



GOLŠIRI, HUŠANG

GOLŠIRI, Hušang (b. Isfahan, March 16, 1938; d. Tehran, June 5, 2000; [Figure 1](#)), one of the most significant Persian writers of the second half of 20th century. He came from a working class background in Isfahan; his family lived in Ābādān for several years (1943-1955) while his father worked in construction for the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (q.v.). In two short autobiographical sketches Golširi contrasts his early formative years in the somewhat drab oil company housing units in Ābādān with his experiences on his return home in his late teens to Isfahan and its surroundings, with their rich historical legacy and deep-rooted traditions (Golširi, 1976, p. 246; Golširi, 1991, pp. 111-12). Incidents from his early life are also reflected in his semi-autobiographical novel, *Jenn-nāma* (The Book of the Jinn, 1998). He worked at various jobs in the bazaar and in factories while attending Adab High School, the largest and best secondary school in Isfahan. Having obtained his school diploma, he was employed for a time in a legal registrar's office. Later, in 1958, he began teaching in primary schools in rural areas and at the same time studied for a degree in Persian Literature at Isfahan University (Golširi, 2001, pp. 11-12).

After receiving his B.A. in 1962, he taught in secondary schools until 1974. Through a school colleague he became better acquainted with current theories and trends in fiction and formed lasting friendships with the more avant-garde writers of the time and most notably with Bahrām Šādeqi (d. 1985; Golširi, 1991, p. 112). Both in his affectionate memorial address for Šādeqi ("Yādi az Bahrām Šādeqi," *Bāḡ dar bāḡ*, pp. 567-72) where he evokes Šādeqi's



sardonic humor and eccentric ways, and in scattered references in his critical essays (e.g. in “Neveštan-e romān šabr-e Ayyub miḳāhad,” *Bāḡ dar bāḡ*, p. 783), Golširi acknowledges Šādeqi’s considerable impact on him, particularly in the early years of his writing. But there were also other writers, translators and scholars with whom he formed friendships and engaged in discussions in the literary circles and weekly gatherings which played a large part in his formation as a writer and critic and in which he took such an active part throughout his life. It was first at the Šā’eb literary circle (*Anjoman-e adabi-e Šā’eb*) that Golširi encountered Šādeqi, Moḥammad Ḥoquqi and Manučehr Badi’i. At these meetings, writers would read their works, and the other participants would then comment on them. This kind of immediate response and analysis of finished works or works in progress became also standard practice in later and more progressive literary circles attended by him, including the classes he later initiated in Tehran for young authors eager to improve their writing techniques. His first published story, *Čenār* (The Plane Tree, *Payām-e Novin*, January 1961) was first read at one of the meetings of the Šā’eb literary circle.

While working as a teacher in rural and urban schools, Golširi began writing poetry and studying popular culture. He wrote articles on the popular culture of the rural areas around Isfahan including their local games, folk tales, and their poetry. Several of these appeared under his own name or under the pseudonym ‘Siāvosh Āgāh’ in the monthly literary journal *Payām-e Novin*, published by the Irano-Soviet Cultural Association. His own poems were also published in *Payām-e Novin*, *Ferdowsi* (q.v.), *Kayhān-e hafta*, *Kòuša*, and *Jong-e Ešfahān*. He revisits those times and the strange ambiance depicted in the collected folktales in the short story, “Dast-e tārik, dast-e rawšan” in the collection of stories under the same title (Dark Hands, Light Hands, 1995). Through his dealings and visits to the offices of *Payām-e Novin* and the Šā’eb circle, he became involved with the veterans of the banned *Tuda* (Tudeh) Party. As a result of this affiliation, he was arrested early in 1962 and spent five months in prison. Golširi wrote of political prisoners and members of the Communist Party in some of the stories in *Namāz-kāna-ye kuček-e man*, (My Small Prayer Room, 1975) and *Jobba-kāna* (The Armory, 1982). After his imprisonment, he distanced himself from party political activity, and made literature the focus of his intellectual life. But this very commitment to literature, and a fervent and relentless struggle to defend the freedom of expression in Persia became a continuous thread throughout his life. It led to further arrests and questionings and, in more recent years, to state-sponsored



black propaganda vilifying his conduct and public stance. He also found it increasingly difficult to publish his work in Persia, and some of his later works including *Ā'īnahā-ye dardār* and *Jenn-nāma*, were published abroad. In the case of *Šāh-e siāh-pušān* (The King of the Black-clad), its English translation as the *King of the Benighted* preceded the publication of the original Persian by just over a decade (Milani, “King of the Benighted and the Poetics of Persian Culture”).

