



ELAHI, BIJAN

ELAHI, BIJAN (بیجان بیجان, Bijan Elāhi, b. Tehran, 16 Tir 1324Š./ 7 July 1945; d. Tehran, 10 Āḍar 1389Š./ 1 December 2010; [Figure 1](#), [Figure 2](#)), modernist poet and translator.

LIFE

Bijan Elahi was the only child born into the affluent family of ‘Ali Moḥammad and Qodsi Elahi. He abandoned his secondary education at [Alborz College](#), during his senior year and didn’t return to a formal educational setting again. While in high school he also attended the painting classes of Javād Ḥamidi (1919-2002), and became familiarized with the modern art movement in vogue in the West. With Ḥamidi’s encouragement, he submitted several of his paintings to a biennale in France where two of them were published in the booklet of the biennale (Asadi Kiāras, 2013, pp.11-12). Although his involvement with the canvas came soon to an end, it had a direct impact on his aesthetics as a poet (Aṣlāni, p. 133)

Elahi married the novelist [Ghazaleh Alizadeh](#), in 1969 ([Figure 3](#)). The marriage, which did not last long, provided Elahi his only child, a daughter, Salmeh, born in 1971. He married Žāleh Kāžemi, a television producer and news anchor in 1988. The marriage ended in divorce in 2000.

In the last three decades of his life, Elahi increasingly immersed himself in Sufism, and took a leave from all literary circles, choosing a life of solitude into which only a few close friends were invited. He died on 1 December 2010 of



heart failure. In accordance to his final wishes, he was buried in a small village near Marzan Ābād, in northern Iran, during which, according to Elahi's will no recording devices were to be allowed. Mas'oud Kimiā'i, the noted director, and Elahi's life long friend who had intended to document the burial, deferred to Elahi's wishes. Šamim Bahār, art critic, storywriter and Elahi's colleague in Fifty-one Publications (Entešārāt-e Panjāh o yek), was appointed by Elahi as his executor to oversee the publication of his manuscripts (Figure 4).

WORKS

Elahi's first poem, "Barf" (Snow, 1964), was published in 1964 in the second issue of the *Jong-e adabi-e Torfa*, a literary journal published by Torfa Publications, which was co-founded by Esmā'il Nuri'Alā, Aḥmad Rezā Aḥmadi, Moḥammad 'Ali Sepānlu, Ġaffār Ḥosayni, and Nāder Ebrāhimi (Nuri'alā', 1994, p. 73).

... Nāmaš barf bud	Her name was snow
Tanaš barfi	Her body, snowy
Qalbaš az barf	Her heart of snow
Va tapešaš	And her pulse
Šedā-ye čekidan-e barf	Sound of dripping snow
bar bāmhā-ye kāh-geli ...	On the thatched roofs ...
Va man u rā	And I loved her
čon šāka-i ke zir-e bahman šekasta bašad	Just like a branch
dust mi-dāštam	Broken under the avalanche

(*Javānihā*, Tehran, 2014, p. 17; Figure 5)

Elahi was on the editorial board and a regular contributor to *Jozva-ye šer* (Poetry leaflet; Figure 6), a poetry journal edited by Esmā'il Nuri'alā' and published in 1966 by Torfa Publications (Nuri 'Alā'). The journal was intended to be a conduit for new poets to present their modern yet formally experimental poetry, later known as the New Wave Poetry (Mowj-e now), to a wide audience. Bijan Elahi, Aḥmad Rezā Aḥmadi, and Bahrām Ardebili were frequent contributors to the journal. The last issue of the journal, which lasted less than a year, was published in 1967 a few days after the death of [Forough Farokhzad](#) and contained a tribute to her.

