



DANESHVAR, REZA

DANESHVAR, REZA (محمد رضا دانشوار, Moḥammad Reżā Dānešvar Tehrānizāda, b. Mashhad, 22 January 1948; d. Paris, 27 May 2015; [Figure 1](#)), fiction writer and playwright.

LIFE

Reza Daneshvar was born to Amir Ḥosayn Dānešvar Tehrānizāda and Ešmat Kāleqi Tarāzuči, a middle-class family. After finishing primary school, he continued his high school education at the Amir Kabir and Ḥāj Taqi Āqā Bozorg High Schools in Mashhad and graduated in 1966. He received his BA in Persian literature from Mashhad University in 1975.

He started his professional career as the director of Mashhad University Press and then as the head of the National Theater of Khorasan Province. At the outset of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, he was the vice-president of the School of Art (Dāneš-sarā-ye honar) in Mashhad; this was followed by a short period as the head of the Mashhad Cultural Heritage Office (Edāra-ye mirās-e farhangi-e Korāsān). He married Minudokt Bideli in 1972 with whom he had two sons: Mazdā, and Esfandiār. The marriage ended in divorce in 1978. He later married Parvāna Merriḵ and fathered a third son, Mazdak.

Daneshvar's first play, *Abuḍar*, was premiered in Mashhad in 1970. It was based on 'Ali Šari'ati's free translation of *Abuḍar al-Ġaffāri*, by the Egyptian novelist 'Abd al-Ḥamid Jowdat al-Saḥār, which was published as *Abuḍar Ġaffāri: kodāparast-e sosyālist* in 1955 (Abrahamian, p. 25). *Abuḍar* was



restaged and published in 1973 as *Yek bār-e digar: Abudār* (In 1971, he was detained for his political activities and spent about one year in Vakilābād Prison in Mashhad, followed by a period of banishment to [Baluchistan](#). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Daneshvar's early short stories were published in such literary journals as *Faṣlhā-ye sabz*, and *Lowḥ: daftari dar qeṣṣa*. In 1971, following the '2500-year celebration of the Persian Empire', the progressively harsh state censorship saw books by Daneshvar and several other writers banned in Iran (Mir'ābedini, 1989, pp. 100, 376).

With the upsurge in the suppression of dissidents following the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Reza Daneshvar, fled to Pakistan, and then to France in 1982, where he lived, worked, and wrote for about three decades. In France, he joined the National Movement of the Iranian Resistance (Nehẓat-e moqāvemāt-e melli-e Irān), founded by Shapur Bakhtiar (Šāpur Baḳtiār, 1914-1991) Iran's last prime minister under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, and cooperated with the movement until the assassination of Bakhtiar in Paris in 1991.

From 2003 to 2006, he was the second resident writer of Ithaca City of Asylum (ICOA), a community organization in New York State and part of a worldwide network dedicated to providing sanctuary to writers whose works are suppressed. During this period he completed, in collaboration with translator Catherina Porter and editor Deborah Tall, the English version of the title story in *Maḥbuba va āl: majmu'a-ye dāstān* (Uppsala, 1996), as *Mahboobeh and Ahl* (Ithaca, Vista Periodista, 2004), and "Bā dustān-e dāmād be 'arusi narrow," a short story published in the collection *Hey hey jebeli qom qom* (Tehran, 1974), as *Don't Go to the Reception with Friends of the Groom* (Ithaca, Vista Periodista, 2006). A second translation of *Maḥbuba va āl* by [Ashurbanipal Babilla](#) appeared as "Mahbubeh and the Demon Ahl" (in Mozaffari and Karimi Hakkak, eds., 2009, pp. 189-214). During his stay in Ithaca, he also taught theater at Cornell University and premiered two new plays, *Sandwich Deluxe* (2004) and *Alfred* (2005; see ICOA).

Daneshvar worked as a taxi-driver in Paris, and also cooperated as a freelancer radio journalist with Radio Zamaneh, a Persian-language broadcasting service founded in 2005 in The Netherlands. Daneshvar passed away in Paris on 27 May 2015 from cancer. He was cremated and buried in Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris. His death received wide coverage outside Iran, and a commemorative celebration was held in the Auditorium de la Mairie de Paris in 21 January 2016 ([Figure 3](#)).



WORKS

Daneshvar's works participate in the modern spectrum of writing in the twentieth century and put on display his conscious experimentation with new novelistic genres, structures, and techniques. His earlier works written in Iran are characterized by his delving into the psychic maze of fictional characters who, reminiscent of Dostoyevsky's protagonists, are often tormented by insanity, crime, and horrible nightmares (Mir'ābedini, p. 98). Examples include the eponymous story in the collection *Hey hey jebeli qom qom* (Namāz-e meyyet by Reza Daneshvar." href="/uploads/files/Reza-Daneshvar/daneshvar-reza-fig5.jpg">Figure 5), a psycho-fiction set in the aftermath of the [1953 coup d'état](#). Narrated from the point of view of two political prisoners who have been subjected to torture in prison, it proffers a dramatic depiction of the manner by which torture and humiliation affect every facet of an individual's entire life. Za'im relents under torture and becomes an undercover agent in exchange for his release, only to harbor perverse fantasies, incestuous desires, and he performs *Namāz-e meyyet* upon the dead bodies in whose blood his own hands are soaked. On the other side of the spectrum is Yusef-Ġolām, who, not yielding under torture, is sentenced to twenty years in prison (Barādarān, 2015). Daneshvar's skillful rendition of his characters in a polished language, as held by a critic, turns *Namāz-e meyyet* into a psycho-fiction in which the boundaries between such ideologically charged concepts as loyalty and betrayal are delimited (Yavari, p. 600).

In the second phase of his writing, while in exile, Daneshvar appears more as a critic of Iranian culture, which, as he alleges, denies individuality and fosters faith in saviors and utopias. *Ķosrow-e kubān* (The king of the good men, Uppsala, 1994; Sušyānt—and fights like [Bahrām](#), the god of war and victory to realize a heavenly town on the earth, (Sheyda, 2016, pp. 135; Idem, 2004, p. 150). Daneshvar in *Ķosrow-e kubān*, as is held by a critic, intermixes a sharply edged realism with fantastic and dreamlike elements, to offer a mythologized retelling of the 1979 revolution through an imaginary trip undertaken by fictive travelers to the [Alborz](#) mountains (Yavari, *ibid.*).

Daneshvar's depiction of the novel's protagonist, Bahrām-e Rāstin, his calling upon the three saviors of Zoroastrianism, his recurrent references to Persian literature and mythology, his focus on external detail even while much of the significant action happens within the narrator's own mind, turns the novel into an edged criticism of a culture which bears the weight of an endemic messianic tendency on its shoulders, has always longed for a utopia that could



never be reached, and has waited in vain for thousands of years to embrace a redeemer that will never come (Sheyda, 2004, pp. 156-59; Sheyda 2016, p. 143).

Mosāfer-e hič-kojā (The traveler of no man's land, 2007, William Knox D'Aarcy, as well as the bride, the groom, the interrogator, the lawyer, the driver, etc. Daneshvar evokes these characters in his play as a way to criticize British interference in Iran and once again to comment on Iranian cultural foundations that are based on the denial of individuality and faith in saviors and utopias (Sheyda, 2009, pp. 244-245, 258).

Daneshvar's last published work was *Bāgi miān-e dow kiābān: čahār hezār o yek ruz az zendagi-e Kāmrān Dibā* (A garden between two alleys: four thousands and one day of Kamran Diba's Life, 2010,

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