The younger and more innovative members of the Šā'eb circle soon parted company with the more traditionalist members and set out on their own. The result of their collaboration was the literary periodical *Jong-e Eşfahān*, eleven issues of which appeared from 1965 to 1981 (Hoquqi, pp. 439-40). Soon the *Jong* made a stir in literary circles outside Isfahan, attracting contributions from major writers, and was noted for the weekly discussion sessions associated with it. Among the regular members of these meetings were Hušang Golširi and his elder brother Aḥmad, Moḥammad Hoquqi, Abu'l-Ḥasan Najafi, Zīā' Mowaḥḥed, Aḥmad Mir'alā'i, Moḥammad Kalbāsi, and Jalil Dustkāh. With the passage of time, younger generations of writers joined these sessions (“Piš-goftār,” *Bāḡ dar bāḡ*, p. 12). The lively exchange of ideas in these meetings and the opportunity to learn about recent theories in literature and linguistics from such skilled translators as Abu'l-Ḥasan Najafi, Aḥmad Mir'alā'i, and his brother Aḥmad Golširi, did much to broaden Golširi's own intellectual horizons and provided him with “a window to the outside world” (“Do rāha-e man o man-e digar,” *Bāḡ dar bāḡ*, p. 586). He abandoned writing poetry for publication and concentrated on what would become a lifelong experimentation with prose, its texture, its malleability, and its range, at times drawing on his close reading of classical Persian texts. In several passages in his critical writings and interviews, he stresses the importance of intuitive skills and imagination as well as learning and acquisition of techniques that all novelists need to perfect their craft. Thus, although he is often depicted as one of the most significant challengers to the dominance of social realism in contemporary Persian literature, he also dismisses those who merely copy techniques of magical realism, or stream of consciousness, without reference to their own culture and time (ibid, p. 794). He advocates a return to the roots and sources of Persian culture and literature and proposes grafting them to techniques learnt through studying world literature. Nevertheless, he reserved his most scathing criticism for those writers who see themselves as simply mirroring reality and merely attempting narrative snapshots with some moralistic tag attached to them, (“Kallāqiyat, sahm-e ašli-e nevisandagi,” in



Bāḡ dar bāḡ, p. 700; “Goftogu pirāmun-e dāstān o dāstān-nevisi,” in *ibid*, p. 728).

In the collection of short stories *Meṭl-e hamiša* (As Always, 1968), where the impact of Ṣādeqi and particularly his short stories and *Malakut* (Tehran, 1961) is palpable, and the novel *Šāzda eḥtejāb* (Prince Ehtejab, 1968), Golširi’s highly individual style and strategies of variegated narration are already in evidence. In the latter, “Golshiri captures with uncanny poignancy the dying gasps of an anguished man, cursed with the power of memory, overladen with the weight of a dehumanizing past” (Milani, “King of the Benighted and the Poetics of Persian Culture”). Echoes of the past, allusions to cloying relationships, internal monologues, and excerpts in the style of Qajar travelogues, are juxtaposed to buttress the overall kaleidoscopic effect of the narrative, its outlines softened and submerged in a twilight world of doubts and mystery. “Only imagination and prevarication came to my aid in my work. I passed on this weakness to *Šāzda Eḥtejāb*, and to *Faḡr-al-nesā’*, and to *Faḡri*. Like me, they too attempt to understand their ancestors through books, photographs, and documents” (“*Ḳallāqiyat, sahm-e ašli-e nevisandegi*,” *Bāḡ dar bāḡ*, p. 700). The novel, which was later made into a film directed by Bahman Farmān-ārā, managed to fuse words and pictures into a coherent entity, and Golširi’s “sparse style, his economy of images, the masterly crafted quality of his every sentence, provide an ‘an authorial’ filmmaker like Bahman Farman-ara ample creative room to enter the story and help fill with images the lacunae left by words,” (Milani, “Taming the Shrew: Unveiling the Prince,” p. 2). It won the Winged Ibex award for the best feature length film at Tehran’s Third International Film Festival in 1974, and was subsequently shown in the London, Berlin and Cannes Film Festivals.

This notion of viewing the writer as involved in a much more complex and equivocal manner with his writing and the characters which appear in it, implicit in the above quotation from Golširi himself on *Šāzda Eḥtejāb*, is expressed explicitly in the text of *Kristin o Kid* (Christine and Kid, 1971). Influenced by the French *nouveaux romanciers*, he appears as a writer who tries to make sense of a web of emotional entanglements around him, including a lasting love affair with an English teacher in Isfahan, by writing about them and observing how his very act of writing affects the relationship and the ensuing events. As already pointed out, both in these earlier novels and in his critical writing, Golširi challenges the notion of a naive acceptance of social realism and the advocacy of a *littérature engagée* demarcating



