

## In Memoriam

### **Zein al-Abedin Motamen: Teacher, Writer and Critic**

(b. Tehran, 4 June 1914–d. Tehran, 24 October 2005)



Zein al-Abedin Motamen was a teacher, writer and critic of outstanding ability. He was born into a family with a long tradition of literary learning that went back to Fath-Ali Khan Saba, the Poet Laureate at the court of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar. Motamen graduated from the American College of Tehran (later renamed Alborz High School) in 1936 where in the same year he began his long and successful teaching career which continued for the next forty-two years. He also studied Persian Literature at Tehran University from where he graduated in 1944. Motamen was a remarkable teacher with a lasting impact on several generations of pupils at Alborz. He was an exemplary model of moderation in temperament and in his general style of living who maintained high standards of excellence in teaching with effortless ease. He was married for a brief period but had no children of his own and so devoted much of his time to his students, some of whom he regarded as members of his extended family. Throughout the years, these pupils and ex-pupils would regularly visit him in his delightful mid-Qajar parental home in the old Pamenar district of Tehran, and more often at his favorite haunt Café Naderi. He had a keen interest in Persian classical music and played the reed. He was also an avid traveler, often going on tours by himself. In his youth he covered vast terrains in Iran on foot, and in later years he would miss no opportunity to travel to different parts of the world. He had a large collection of photographs and slides from these travels, over 3000 in his own estimation, all taken by himself. Motamen authored and edited several works in prose and verse, including *The Eagle's Nest*, a popular historical novel set in the early Seljuq period depicting the life of Hasan Sabbah and

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the Ismailis of Alamut, which he wrote when he was eighteen years old. It was serialized in a leading journal of the time, and was later published as a book in 1938 and has been reprinted regularly ever since. He also wrote two critical volumes on classical Persian literature, *Studies in Persian Poetry* (1954), and *Evolution of Persian Poetry* (1956). Motamen had a keen interest in the Indian Style in Persian poetry as is evident from his *Saeb of Tabriz: A Florilegium* (1941), and *Gems from the Ocean of Saeb's Mind* (1985). He also wrote *A Leaf from the Book of My Life* (limited edition, 1965, and reprinted twice later), containing a selection of his own poems and literary essays. He was buried in the section specifically allotted to writers and artists in Behesht-e Zahra Cemetery near Tehran. A memorial meeting was held in his honor on Sunday 30 October 2005 at Alborz High School in Tehran.

*Ali Gheissari*