Letters to the Editor

TO THE EDITOR:.

Dr. Clinton's recent review of Mazzaoui and Mill-ward's <u>Social and Cultural Selections from Contemporary Persian</u> (<u>Iranian Studies</u>, Vol. VIII, No. 4, 1975) has prompted me to add several of my own observations on the book. Although Dr. Clinton mildly mentions some of the weak points of Mazzaoui and Millward's reader, he is per-haps too generous in concluding that "this reader is a substantial improvement over those already available."

I used this reader as an experiment in a second-year Persian class at the University of Pennsylvania in the fall of 1974. In spite of the authors' claim that the selections meet their two primary criteria of "vig-orous language," and "interesting subject matter" (p. ix), my students and I found that the selections were tiresome and provided a misrepresentation both of the Persian lan-guage and of Iranian society and culture as a whole.

To begin with, the title of the book, <u>Social and Cultural Selections from Contemporary Persian</u>, is mislead-ing. The readings, as the introduction of the book indi-cates, are taken from only two semi-official evening news-papers, <u>Iṭṭilāᶜāt</u> and <u>Kayhān</u>. Since they have excluded news, political and literary articles, advertisements and announcements, the authors are left with articles from "inside pages," which primarily consist of reports on problems of city life which are dramatized beyond propor-tion.

The authors claim that the sixteen selections included represent "typical" situations in Iranian society (p. ix). Students are thus encouraged to form a view of Iranian society based on these selections, which include two attempted suicides by women over love problems (I and III), "flirtation in public" (IV), "telephone nuisances" (XIII), which the authors claim to be "almost a national pastime" (p. 79), and vagrants in the streets of Tehran (XII). Of the two selections on marriage, II and VIII, the former deals with a very peculiar and uncommon problem.

As regards to the more general social issues, the student is led to believe the Iranian's view of society revolves around the preservation of old brick-baking furnaces (XIV), and the restoration of the monumental mosque in Ardabil, which is somehow linked in one lesson (X) to an attempted theft of a golden rod from a Qazvin mosque. Even the few general selections center around individual or superficial problems: "Women will be lawyers too!" (V), "Why have you moved to Tehran?" (VI and VII), and so forth.

This summary can only lead us to reject the author's claim that the subject matter adequately reflects situations "typical of the social and cultural milieu of contemporary Iran" (p. ix). One wonders whether a textbook in English based on unreliable newspapers which predominantly report suicide attempts, rapes, sex scandals, bank robberies, and "Legionnaire's Disease" would be truly representative of American society and culture, and whether it would be acceptable to American instructors as a serious textbook for teaching English as a second language.

The authors of the reader describe the language of the selections as "direct, forceful and lively" and, furthermore, as "simple, unadorned, straightforward Persian" (p. ix). But, as Dr. Clinton has already indicated, it is really not valid to describe the language and style of the selections in the reader in such a manner. In fact, it is the jargon of journalists and reporters who have to fill many columns every day in a short time, and who are not concerned with writing in a simple and lively style. This often results in a complicated, repetitious style,

full of grammatical errors and uncommon usages. One idea
might be repeated in the same passage three or four times
(see Selection IV). In short, the student is faced with
the language of Iranian journalism, as described by Dr.
Clinton: "a hodge-podge of styles--colloquial, literary,
bureaucratic--and dense with neologisms and borrowings
from French and English."