sharply the writer from the work and confining the former to a judgmental depiction of the world as it is. For Golširi, the lines are much more blurred and such simplistic dichotomies turn literature into facile propaganda. In much of his writings, the process of writing also addresses questions of technique and how stories take shape, thus in a way foreshadowing a *leitmotif* of Persian cinema in recent years. Here the critic Golširi, who had expressed his aesthetics in such articles as “Še’r-e ruz, še’r-e hamiša” (Poetry for today, poetry forever, *Payām-e Novin*, 1966-67) and “Si sāl romān-nevisi” (Thirty Years of Novel Writing, *Jong-e Ešfahan* 4, 1967, also in *Bāḡ dar bāḡ*, pp. 209-52), transgresses the privacy of the writer in order to expose his entire being. This tendency later characterizes such works as *Ā’inahā-ye dardār* (Mirrors with Cover Doors, 1992), which again, as Golširi himself points out, can lead to fruitless conjectures by those readers who can only understand the persona of the writer and his fictional reminiscences as bald statements of facts whose credibility can be either accepted or rejected. Thus, in *Ā’inahā-ye dardār*, the true identity of Šanam bānu and her exact location become a topic of interest, and *Kristin o kid* is criticized for being *garb-zada* and pandering to the west (“Ru dar ru-ye ā’inahā-ye dār” *Bāḡ dar bāḡ*, p. 821).

In 1973, Golširi was arrested for a second time and spent six months in detention. After his release, having been banned from publishing his works for five years and losing his teaching post, he moved to Tehran. From 1974 to 1978, the literary sessions of the *Jong* continued in Tehran and included, as well as some of the veterans of the Isfahan sessions, other writers and critics including Dāriuš Āšuri, Moḥammad ‘Ali Sepānlu, Mahšid Amiršāhi, Režā Sayyed Ḥosayni, and Parviz Mohājer (“Piš-goftār,” *Bāḡ dar bāḡ*, p. 12). From 1978 these gatherings operated as meetings of the Iranian Writers Association (*Kānun-e nevisandagān-e Irān*). During this period, Golširi earned a living as a part-time instructor at the Faculty of Fine Arts at Tehran University.

In the latter part of the 1970s Golširi published two significant works in which messianic and cyclical notions of time and history play a large part. His *Ma’šum-e panjom* (The Fifth Infallible Martyr, 1979) is a “short narrative which oscillates between being a historical-philosophical tract, a long poem, and a novella” (Milāni, 1989, p. 695). *Barra-ye gomšoda-ye rā’i* (1977), the first volume of a projected three-volume novel, recreates the atmosphere of recurrent violence and fear which pervades the history of Persia and has had such dire effects on intellectuals and women. In this novel, he arrives at the principle theme of his subsequent fiction. He focuses on those who have wanted to



change the world, but who “merely spin in their own tracks” as a generation incapable of changing the world and at the same time as people expelled from their traditional roots (Mir'ābedini, pp. 691-98). The two works stand in a sharp contrast in terms of length, diction and pace. In his use of a highly figurative and literary language (echoing Abu'l-Faḥr Bayhaqī's *Tāriḳ-e mas'ūdi*) in *Ma'ṣum-e panjom*, as much as in his somewhat expansive and leisurely approach in *Barra-ye gomšoda-ye rā'i*, Golširi proves his technical skill in exploiting different authorial voices to evoke an entire culture with its doomed expectations. As a recent critic has pointed out (Milāni, 1989, p. 695), the two works can be regarded as closely related in their notion of history, with *Ma'ṣum-e panjom* adopting the macrocosmic approach of the *longue durée*, while *Barra-ye gomšoda-ye rā'i* contains a microcosm of everyday fears, anxieties and aspirations, couched in a colloquial language.

Between October 10 and October 19, 1977, a series of ten lectures, political speeches, and poetry readings were held under the auspices of the Goethe Institute (q.v.) by the Writers' Association of Iran which had again resumed its activities. Golširi, who had been one of the early members of the Association, was elected as a member of the committee overseeing the events (Karimi Hakkak 1985, p. 209) relating to the Ten Nights (*dah šab*), as they came to be known (Mo'adden, pp. 346-56, 692-94). He later remembered it as a rare moment of unity among diverse writers and poets (“Goftogu pirāmun-e dāstān wa dāstān-nevisi” *Bāḡ dar bāḡ*, p. 744). His own contribution, “Javānmargi dar naṭr-e mo'āṣer-e fārsi” (The Early Death of Contemporary Persian Prose) was a characteristically wide ranging panorama of modern fiction, attempting to explain the aborted creativity of most contemporary writers. As in much of his critical discourses, the sober pedagogic tone was enlivened by the occasional witty and highly charged aside (*Bāḡ dar bāḡ*, pp. 290-306).