With the publication of *Jozva-ye šer* having come to an end, Elahi severed his association with Aḥmad Rezā Aḥmadi and Esmā'il Nuri'alā' and joined Bahrām Ardebili and Parviz Eslāmpur to publish two volumes of *Šer-e digar* (Other

poetry) in 1966 and 1970 (Šams-e Langerudi, III, p. 562; [Figure 7](#)). In 1970, while Elahi was abroad, many of the contributors to the *Še'r-e digar* signed onto the manifesto of *Še'r-e hajm* (Spacementalism), which was coined by and inseparably associated with Yad-Allāh Ro'yā'i and his poetry.

In 1972, Elahi joined the newly established Entešārāt-e Panjāh o yek, which was sponsored by 'Aziza 'Azodi, an Iranian intellectual whom Elahi had met in Paris, and managed by Šamim Bahār. They published *Šab-e yek, šab-e dow*, by Bahman Forsi in 1974, as well as several books, translated from English, on the life and works of such noted directors as Pier Paolo Pasolini, Federico Fellini and Stanley Kubrick (Šabā, p. 135). However, Fifty-one Publications ceased operations in 1975, with many books still in its waiting list, including several of Elahi's works of translation (Šakeri, p. 136).

Only several of Elahi's translations were published during his lifetime, including T. S. Eliot's *Ash Wednesday*, as *Čahār-šanba kākestar* (Tehran, 1972; [Figure 8](#)), and selected poems of [Maṣur-e Ḥallāj](#), Sufism's most celebrated martyr, which was published by Anjoman-e falsafa in 1975. His poetry collections, however, remained unpublished during his lifetime. Twice, in 1975 and 1978, he attempted to publish a collection, titled *Didan* (To see), but both times the process stalled before completion.

Elahi's poems, rebuffed by traditional poets, on the one hand, and the apostles of the left and the committed poetry, a central issue for the literati who defined literature as a political vehicle, on the other (Ašlāni, p. 133), were only sporadically reviewed by his contemporaries during his life. While appreciating the wide range of Elahi's vocabulary and his ability to maintain a coherent line of thought in his poems, Rezā Barāheni contended that Elahi's frequent manipulation of the conventions of rhyme and rhythm, and his urge to de-familiarize what is or has become familiar, has distanced his poetry from its intended audience, and has robbed his language of poetic subtlety (Barāheni, pp. 1241-42).

Barāheni was not alone in his opinion. Other poets and critics also followed suit, including Esmā'il Nuri'alā, the theorist of New Wave Poetry, who argued that Elahi's disregard of the "principle of creating a connection between the poet and the reader," has bound his poems in an "abstract game with words." (Nuri'alā', 1994, p. 89) Elahi's "Aql-e sork," offers a rewarding example (see Šams-e Langerudi, III, p. 603):



*Safar čerā konam, čerā
Safar konam?
Man ke mitavānam
Sargardān bāšam
Sālhā havāli-e kāna-am*

Why should I travel? Why
Should I travel?
I, who can bewilder,
Years around my house

*Kāna; divānegiyam-čerā
ke birun-e kāna-am-
Kāna-ye peydā dar nur
peydā dar nok-e nur
Paranda-ye peydā
ke foru midahad be mehr
sib-e ādami
jā be jā mišavad dami
va češmhā-ye u
ke farāmuši miāvarad*

Home: my longing- because
I am out of it –
The house, which appears in the light
appears on the peak of light ...
The known bird
that swallows out of kindness-
the Adam’s apple
moves for a second –
then its eyes
bring forgetfulness.

(*Didan*, Tehran, 2013, p. 190)

Posthumously, however, Elahi is praised as one of the canonical figures of the Other Poetry in Iran, with an effectual influence on two literary movements that developed later, namely, *Mowj-e nāb* (Asadi Kiāras, 2008), and *Še’r-e goftār* (Speech poetry; Šarrāf). He is also credited as a poet with direct impact over the works of such poets as Parviz Eslāmpur (1943- 2013), Bahrām Ardibili (1943-2006), Hušang Čālangi, and Firuz Nāji (see *Andiša-ye puyā*, 33, Farvardin 1395Š./March 2016, pp. 128-39)

Not all critics, however, concur with this posthumous revisionist reevaluation of Elahi’s poetry, calling it a “historical tourism”, or rather an ahistorical narrative of the history of modern Persian poetry, in which Elahi is refashioned as the period’s “Idealized Other” (Saṭvati Qal’a, 2015, p. 43). Two of Elahi’s poetry collections were published as *Didan* (To see), and *Javānihā* (The salad days) in 2013 and 2015, respectively.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(online resources accessed 15 January 2015):

Poetry collections.

