The literature of exile and the figure of the exiled artist have been given a romantic interpretation in the past century. However, as Edward Said rightly remarks:

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in the exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. (173)

The concept of exile has been transformed into an enriching motif in modern culture, but in Said's view, exile cannot be made to serve notions of humanism in a world where it is the consequence of warfare and totalitarian rule (174). In the case of Iran, life in exile has indeed sparked creativity, and yet Said's warning does
apply: the experience of exile has been traumatic for many of the Iranians who fled the Islamic regime after 1979.

The consequences of leaving Iran are reflected in the texts written abroad, and it is this shared reflection, which emerged as a massive trend after the 1979 Revolution, that I speak of as the “literature of exile.” I argue that such literature is defined by three characteristic uses of the experience of exile—thematic, stylistic, and generic. My argument begins from the premise that this literature is a new phenomenon. Although, prior to the revolution, Persian literature had sometimes been produced by writers living abroad, never had exile functioned as more than a thematic device. Nor, until the post-revolutionary period, had exile ever been narrated in such proportions, or by so many different writers.

A distinction is commonly drawn between immigration, which is assumed to be a matter of personal choice, and exile, which is forced upon the emigrant (typically for political reasons) and therefore connotes suffering. Whereas critics such as Maliheh Tiregol thus argue that exile constitutes a unified category of experience that is qualitatively distinct from the experience of immigration, I prefer the broad definition of exile proposed by Peyman Vahabzadeh, for whom this dichotomy does not apply in the case of Persian literature. “Many of the exiled and banished of yesterday,” he writes, “who longed for a vindicating return to their homeland transformed into today’s emigrants who have come to terms with their permanent conditions of alterity and foreignness” (496). Regardless of the reasons—personal or political—that prompted them to leave their homeland, both exilic and immigrant writers are caught between two nations: sentiments of alienation from both the new country and the homeland are shared in the same sense of loss and the desire for a return. Although, in terms of the psychological impact of leaving the country, differences do exist among exile, refugee, expatriate, and emigrant, I contend that these differences are reflected in literature only to a limited degree. Therefore, I do not make a distinction between the literature of exile (adabyat-e tab‘id) and the literature of emigration (adabyat-e mohajerat).

In what follows, I will focus on the use of exile as literary device in the short stories of Goli Taraqqi. Taraqqi is an apt subject not only because the notion of exile imbues all aspects of her writing, from language to structure and theme, but also because she offers a discourse on the subject, in the “metatext.” Moreover, her stories exhibit so many of the characteristic features of the Persian literature of exile, and in such dense concentration, that they can be viewed as representative of the whole trend.
Taraqqi, one of Iran’s most prominent writers, left the country during the Iran-Iraq war and now lives most of the year in France; she publishes all her texts in Iran and travels back to Tehran at least once a year (personal interview, 6 May 2009). Interestingly, although she belongs to a privileged category of exiles (she is not banned from Iran and is relatively comfortable in financial terms), her texts are some of the most convincing in terms of a reflection on exile, precisely because of her “in-between” status, the product of her perpetual shuttling between the two countries. As she puts it:

I have double nationality: I am an Iranian with a capital I, but a French citizen with the smallest possible “F,” almost invisible. This phantom-like citizen is the size of an ant, in comparison with my gigantic Iranian being. Nevertheless, this small ant exists and claims its individuality and civil rights. . . . She’s a modern ant, and in spite of her small size she has the force and the audacity to occasionally kick out the other part, meaning the Iranian self. This double life has marked my literary imagination; it has become the central theme of almost all my writings. (qtd. in Nafisi)

The “double life” affecting her literary imagination is predominantly found in her attempts to find a home through literature: one example is her Do donya (Two Worlds), a collection of short stories in which the opening story depicts a commitment to a psychiatric clinic in a suburb of Paris, while the last story ends with an exit from this same clinic. In between, the process of writing has taken place, starting with remembrance and the writing of childhood memories. The homodiegetic narrator herself states in the last short story that she was saved by literature. A new beginning emerges, in a new country, where she can finally visualize the possibility of a future while also creating and re-creating her past through her childhood remembrances. This very process is present in the title, which insists on the existence of a here and a there.

