technological 'backwardness' rendered explicit in failing military encounters with imperial powers, and the sufficiency of her old social and educational institutions suspected. The final outcome of all this was the generation of a powerful ideology of progress which, in the political sphere, led to the Constitutional Revolution that concluded itself in 1905–09.

Before and during the Qajar period, intellectual, philosophical, political and literary movements had begun among intellectuals and formally educated people. Members of these groups, who struggled through writing political and social articles, arguably had a major role in awakening the masses and encouraging them to be active in their respective movements. The revolutionary turbulence within society resulted in the 1921 coup, which led to the abolition of the Qajar dynasty and the emergence of the Pahlavi dynasty. *Tehran-e Makhuf* was designed to show the corruption of society in the late Qajar period. In *Tehran-e Makhuf*, by representing political and administrative corruption, social insecurity, prostitution and addiction, Moshfeq-e Kazemi raises problems affecting the urban middle and lower classes. In addition to corrupted aristocracy and Qajar princes connected to government agencies, along with wealthy and greedy characters, other social types are found in the novel. These include disadvantaged women, who on the one hand live under the pressure of old customs and on the other under that of a new corrupted system. Yavari (2006: 345) explains how this became a feature of many of the novels that followed *Tehran-e Makhuf*:

Drawing on the literary naturalism of the West, many of these novels revolved around the lives of fallen women and the tales of grim cities, both portrayed as stereotyped victims of modernity's sinister forces. The juxtaposition of the city and the village, the innocent peasant girl and her promiscuous urban counterpart, was a recurrent theme in the fictions of the period. Although this newly realized figure of the Persian woman appeared in a seemingly more realistic manner than her mythical predecessors, in the hands of her male creators she nevertheless remained far from reality.

It could be said that *Tehran-e Makhuf* is the first Iranian novel that presents a form of social criticism and such female characters have an influential presence in the novel. At the end of the book, the 'real' revolutionaries, frustrated with what they see as deviation from the values of the revolution, are shunned and pushed away from society.

Comparing the cultural and political contexts of France and Iran, and also with regard to the fact that Moshfeq-e Kazemi was familiar with Western culture and was proficient in French, we can assume that he was familiar with French writers, either reading their works in the original French or in translated versions (Tebyan n.d.). Moshfeq-e Kazemi was apparently under the influence of great novelists such as Alexandre Dumas and Balzac, among others. As Azadibougar (2014: 91) states, 'The translators, one has to add, were men of letters, educated in Europe and mastered at least a couple of European languages.' Common social and political horizons of thought led Moshfeq-e Kazemi to have strong inclinations towards French scholars and writers of the nineteenth century. Hence, it can be assumed that he had the novel *The Mysteries of Paris* in mind while writing *Tehran-e Makhuf*. As well as the common themes of the two novels, similarities are evident in terms of

content, artistic features and writing style. Concerning the structure, in both novels, one can see the confrontation of the protagonists with old traditions and closed-minded conservatives, which is represented in the form of 'love' and the defence of love, even as it ends in separation. In both novels, the heroes, however, achieve some level of success. The heroes in both novels face misfortunes that may symbolically reflect the despair of writers of the time at the perceived deviation of the revolutionary movements. In *Tehran-e Makhuf*, Mahin's death is symbolic of destruction on a broader scale. In a similarly symbolic move, in *The Mysteries of Paris*, Fleur-de-Marie finally enters a convent and meets her end there, hidden behind its walls.

The other point worth noting is the atmosphere depicted in both novels. Both writers give detailed descriptions of places and, like reporters, they describe each scene in depth. This serves to reinforce the great differences in lifestyle between the privileged few and the disadvantaged masses, as well as the extremes of morality and immorality. For example, in *Tehran-e Makhuf*, Moshfeq-e Kazemi writes: 'Qurban Ali' with the help of his mother washed out Farokh's injury. Then, he took him to the small public bath of the village. Also, he lent Farokh his shirt and trousers. And since he had not more than one overgarment, Qurban Ali' gave him his winter garment that hangs loosely from the shoulders.' In *The Mysteries of Paris*, Sue (2015: 896) writes:

Sarah was in such a rush to get to the bottom of the chest that she flung the bins full of necklaces, bracelets, and tiaras willy-nilly all over the table. The rubies, emeralds, and diamonds of this jewelry sparkled brightly.

The Owl was dazzled. She was armed, she was alone, she was shut up with the countess, and her escape would be easy and certain. A hellish idea crossed this monster's mind. But to carry out this new crime, she had to get her stiletto out of her basket and get near Sarah, all without inciting her suspicions. With the cunning of a jungle cat slinking on its belly to get treacherously closer to its prey, the old woman took advantage of the countess's preoccupation to move, imperceptibly, around the desk that separated her from her victim. The Owl had already begun this underhanded course when, suddenly, she had to stop in her tracks.

The storytelling techniques used in both novels serve to keep the reader or listener in suspense. Sue was known as the master, or even inventor, of the cliff-hanger and Moshfeq-e Kazemi evidently followed his lead. In order to sustain their respective audiences' attention, the authors introduce successive dramatic events, appealing to the reader's emotions and arousing concern about the precarious fate of the heroes and heroines, thus leading audiences to follow the story enthusiastically. The introduction of danger and conflict is one technique used to create suspense. In both *Tehran-e Makhuf* and *The Mysteries of Paris*, conflicts occur between the protagonists, who in both narratives arguably represent immutable goodness and hope, perhaps symbolising divinity, and the antagonists, who symbolise evil and injustice. In both, love, emotion and honour are values that play significant roles in justifying the presence of

the conflict. Finally, in certain cases, issues of fate and coincidence serve the writers of both novels, reflecting – and perhaps shaping – popular beliefs in the validity of otherwise ‘inexplicable’ factors in the course of human life.