Didan, Tehran, 2013.

Javānihā, Tehran, 2015.

Selected translations.

T. S. Eliot, *Ash Wednesday*, as *Čahār-šanba kākestar*, Tehran, 1972.

Gustave Flaubert et al., selected stories, as *Bahānahā-ye ma'nus*, Tehran, 2013 (Figure 9).

Manšur-e Ḥallāj, selection of poems, as *Aš'ār-e Ḥallāj*, Tehran, 1975.

Idem, poems and prose, as *Ḥallāj al-asrār* Tehran, 2014 (Figure 10).

Friedrich Hölderlin, selected poems, as *Niyat kayr*, Tehran, 2015; with a comprehensive introduction by Elahi and an afterword by Cyrus Atabay (Figure 11).

Arthur Rimbaud, *Illuminations*, as *Ešrāqhā: ovrāq-e mošavvar*, Tehran, 1983 (Figure 12).

Federico Garcia Lorca, selected poems, as *Gozida-ye aš'ār-e Federico Garcia Lorca*, Tehran, 1968 (Figure 13).

Henri Michaux, selected poems, as *Sāhat-e javvāni*, Tehran, 1980 (Figure 14).

Pablo Neruda, *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*, London, 1969, as *Bist še'r-e āšeqāna va yek sorud-e nowmidi* (under the pseudonym Forud Kosravāni), Tehran, 1973 (Figure 15).

Sources.

Dāriuš Asadi Kiāras, *Bižan Elāhi: Šā'erān-e naqqāš 1*, Tehran, 2013.

Idem, "Gozāreš be kāk jonub," 2008, available at <http://paraan.blogfa.com/post-53.aspx>.

Moḥammad Rezā Ašlāni, in *Andiša-ye puyā* 33, Farvardin 1395 Š./March 2016, p. 133.

Rezā Barāheni, *Ṭalā dar mes*, Tehran, 1992.



Barresi-e ketāb: viža-ye šeʿr-e ḥajm 4, Šahrivar 1350 Š./ September 1971.

Moḥammad Taqī Šams-e Langerudi, *Tāriḳ-e taḥlilī-e šeʿr-e now*, Tehran, 1991.

Esmāʿil Nuri ʿAlā, “Yek sāl bā Bižan Elahi va jowzva-ye šeʿr,” 2010, available at <http://www.puyeshgaraan.com/ES.Articles/ES.Articles.Bijan-Elahi.htm>.

Idem, *Teʿory-e šeʿr: az mowj-e now tā šeʿr-e ʿešq*, London, 1994.

Yad-Allāh Roʾyāʿi, “An ke barāyaš ḥajm madḥab-e rābeṭa bud,” available at <http://35anj.net/?p=282>.

Moḥsen Šabā, in *Andiša-ye puyā* 33, Farvardin 1395 Š./March 2016, p. 135.

Parhām Šahrjerdi, “Barā-ye zendegihā-ye Bižan Elāhi,” 2010, available at http://zamaaneh.com/literature/2010/12/post_696.html.

Bahman Šākeri, in *Andiša-ye puyā*, 33, Farvardin 1395 Š./March 2016, p. 136.

Ġolām-Rezā Šarrāf, “Šeʿr-e goftār,” available at <http://doblynians.persianblog.ir/post/17/>.

ʿAli Saṭvati Qalʿa, “Faṣlhā-ʿi az ketāb-e Elāhi be ravāyat-e Barāheni,” *Hengām* 14-15, 1394 Š./2015 (Special issue on Bijan Elahi), pp. 36-56.