Jennifer Langer uses an interesting metaphor for writers like Goli Taraqqi, for whom literature is a question of life and death: she compares them to Shahrzad (Scheherazade) of The Thousand and One Nights, who started telling stories in order to stay alive (267), an experience that is precisely the subject of Do donya. Indeed, most authors of the Persian literature of exile are Shahrzad fighting for their lives through language, even if the role of the sultan Shahriyar is undetermined and varying.
“Anar banu va pesar-hayash” (“The Pomegranate Lady and Her Sons”), “Madam Gorgeh” (“The Wolf Lady”), and “Adat-haye gharib-e Aqa-ye ‘Alef’ dar ghorbat” (“The Bizarre Comportment of Mr. Alpha in Exile”) are three short stories emblematic of Taraqqi’s exilic writing. I will compare them in order to achieve a synthesis on exile as a theme, as a style, and as a genre. I hope to show that exile is inscribed in the writing at all these levels. All three of these stories have been translated into English.

“Anar banu” is an autobiographical short story in which the narrator leaves Iran to return to France, where she lives most of the year. At the airport in Tehran, she meets an eighty-three-year-old woman who has left her village in the province of Yazd for the first time in order to visit her sons, who have lived in Sweden for twelve years. The old lady is illiterate, which adds to her difficulties in travelling; she complains about having to leave her dear homeland and her village, where she was born under a pomegranate tree. The narrator helps the pomegranate lady on the journey and tries to point her in the right direction at the Paris airport, where she has to change flights, but realizes three days after their parting that by mistake, she has kept the lady’s plane ticket from Paris to Sweden. No matter how hard she tries, she cannot find any information about what has become of the old lady. The end of the story becomes surreal, as the narrator imagines her happy in Sweden, surrounded by her sons, preparing traditional Iranian food for them. This surreal end becomes the dream of the narrator to find her roots again.

“Madam Gorgeh” relates the story of an Iranian woman living with her two young children in a Parisian building, and their conflict with the downstairs neighbour. It is told by a first-person narrator, who can again be easily compared to the author. More precisely, it is a fable, where the narrator’s neighbour is portrayed as a she-wolf whose constant complaining about the noises coming from the upstairs flat eventually leads the Iranian mother and children to avoid laughing, playing, or inviting friends to their home. The situation changes one day when the narrator, absolutely certain that there is no noise in her flat even though the neighbour is still complaining at the door, realizes that she can shout back, thus ending the tyrannical game: the neighbour reverts to being her silent, lonely old self, and the narrator resumes her normal life.

In “Adat-haye gharib-e Aqa-ye ‘Alef’ dar ghorbat,” told through a heterodiegetic narrator and forming part of a novel not yet completed, the main protagonist, Mr. Alpha, is a middle-aged Iranian history teacher whose pupils attack him in
his classroom during the Islamic Revolution, after which he emigrates to Paris. In an interview published in the magazine *Bokhara*, Taraqqi explained how she met the person—a lonely Iranian man giving bread to pigeons in a Parisian park—who inspired the character of Alpha (Fani and Dehbashi 43). In Paris, Alpha lives alone, is jobless, and wanders aimlessly through the city streets and inside his own memories; he remembers his past in a middle-class Tehrani background and his platonic love for Mrs. Nabovat, the physical education teacher of his school. Because he has always lived in a confined environment, Alpha is unable to adapt to France. Moreover, he has exiled himself out of fear, without thinking, because of his inability to make choices and his tendency to follow the crowd.

**THE THEME OF EXILE**

In “Anar banu”

The sense of being a wanderer permeates “Anar banu,” from both the viewpoint of the old lady, who travels from Yazd to Sweden so as to die in the arms of her sons, and that of the narrator, a figure of the writer: “O my sons, what am I going to do with you? I wish I could stop loving you, so that I would not become the wanderer that I am today” (53).² Wandering and exile are indeed recurrent and important features in the narrator’s emotional life. The first lines of the short story are emblematic of this importance:

Mehrabad Airport, Tehran. Air France, Flight 726

Two o’clock in the morning: sleepless night. Confusion, tiredness, hurry are mixed with nostalgia, anxiety and crazy ideas like the one of leaving and never coming back or, on the contrary, the one of staying here in my beloved Tehran, with all its good and bad and not to move away from there anymore: one of these even more crazy ideas! Well, a bloody life of wandering, of eternal comings and goings (eternal compared to my lifetime), of middle-of-the-night flights, opening my suitcase, going through customs (this bridge of paradise) and the humiliating inspection of the body, the shoes, the pockets, the bag, the ears, the nose. (45)