In each novel, the writer employs the narrative style of report writing, following a linear structure in which events happen in chronological order. The authors, like oral storytellers, establish a direct relationship with the reader or listener. When they sense that the reader needs some information related to the past, they immediately interrupt the flow of the story and provide the reader with the necessary information. The writers introduce characters and events by recounting memories to the reader. This technique is evident in both novels. The narratives employed in these novels follow the framework presented by Labov (1972), as shown in Table 2: there are six elements in a narrative, the presence of some being optional. The episodes of these novels also first explain what the event is about and then go into detail as they report the time, place and characters. After that, they make observations on the particular events or sequences, often contributing moralistic commentary, and follow these with the resolution. Finally, the writer rounds off the episode’s story and sets the stage for the next episode.

Table 2: Labov’s Narrative Framework

E	Abstract	→	what the story is about
V	Orientation	→	sets out the characters, place and time for the reader/ listener (who, where and when)
A			
L	Complication	→	events which are unusual, funny, frightening, that make the story a story
U			
A	Evaluation	→	comments on the events
T			
I	Resolution	→	how the events worked out
O			
N	Coda	→	rounding off the story and bridging back to the present

Source: Adapted from Labov (1972).

While Labov holds that the abstract and coda are optional, in these novels, the presence of a coda seems necessary, since the authors act as omniscient narrators, evaluating whole events, characters and even social and political implications. Again, although all narratives may not follow the sequence of these elements, in *Tehran-e Makhuf* and *The Mysteries of Paris*, almost all episodes observe the above elements.

In both novels, the authors use a third-person omniscient perspective. As this omniscience is limited to one ‘person’, especially moral champions, the main character is present in every event. Sometimes the writers, like teachers,

warn or even blame the reader and sometimes they take some ethical issues and explain them to the reader. In addition, the writers speak, feel and act on behalf of all characters and, at times, they themselves appear in the story and directly talk to the reader. Both writers employ direct characterisation and hence rather than set free their characters to let their personality evolve during the story, they sometimes interrupt the narrative and give detailed descriptions of the character, including such aspects as the character's height, hair, skin and eye colour. Although this occurs at the beginning of each new turn of events and the arrival of each new character in the story, characters are simple and stereotyped in both stories. In other words, most characters are one-dimensional and are depicted as black and white. However, if any changes or shifts occur, these are abrupt, turning, for example, from black to white or vice versa and from then on the character remains in that status. See, for instance, the respective changes in the characters of Siavosh Mirza in *Tehran-e Makhuf* and the Slasher (*le Chourineur*) in *The Mysteries of Paris*. In addition, one of the distinctive features of both serial stories is that there is a hero who remains the hero until the end of the story. This character, in fact, becomes very popular. The heroes of these stories are also gentle, kind and compassionate. They, like supermen, are ready to eliminate any barriers set by the enemy that stand in the way of good and truth. From an anthropological perspective, the important 'saviour' roles played by these heroes and their popularity across diverse social groups tells us something of the widespread need in Iranian society for a figure representing hope, freedom and justice at times of collective despair, undeserved hardship and inequality.

To conclude, the two novels, *The Mysteries of Paris* and *Tehran-e Makhuf*, were both first released as serial stories in the known newspapers of the time. In many ways, *Tehran-e Makhuf* can be considered the first Eastern novel inspired by *The Mysteries of Paris*, like similar novels in other languages, such as *Mysteries of London* (1844–1848), *Los Misterios de Madrid* (1844) and *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York*. Georg Lukács suggests that the European Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution led writers of literature to address ordinary people, especially those in the lower classes of society (see Bewes and Hall 2011). Umberto Eco (1967) observes that Eugène Sue in *The Mysteries of Paris* provides a detailed picture of a society full of discrimination and corruption, which emerged at the beginning of the French industrial era. This is true of the urban mystery novel *Tehran-e Makhuf* as well. The two novels share aspects of storytelling technique and structure. In addition, as serial stories published in instalments in newspapers, both gained great popularity. The characterisation is similar in both novels, as the protagonists in each emerge from noble families who happen to defend human rights and values. While the literary and social contexts of France and Iran had significant differences, these and other similarities in a section of their respective forms of literary production provide insights into aspects of Iranian society that arguably persist today, including a collective desire for social justice and hope.

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Notes

1. We use the English translation ‘appalling’ but, as is evident below, others have translated *makhuf* variously as ‘terrible’ and ‘horrible’.
2. For an alternative analysis, which questions the dominant role of ‘Western’ literature in the development of Persian prose, see Khorrami (2003).
3. For more on relevant aspects of Iran’s literary history, see Pedersen (2016) (especially Pedersen’s subsection on *Tehran-e Makhuf* (110–133) under ‘Social Realist Novels’), Mirabedini (2001), Anjuman-e Irānshenāsi-ye Farānsah (1998) and Browne (1959).
4. *Tehran-e Makhuf* was, in fact, published as a two-volume novel in 1924.

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