In terms of arrangement, the authors themselves admit
that they have made no attempt to arrange the selections ac-
cording to any pedagogic method. Each selection has an in-
troduction in English, a glossary, some grammatical notes
(which mix accurate explanations with frequent mistakes
and ambiguous statements), followed by exercises and drills.
Following are examples of the inaccuracies and mistakes
which can be found:

p. 4:   "zan + ā + shū = zanāshū... = zindigī-yi zanāshu'ī,
         the alef, from Pahlavi,..." (unclear explanation).

pp. 3 & 108: "akhīran, 'finally'" (instead of "recently").

p. 5:   "iᶜtiqād kardan" (does not occur in Persian).

p. 22:   "bad bār āvardan 'to turn out badly'" (instead of
         "to bring up, e.g., a child, badly").

p. 25:   "Faqaṭ pisarān murid-i naẓar-i mā nīstand. 'We
         are not only concerned with our sons here.'"
         (should be "boys," not "sons").

p. 25:   "khānum-hā, 'ladies'--they are being addressed.
         The same in line 78" (In both cases khānum-hā is
         the subject of the following verb.)

p. 25:   "chasbīdan: This verb is intransitive; thus the
         rā in ẓavāhir-i tamaddun-i gharb rā is for the
         dative, not for the object."
         (The verb chasbīdan is in fact transitive, as the
         authors themselves suggest in their glossary, pp.
         23 and 114, where it is listed as meaning "to cling
         to." The rā serves its normal function of marking
         the direct object.)

p. 29: "ta'kīd, 'confirmation'" (instead of "emphasis").

p. 32: "vizārat-i taᶜāvun va umūr-i rūstāhā, 'Land Reform and Rural Co-operatives'" (should be "Co-operatives and Rural Affairs").

p. 38: "bā surᶜatī kih..., the connective article 'kih' here has the meaning of 'tā,' i.e., in order to." (In fact, here kih is the normal relative marker meaning "that" or "which.")

p. 40: "Agar dar murid imkān bishavad...." (This phrase, given in a student exercise, cannot be said in Persian.)

p. 126: "muᶜarrifī kardan, 'to report, expose'" (instead of "to introduce").

Perhaps the weakest point of the book appears in the questions following each selection to be answered by students. The form of these questions in many instances shows the authors' uneasiness in writing Persian. Even if these questions are not grammatically incorrect, they sound odd to a native speaker. In many selections, the questions that follow do not have a uniform tense sequence relevant to the actual text; the set of questions on page 25 provide a good example. Or, the questions sometimes contain problems in word order:

p. 25:   ۶) چه شکایتی به جمعیت زنان از طرف دختران و زنان میرسید؟

p. 40:   ۹) اولیای دانش‌آموزان چه توقعی داشتند از آقای مرتضوی؟

Still others are lacking the indefinite ی necessary to form questions in Persian:

p. 52:   ۳) چه حقیقت را نمیتوان کتمان کرد؟

           ۴) علت عدم توافق بر سر مهریه چه اثر در جمعیت ایران دارد؟

In some cases, they are simply not asked in a form used in modern Persian:

p. 40:   ۱) موقعیکه نویسنده از او سئوال پرسید مسافر چه کار کرد؟

p. 52:   ۱) چه چیزهائی که در راه ازدواج وجود دارد باید شکسته شود؟

        Although I too appreciate the efforts put into the preparation of this book, I cannot agree with Dr. Clinton that the book is really "a substantial improvement" over other readers available for teaching Persian at an intermediate level.

                                        HAMID MAHAMEDI

[Hamid Mahamedi is currently teaching Persian at the University of Pennsylvania.]

TO THE EDITOR:

        I have no general criticism of Professor Elwell-Sutton's review of Morals Pointed and Tales Adorned (Iranian Studies, Vol. IX, No. 1, 1976) other than the usual one--that the gratifying words of praise tend to get lost in the mass of detailed objection. The general message would seem to be that I show promise and should go on trying! However, one or two remarks might clarify my practical difficulties and my theoretical positions.

        Any out-of-dateness in scholarship might be partly excused on the grounds that the work was finished in 1964, and underwent a series of disasters for nearly 10 years: difficulty in finding funds and a publisher, inordinate slowness of appraisal, loss of the best typescript, fire, delays in printing overseas and through mail-strikes, etc. At the same time, there is--certainly at Toronto (and one gathers elsewhere)--enormous dif-