The space of the airport is symbolic of the space of exile and its unreality. It is significant that the short story is entirely set within the framework of these middle spaces, Mehrabad and Charles de Gaulle airports, and that the places about which the two characters talk (Iran and Sweden) become unreal places for reinventing the
past and dreaming the future. Even though the characters stop in Paris, the city is not mentioned as a place where people live: it is just one stop before Sweden, where the lady's family reunion is supposed to happen, and just another Western place, as unknown to the old lady as Sweden is.

Exile has plagued the lady's family, and its sorrow has been the cause of her husband's death. Both husband and wife lamented their boys' exile, both sons having lost their Iranianness, according to their parents, through occidentalization and marriage to foreign women. The husband, especially, thought when he saw their pictures that they had become effeminate, and he died from shame and anger.

However, the painting of exile is nuanced, carrying overtones of exile itself as a way to reunify Iran symbolically. The unification of the homeland happens in the story through the relationship between the two antagonistic Iranian women. The pomegranate lady functions as a synecdoche for Iran. It is a recurrent and valid argument of postcolonial studies that women are linked to the land, their bodies compared to the nation's soil (McClintock, Mufti, and Shohat), and the pomegranate lady embodies this tie. The narrator is a modern occidentalized woman, hurried and intolerant of the old lady's failures to understand her surroundings, while the old lady represents the traditional Iran lost by the narrator, an image of the lost nation. Yet through their exile, the two female characters realize that they both represent Iran and are longing for it. Though the narrator finds some of the old lady's reactions exasperating, she describes her in a sympathetic way:

She has a gentle voice and her eyes laugh. She is round, plump, and short. Her feet do not reach the cabin floor. Her face resembles a red pomegranate, ready to be squeezed, with red cheeks and full lips. She is a delightful and lively old woman. (55)

This short story is similar in its design and themes to “Khaneh-i dar asman” (“A Mansion in the Sky”), another text by the same author, in which an old Iranian woman wanders between European cities to be with her children, who live in different countries and eventually come to consider her a nuisance. However, in “Anar banu,” the narration evolves in a positive way: antagonisms between the two kinds of Iranians—one modern, occidentalized, and living in both lands; the other traditional, staid, and never stirring from the home country—disappear. The narration shows the reunification of Iran through the encounter of two characters, as opposed to “Khaneh-i dar asman,” which is precisely the narration of the rupture between these categories. In “Anar banu,” exile becomes the only status and
identity along which the two characters can define themselves, and it eventually comes to be understood as a positive state. On the last page of the story, the narrator indeed explains to the old lady that exile and looking for a new place are themselves ways of life and that as such, they probably make her sons happy.

In “Madam Gorgeh”

“Madam Gorgeh” is another embodiment of exile, as well as a satire of Parisian life, where neighbours are an omnipresent nuisance. While “Anar banu” is set in the abstract space and time of exile and of air travel, “Madam Gorgeh” unfolds in the daily-life space of exile, when an exiled person is not at home even in her own flat and relives the constant threat of displacement. Even home is not the last secure bastion against a hostile world: exile is represented as a constant battle. Life in exile has become a miniature of earlier life, shrinking human beings and making them claustrophobic. In “Madam Gorgeh,” this is exemplified by the comparison between the tiny scraps of nature found in Paris in the two square metres of the family’s balcony and the big parks of Darband in Tehran (143). The term “garden parties” applied to the former becomes an ironic reflection on this diminishing of the self and on the claustrophobic tendencies of exiles. The children suffer even more acutely, as they cannot understand the reasons for leaving their loving family for a cold foreign place: “They have been exiled to a cold, sad, unkind place from the bosom of their grand-mother, their aunts, from an abundance of love and affection, charming airs and caresses” (143; trans. Vatanabadi and Khorrami 132). The story’s happy ending, however, depicts exile as a temporary and conceivably constructive period.

