



‘EŠQĪ, MOḤAMMAD-REŽĀ MĪRZĀDA

‘EŠQĪ, MOḤAMMAD-REŽĀ MĪRZĀDA (b. 12 Jomādā II 1312/11 December 1894; killed 12 Tīr 1303 Š./3 July 1923, [Figure 1](#)), poet and journalist of post-constitution era and an important contributor to the modernization of poetry in Persia. ‘Ešqī was born in Hamadān, where he attended two European-style schools, Olfat and Ālīāns (Alliance), learning French as a part of the curriculum. He did not finish his education, probably due to family tensions. At about age fifteen he left Hamadān, ostensibly to continue his education in Tehran. However, he seems to have wandered about for a few years, mostly in Isfahan, before returning to Hamadān in 1915. There, he began to contemplate, and may actually have begun, a career in journalism with the publication of *Nāma-ye ‘Ešqī*. According to ‘Alī-Akbar Mošīr Salīmī (p. 4), *Nāma-ye ‘Ešqī*, though short-lived, was actually published in Hamadān in that year. Yet none of the catalogues or historical sources on journalism in Persia presents an account of the journal, or lists it among the actually published periodicals of the time. It is possible that a permit was obtained but no issue of the journal was actually printed or distributed.

With the occupation of Western Persia by Russian forces during World War I, ‘Ešqī accompanied several other Persian intellectuals, including the poet ‘Āref Qazvīnī (q.v.), in a westward migration to Istanbul. It is not clear whether ‘Ešqī was motivated in this journey primarily by the worsening situation in Hamadān, by his interest in the Young Turk movement in Istanbul, or by other



considerations. According to Mošīr Salīmī (p. 26), ‘Ešqī may have attended classes in the social sciences and philosophy division of the Bāb-e ‘Ālī Institute of Technology in Istanbul, although there is no evidence for this. An eyewitness account, written by Mo‘azzam-al-Salṭana, Persia’s consul-general in Istanbul, portrays him as a destitute young man who may have been forced, at least for a while, to spend the nights on a bench in Istanbul’s famous Taqīm Park (Mošīr Salīmī, pp. 27-28). He may also have taken one or more trips to Persian Kurdistan in the company of some unidentified German militia fighters (Mošīr Salīmī, p. 5).

On his way to Istanbul, ‘Ešqī visited the ruins of the Sasanian Palace in Ctephion (see *AYVĀN-E KESRA*); once in Istanbul he wrote an operatic verse drama with that palace at its locus. Entitled *Rastākīz-e šahrīārān-e Īrān* (The resurrection of Persian kings), this work features, in addition to ‘Ešqī himself, Zoroaster, Cyrus, Darius, and a few other mytho-historical characters from pre-Islamic Iran. This was the first of several dramatic compositions designed to incite patriotic feelings in contemporary Persians. Mošīr Salīmī reports (p. 5) that this work was immensely successful among expatriate Persians, particularly in India, and Šadr Hāšemī (*Jarā‘ed o majallāt* IV, p. 108) cites a notice entitled “Šureš-e adabī-e ‘Ešqī” (‘Ešqī’s literary rebellion) in *Akṭar-e mas‘ūd*, a newspaper published in Isfahan, testifying to the enthusiastic reception given to this and other dramatic works of ‘Ešqī in that city. Years later in Tehran, ‘Ešqī was honored by Indian Parsees, who had been deeply affected by the nationalist sentiment of the kind expressed in ‘Ešqī’s operetta among Persian youth (Mošīr Salīmī, p. 5).

In literary approach, ‘Ešqī’s verse dramas reveal the influence of new esthetic tendencies finding their way to Persia through Istanbul. *Rastākīz-e šahrīārān* is the first of several compositions by ‘Ešqī wherein a fiercely nationalistic ideology finds expression through an unprecedented appropriation of French and German poetic or dramatic genres. Of special note is the musical melange achieved through a mixture of contemporary Turkish, Caucasian, and symphonic melodies with tunes from traditional Persian *dastgahs*, laid out with fairly explicit stage directions in the text. Akṭar’s report describes the melodies in this work as “a mixture of Eastern and Western tunes” (Mošīr Salīmī, p. 108). The immense popularity of the performance may have owed as much to its poetic and musical novelty as to the sentiment it may have aroused in its audience.

After two years, ‘Ešqī returned from Istanbul to Hamadān, greatly radicalized.



There he began to write his poems in criticism of the existing political situation in the country, including a *mostazād* in which he satirized the Fourth Majles, and a *qaṣīda* in which he ridiculed Prime Minister Ḥasan Woṭūq-al-Dawla for the Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919 (q.v.) signed between Persia and Great Britain. Eventually his opposition to this treaty earned him a brief stay in prison (Mošīr Salīmī, p. 89). In this, as in later attacks on the idea of a republican regime for Persia, ‘Ešqī may have been inspired by Mirzā Yaḥyā Dawlatābādi (q.v.), a leading nationalist and a fellow poet. The latter cause was most effectively expressed in “Jomhūrī-nāma,” a *tarjī‘-band* in forty stanzas composed a few months before his death, in which the history of this movement is reported and its leaders satirized violently. It was published anonymously, and was thought for years to have been composed by Moḥammad-Taqī Bahār (q.v.), another leading opponent of the movement.

Sa‘īd Nafīsī, the noted scholar and contemporary of ‘Ešqī, has left an account of ‘Ešqī’s post-war years in Tehran. He recalls a gathering, perhaps in 1919, in which the poet ‘Āref introduced ‘Ešqī to him as “one of our friends of the migration” to Istanbul. Nafīsī calls ‘Ešqī a confused young man who, even as a poet, was not sure which style or mode of expression to adopt. He remembers ‘Ešqī as honest, yet irascible, harsh yet gullibly simple-minded, and calls his satirical compositions instruments of discord among the intellectuals of the time (quoted in Mošīr Salīmī, pp. 84-85).