In “Aqa–ye ‘Alef”

“Adat-haye gharib-e Aqa–ye ‘Alef’ dar ghorbat,” an early short story by Taraqqi, introduces the theme of exile through a nostalgic narration, the most recurrent form within Persian literature written in exile. The character of Alpha is an abstract embodiment of exile: in fact, Alpha—who symbolizes various concepts by his very name—is more the personification of an idea than a short story character. He has no proper name other than Mr. Alpha, a letter, and the first of a series yet to come. Even as a child, he was called “Little ‘A’” (213): just a practical appellation carrying no reference to his identity and given solely to avoid confusing him with other children. This sense of anonymity is reinforced by the name being enclosed in quotation marks.
In the story, Mr. Alpha does not belong with the majority of Iranian immigrants in France, whose comfortable financial circumstances and good educational background make them familiar with French mores and culture; he is thus faced with redefining his own social status. In this sense, Taraqqi’s text on the difficulty of exile and the miseries of an undocumented resident in the big city of Paris is universal. Alpha is an archetype, with whom the reader cannot identify. He is designed as such to let the narrator draw on her main subject: exile as the transforming experience of the loss of one’s own being.

In the story, Mr. Alpha is feeling all his “-ness” disappearing: his Iranian-ness, his Alpha-ness, the very essence of his own self:

He felt as if he had been transformed into someone else, someone he did not particularly like. [. . .] He sustained a deep anxiety that his foreign sojourn, like an acid, would corrode his “Mr. Alpha-ness.” [. . .] Life beyond the window-panes seemed to have no relation to him. (190; trans. Farrokh, 123–24)

He summarizes his feelings in a letter to his colleague, Mr. Fazeli:

I am lost and bewildered here. [. . .] I do not understand things. My past is all lost to me, and my vision does not extend beyond the end of the week. [. . .] Sometimes I even doubt my mental health and fear that in this foreign atmosphere I may lose the meager balance of my sanity. (175: trans. Farrokh, 119)

The narrator depicts exile as an unreal experience and draws on Alpha’s feeling of being lost in time and space. The relation between the characters and the representation of space is revealing in this story: the experience of exile is a deep and physical one. The first pages of the text deal with Alpha’s waking up to a new environment (97). All his senses experience new and strange feelings: hearing (with the sound of the bell), smell, touch, sight; only the sense of taste is safe from this trauma. Time is also physically experienced as foreign: Alpha does not know how to adapt to the new temporality; unable to adapt to the present, he is perpetually confused about the time of day. Since exile is an experience of remembering, it is significant that Alpha’s most used adjective is “known” and its various opposites, because Alpha finds security in the known and cannot adapt to new situations. He defines things according to two categories: known and unknown.

The discourse of this text is complicated by the fact that Alpha is an anti-hero without personality. We see him becoming another man through the experience of the Revolution, as he becomes another man through the experience of exile: he has
no specific traits; he is ductile; there is no such thing as his Alpha-ness. However, if exile is depicted in a negative light, this is somewhat mitigated by the fact that Alpha is an anti-hero and cannot therefore be considered a model.3

It is hardly surprising that a writer with a life experience such as Taraqqi’s would write on exile. In the next section, I address the way the theme has led her writing through a stylistic evolution. This change is illustrated through comparing the use of metaphors and structure in “Aqa-ye ‘Alef,” “Anar banu,” and “Madam Gorgeh.”

WRITING EXILE: METAPHORS AND STRUCTURE

The pomegranate lady is both a plausible and an extreme figure of the Iranian exile. She has no clue about her new environment and thus looks at things in a fresh and innocent manner. The narrator sees the reflection of her own suffering in the sense of loss and feelings of sadness expressed by this old woman. The home country, embodied in this rural woman, thus becomes a dream-like country, idealized in its traditions as represented by basic activities such as cooking and sharing food.

The pomegranate fruit is important to this embodiment of the nation in the lady, who bears such an otherwise improbable name. The pomegranate is indeed a symbol of Iran through its long association with an array of meanings deeply embedded in Persian literature.4 The fruit almost becomes a fetish, a talisman protecting the character of the old lady against the West. The pomegranate represents not only the native products of Iran but also the country’s cuisine, which the old lady invokes as a reason for pride—even a reason for returning to the home country (58). Exile is thus inscribed within the text through the metaphors of the lost homeland, as represented by its cuisine. This fetishization of Iranian objects, especially culinary ones, is another component of the Persian literature of exile. The pomegranate plays an important role, therefore, as a national fetish.

In “Madam Gorgeh,” the metaphor around which the text is structured centres on the linguistic element. The story is a description of the power of language and of the battle to overcome and appropriate such power—an important problem in the life of the exile, for whom language is both a question of belonging and of survival in the new country. The narrator is harassed by her neighbour because of her inability to speak French. When she finds in herself the words to fight the neighbour’s verbal attacks and overcome the French language, she becomes the winner: “I chirp like a nightingale and swim in the ocean of words. My thoughts are the same as my language” (153, trans. Vatanabadi and Khorrami 140). “Madam Gorgeh”
is both a metaphor for language and a statement on its empowering force. In this sense, the story is a tale: it is structured as the initiation process of the heroine, who is held up as an example for potential readers.

As for “Aqa-ye 'Alef,’” the text is more realistic than metaphoric, its most striking feature in terms of style being linked to the structuring of the narration through the alternation (almost equal in quantitative terms) between narrative sequences set in Paris and memories of the past. The psychological loss experienced by the character resonates in the narrative structure so as to make the reader participate in the sense of uncertainty and confusion as to space and time. In fact, Parisian scenes are pretexts for the analepses of Alpha's life in Iran. In exile, the present has no real consistency; what is meaningful is the space of dreams. There is no space of any solidity: one is in the unstable dimension of exile, between old dreams and reality. Exile is thus the feeling of not being able to distinguish between dream and reality, and of looking for the in-between that allows for avoiding decisions and taking refuge in memories. Thus the very structuring of the story around this dialogue between past and present evolves from the theme of exile.

The three short stories have a style directly linked to exile—for “Anar banu” and “Madam Gorgeh,” through metaphor, and for “Aqa-ye ‘Alef,’” through structure. In the next section, I will demonstrate how exile is also part of the writing process within a specific genre.

THE GENRE: BETWEEN REALISM AND TALE

An evolution can be noted in Taraqqi’s writing from the realistic genre of “Aqa-ye ‘Alef”” to the use of tale conventions in the other later short stories. I contend that this evolution reflects the maturing of Taraqqi as a writer, who detaches herself from her first-hand experience of exile to create stories out of it and get some distance from the trauma of the arrival in France. Iranian writers within Iran often insist, in interviews, that one of the ways to avoid censorship is through the use of the conventions of tales and fables. I would argue that this is also a characteristic of Persian literature abroad, where most innovations on the tale are reproduced even when censorship is no longer a direct threat. The determining factor is a stylistic trait characterizing the whole of Persian literature. Indeed, the tale realizes the potential of a contemporary literature using all the richness of its tradition. Balaÿ argues that this use is linked to fragment-writing, dominant as much in the novel as in the short story. In the case of the tale, this argument is fitting and
demonstrates that Persian literature abroad can use the form of the tale even when censorship has ceased to be a direct threat.

“Aqa-ye ‘Alef’” appears less innovative in terms of genre, precisely because it does not use the efficient device of the tale and restricts itself to a classical realistic short story. I argue that for Taraqqi, who wrote this story at the very beginning of her life in Paris, exile was still deeply bound with her emotional state and that the motif had not had sufficient time yet to transform her writing. In fact, “Aqa-ye ‘Alef’” is peculiar in Taraqqi’s writing economy because of its unfinished aspect. In an essay titled “Ashna-ii ba Aqa-ye ‘Alef’” (“Encounter with Mr. Alpha”), Taraqqi describes the difficulties she encountered when the story, initially conceived as the first part of a novel, was submitted to censorship. She tells of having to alter the ending, bringing Alpha back to Iran, because the censor objected that such a good man might be perverted by life in Paris (569–70). Taraqqi thus had to cut the narration of his exile, which meant that she did not finish the story and that the novel was left unachieved. I contend that this loose structure and the consequent failure to complete the novel are the reasons for the lessened effectiveness of the short story. In the Bokhara interview, Taraqqi states that she vowed to finish the novel about Alpha (thus confirming that she does conceive the text as a novel), if that were the only thing that she was to finish in her life. She speaks about the novel as a genre, and how much energy it requires, insisting that she is not the kind of writer to write novels and that she can be content with short stories (Fani and Dehbashi, 43). She seems to me very lucid when she states that the text of “Aqa-ye ‘Alef’” resists her. A comparison with the two other short stories shows that a more innovative generic use is beneficial to the treatment of exile. This is especially true of the use of the tale conventions, sometimes verging on the moral tale and sometimes on the fable, using animals or imaginary figures.