Indeed, ‘Ešqī’s passion for social justice and human rights in Persia, envisioned in the chaotic political atmosphere following World War I, may have pushed him gradually to the brink of sound judgment. In numerous public lectures as well as in a series of highly emotional articles published in *Šafaq-e sork*, *Sīāsāt*, and eventually his own weekly newspaper *Qarn-e bīstom*, he began to propagate the idea of a feast of blood (*īd-e kūn*), an annual cleansing ceremony in which “the people, while singing songs, would head for the houses of those public officials who . . . during the previous year have committed treason against their public trust, and, leveling their homes, would cut the traitors up into pieces” (Mošīr Salīmī, pp. 135-36). Chief among ‘Ešqī’s candidates for this punishment were Prime Minister Woṭūq-al-Dawla; Qawām-al-Dawla, governor-general of Fārs; and eventually Reżā Khan, the future king. At first the idea was taken as a rhetorical hyperbole expressing the author’s extreme exasperation. However, it was repeated with increasing intensity in several articles and poems, including the *Se tāblo* (Three tableaux) the best-known of ‘Ešqī’s long narrative poems (Yūsufī, p. 376). It thus alarmed not only the ruling



politicians, but several leading intellectuals of the time. This may have contributed to ‘Ešqī’s isolation from the mainstream of social life in early 1920s.

Perhaps in an attempt to establish a forum for his own ideas, ‘Ešqī decided not to publish his own newspaper. *Qarn-e bīstom*, the weekly journal with which his name is most famously associated, first appeared on 27 Ša‘bān 1339/5 May 1921 (Šadr Hāšemī, *Jarā’ed o majallāt* IV, p. 105), but was suppressed after only four issues. It resumed publication over a year and a half later, on 28 Jomādā I 1341/15 January 1923, this time in four pages, and distributed more widely than before. Because the paper lists ‘Abbās Eskandarī as its managing editor, Šadr Hāšemī (IV, p. 106) speculates that in its second year, *Qarn-e bīstom* may have taken the place of *Sīāsāt*, a suppressed journal managed by Eskandarī. The eighteenth issue of this second series was published on 28 Ḥamal 1302 Š./17 April 1923). It was suppressed again until 7 Tīr 1303 Š./29 June 1923, when a single issue was published. It is widely believed that this issue sealed ‘Ešqī’s fate. In its eight pages, ‘Ešqī had written, once more, against the republican movement, widely believed to have been plotted by Režā Khan and his supporters against the Constitution. Five days later, he was assassinated by two gunmen in his residence. He was buried the next day in Ebn-e Bābūya cemetery, a ceremony which the Majles members of the minority party and other opponents of Prime Minister Režā Khan quickly turned into an occasion for public protest against the rising tide of his power.

Since his death, ‘Ešqī’s life and career have been the subject of many romanticized accounts. The desire to pay homage to a martyred poet with nationalistic and patriotic views, and to celebrate the spirit of an uncompromising revolutionary may have underlain this tendency. This has cast a shadow on ‘Ešqī’s real historical significance as a modernist poet, and a source of inspiration to other poets, most notably to his younger contemporary, Nīmā Yūšij. ‘Ešqī’s unique contribution to the process of modernity in Persian poetry lies in his attempt to liberate Persian poetry from systemic constraints of the classical system of poetic signification. In such works as “Nowrūzī-nāma,” *Rastākīz-e šahrīārān*, and above all in *Se tāblo*, the first traces of a systemic change in Persian poetry becomes visible (Karimi-Hakkak, pp. 212-31). ‘Ešqī’s vision of poetry as a focus for the expression of immediate and unadorned, as opposed to conventional and stylized, sensory perceptions imparts a sense of verisimilitude to his poems which may have struck his original readers as prosaic, but was later taken up by Nīmā Yūšij



and developed into an essential principle of modernist Persian poetry in Persia.

Bibliography (for cited works not given in detail see “Short References”):

Almost all of ‘Ešqī’s writings, as well as much information on his life and ideas, have been gathered in a single work by ‘Alī-Akbar Mošīr Salīmī, a friend of the poet. In successive editions of *Kollīyāt-e mošawwar-e Mīrzāda ‘Ešqī* (8th ed., Tehran, 1357 Š./1978), the editor, Mošīr Salīmī, has brought together virtually all of ‘Ešqī’s known poetic compositions, his most important political articles, and observations and memories of various individuals concerning ‘Ešqī’s life, particularly accounts of circumstances surrounding his assassination. Still, these writings are vague on several points and inconsistent or contradictory on others.

See also: M. Ājūdānī, “‘Ešqī: Naẓarīyahā wa now-āvarīhā,” *Āvand: Našrīya-ye Anjoman-e honarmandān wa nevīsandagān-e Īrānī dar Berītānīā* 1/1, January 1988, pp. 34-37.

Idem, “Tāblo-e Maryam,” *Āyanda* 12/1-3, 1365 Š./1986, pp. 49-56.

A. Karimi-Hakkak, *Recasting Persian Poetry: Scenarios of Poetic Modernity in Iran*, Salt Lake City, 1995, pp. 210-31.

Ġ.-Ḥ. Yūsofī, *Cašma-ye rowšan: Dīdār-ī bā šā‘erān*, Tehran, 1369 Š./1990, pp. 371-81.