In “Anar banu,” the elements of tale come mostly from the character of the pomegranate lady. She actually bears an unlikely name that refers directly to myths; her birth under a pomegranate tree and her being bred by trees are also mythical, harking back to the myth of the Iranian nation, in which the pomegranate is an essential intertextual element. In the same mythic vein, the pomegranate lady’s narration transforms her own journey into an arduous adventure in which she crosses mountains and oceans to achieve her goal, with the courage and prowess worthy of a fairy-tale hero. The story’s imaginary happy ending also confirms that Taraqqi had the tale form in mind when writing this text. The ending is indeed very close to the traditional fairy-tale ending—“And they lived happily ever after.”
although in this case “they” are not a prince and princess but rather a mother and her two sons.

“Madam Gorgeh” is a story about tyranny and the necessity of revolting against unjust rules, as well as a tale on exile and adaptation to the new country, especially through language. The narration follows the structure of a fable, with the heroine-narrator getting rid of the monster-neighbour when she succeeds in ridding herself of her own fears (about the language). The devices employed in the story also appear in the choice of images used, especially in the animal form taken by the characters: the neighbour-she-wolf and, by extension, the lamb as the wolf’s prey. At the beginning of the story, the narrator is the lamb, but the situation is ultimately reversed, with the neighbour subdued by the narrator, who transforms herself into all sorts of monsters: “I [. . .] have grown taller, and my teeth have grown like those of Dracula’s. I’ve grown horns and a beard; I look like a dragon and I love it” (153; trans. Vatanabadi and Khorrami 141). This fantastic style helps to transform exile into a universal fable, where the issue of empowering is as important as the particular experience of exile. The need to master the host country’s language is underlined in humorous passages. The use of the tale, as analysed above, plays a different function in stories of exile than in stories written in Iran, where it is mainly used in order to escape censorship. In exile, the tale is used as a tool to reinforce discourse on the Other, as it is also a device for narrations on faraway lands and strange indigenous people. The tale in stories written in exile demonstrates that the Other is like the Self, if not identical.

In the following section, I argue that France is one of the elements forging a representation of the Iranian Self and that a complete analysis of exile needs to look at the place from which the story is written and against which the narrators define their exilic status. I further argue that the Persian literature of exile is as much acted upon by the representation of the Self as by the representation of the Other, as exile is precisely defined by this state where redefinitions of identity happen, when the confrontation with the Other has become mandatory. It is through the redefinition of France and the French that the narrators’ selves are delineated in Taraqqi’s texts.

THE REPRESENTATION OF FRANCE IN THE THREE STORIES

“Anar banu” is not concerned with France in a precise way, though the country is always in the background—part of a West unknown to the old lady, for whom both
France and Sweden are distant and incomprehensible locations. Paris is an indeterminate Western space where people are in a hurry: a pretext for generalizations on Western society. For instance, the discipline of the French passengers on the plane is remarkable, whereas the Iranian passengers continuously leave their seats until the French flight attendant finally gives up on them. Also, Westerners are shown to be indifferent to the plight of others: at the airport in Paris, without thinking of stopping or giving help, they pass the old lady as she sits on the floor helplessly repeating “Sweden.” When the narrator realizes that the suffering pomegranate lady needs to be carried, she helps her onto a trolley and tries to comfort her and shield her against embarrassment: “I say: ‘Dear Mama, nobody knows you here. Nothing is inappropriate in the West’” (65). The strict opposition between the West and Iran is, however, blurred by the fact that the narrator is herself representative of Westerners: she insists on having a thousand things to do and is abrupt when addressing the old lady. Only from time to time does she remember the tradition of generosity of her country and resolve to continue giving help.

“Madam Gorgeh” also posits an opposition between the French and Iranians, the former portrayed as serious, self-contained people who prefer meeting friends in a café rather than opening their homes to them. There is a funny depiction of French people taking an inordinately long time to open their doors with their many locks and making sure that the person who knocks is reliable, while the Iranian narrator says her door is always open, a welcoming cup of tea ready for anybody who might like to come in (62–63).

There is definitely a criticism embedded in this story, employing as it does the extended metaphor of the wolf-lamb dyad to present Western society as a place of constant struggle where the weak are necessarily dominated by the strong. At the end of the fable, the weakened neighbour disappears without anybody noticing: this implies that Western society is a place where a person can become lost and disappear. But, as in “Anar banu,” the criticism is also applied to the narrator herself, who knows how occidentalized she has become: at the end of the story, busy preparing dinner for the friends she is expecting, she herself forgets about the loneliness of a tramp in the street and the despair of her downstairs neighbour alone in the cold. Mixed with negative Western characteristics, the Iranian Self can no longer be purely Iranian; as such, the criticism of French society is also a self-criticism.

The narrators of “Aqa-ye ‘Alef” and “Anar banu” often use the term Farang to refer either to France or to the West. This is a significant word choice, considering
that they could use the modern term Faranseh. The choice of Farang refers both to a poetic symbol, the ancient term being evocative of travelogues and poetic images, and to a political stance, because Farang and Farangestan are also generic terms to designate the whole Western world and can have negative connotations. In an interview, Taraqqi remarked on the element of irony in her association of the term with the Qadjar era, stating that she had used it because of its humorous connotations (personal interview, 9 Jan. 2009). In the case of “Aqa-ye ‘Alef,” this choice of vocabulary is confirmed by the fact that for Alpha, France is a Western country of exile like any other. Alpha has no particular attachment to French values. The only ones he approves of are Western and general: for example, he praises the civility of the people. In his depiction of the West, the narrator deals with the topos of a busy, self-absorbed place (203). For Alpha, Notre Dame Cathedral incarnates Paris, with its frightful solidity and all its weight of stone, symbolizing the chill of the country—its beautiful, ancient, but inaccessible nature. Paris is generally depicted as a cold city with unfriendly people, cold weather, and an impenetrable beauty, definitely too sumptuous and far too distant for Alpha’s expectations. It is also described as an anonymous city where one does not want to hear or befriend one’s neighbours, solitude being the corollary of coldness, as in “Madam Gorgeh.” Sometimes, the positive topos of Paris as the most beautiful city in the world tempers this depiction: Mrs. Nabovat, Alpha’s platonic love relation, is particularly representative of this opinion in the letters she writes to him (118). Taraqqi does not hesitate to use topos and clichés of the country, or to mix positive and negative ones. This balance between negative and positive representations, and between self-criticism and criticism of France, is another way for Taraqqi to present a nuanced way of looking at the Other.

In this essay, I have compared three short stories by Goli Taraqqi to illustrate how Persian literature of exile uses thematic, stylistic, and generic devices. Many Iranian writers living in France can be compared to Taraqqi and be included in Persian literature of exile in France, including Reza Qassemi, Chahla Chafiq, Javad Javaheri, M. F. Farzaneh, and Mahasti Shahrokhi. These writers range from authors who have integrated themselves into French society and participate in it as full citizens—such as Chahla Chafiq, a published sociologist and activist—to authors like Goli Taraqqi, who tend to mix mostly with other Iranians and rarely speak French. Nuances have to be applied when including them in the broad trend of Persian literature of exile, but the common characteristics of exilic writing along thematic, stylistic, and generic lines necessitate a comparative approach.
NOTES

1 The first of these stories is from Taraqqi’s collection *Ja-ii digar* and the second and third are in the collection *Khatereh-haye parakandeheh*.

2 In translating Taraqqi, I have consulted published translations in English and French, and, on occasion, I quote from one of the available English translations (as indicated). All other translations from the Persian are my own.

3 I do not read Alpha as an embodiment of Taraqqi, although she did compare her story with his in an interview (Fani and Dehbashi).

4 The pomegranate is also present in other literary imaginaries, such as the Turkish or Armenian.

5 The genealogy of “Aqa-ye ‘Alef’” is an example of the fluidity of Persian literature within Iran and abroad. Although living mostly in Paris, Taraqqi is determined to publish her books in Tehran: censorship thus remains a weighty issue affecting her life and work.

6 It is also important to remember that Taraqqi received an English education and that she experienced France through the prism of an Anglo-Saxon outlook (personal interview, 6 May 2009).

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