In the fall of 1978 Golširi traveled to the United States on a “Pen International” grant and spoke on modern Persian literature in various cities. He returned to Persia during the Revolution and taught at the Isfahan Arts College. During the Revolution he was one of the founders of the Independent Association of Editors in Isfahan, while also continuing to participate in the Tehran Writers' Association activities. In 1979 he married Farzāna Ṭāḡeri, a translator of works of English literature, and began teaching as an instructor at the Faculty of Fine Arts at Tehran University. He remained in this position until 1981 when he was again expelled from the university as a consequence of the cultural revolution designed to purge all universities of their more radical and



secular teachers and students. At about the same time, in April 1981, the offices of the Writers' Association in Moštāq Avenue in Tehran were attacked by vigilante groups and members of local *komitas* (revolutionary committees), bringing about a suspension of their activities. Even though some of his works could not be published, Golširi's efforts to encourage a new generation of Persian writers continued. He held classes, and edited and collaborated with such modern literary journals as *Naqd-e āgāh*, *Kārgāh-e qeṣṣa*, *Mofid*, *Zandarud*, *Argavān*, *Behtarin-hā*, and *Kār-nāma*.

Golširi left Persia for the first time after the Revolution in November 1989 to participate in a cultural exchange program between Persia and the Netherlands. He also visited Belgium, England and Sweden. Later on, he attended many seminars in Europe and America. In 1998, he was elected as one of the provisional members of the board of the Writers' Association. Golširi had already been, prior to the Revolution, the joint recipient, with Šādeqi, of the Foruq Farroḳzād award. He received the Lillian Hellman and Dashiell Hammett award in 1997 via the Human Rights Watch Organization, and in 1999 he was awarded the Osnabrück Peace prize from the Erich Maria Remarque Foundation for his defense of freedom of speech and in particular for his part in revitalizing the Writers' Association. The former enabled him to spend a few months in Germany and complete *Jenn-nāma*, his last great novel, where his formidable satirical powers are fully displayed.

Golširi was an innovative novelist who explored new literary techniques with each piece he wrote. In his multi-layered stories, he “was able to draw possibilities and the form of the narrative from the very heart of the Persian language” (Mandani-pur, p. 51). He died at a relatively early age and showed through his creativity to the end that he was an exception to what he had enunciated in “Javānmargi dar naṭr-e mo‘āṣer-e fārsi” (Ghanoonparvar, p. 368). He was buried in the cemetery of the Ṭāḥer shrine in Karaj beside two of the victims of an infamous series of political murders, Moḥammad Moḳtāri and Moḥammad-Ja‘far Puyanda. “Golširi's speech at their graveside two years before is regarded as one of the most defiant statements by an Iranian writer in recent years” (Saba, *The Guardian* obituary).



BIBLIOGRAPHY

For a comprehensive bibliography of Golširi's works see, Puna Qadimi and Dāriuš Kārgar, *Dāstān-e yak 'omr: ketāb-šenāsi-e Hušang Golširi (1316-1379)*, Paris, 2000.

Selective bibliography of Golširi's works: (1) Novels, short stories and film scripts. *Meṭl-e hamiša*, (seven short stories), Tehran, 1968.

Šāzda Eḥtejāb, Tehran, 1968; tr. M. R. Buffington as "Prince Eḥtejāb" in Hillmann, ed., 1976, pp. 250-303; French tr., H. Esmaili and J. Selva as *Le Prince Ehtejab*, Paris, 1990; German tr., Anneliese Ghahraman-Beck in *Der Mann mit der roten Krawatte*, Munich, 1998, pp. 7-111.

Kristin o Kid, Tehran, 1971. "Ma'šum-e avval," tr. by Houshang Golshiri and Barbara Nestor as "Innocence," *Stand* 14, 1973, pp. 52-58.

Namāz-kāna-ye kučak-e man (nine short stories), Tehran, 1975.

Barra-ye gomšoda-ye rā'i (a novel), vol. i, Tehran, 1977.

Ma'šum-e panjom yā ḥadiṭ-e morda bar dār kardan-e ān savār ke k'āhad āmad, Tehran, 1979.

Jobba-kāna (four short stories), Tehran, 1983.

Ḥādiṭ-e māhigir o div (a novella based on a story from *A Thousand and One Nights*), Tehran, 1984.

Panj ganj (five short stories), Stockholm, 1989.

"Fath-nāma-ye moḡān," in *Panj ganj*, pp. 7-35; tr. Moḡammad Reżā Ghanoonparvar as "Alienation from the Self-Made Revolution: 'Fathnameh-ye moghan' (The Victory Chronicle of the Magi)," *Iranian Studies* 30/3-4, 1997, pp. 225-42; tr. Christophe Balay as *Chronique de la Victoire des Mages*, Paris, 1997. *Davāzdah roḡ*, (film script), Tehran, 1990.

Dar velāyat-e havā (a novel), Stockholm, 1991.



Ā'inahā-ye dardār (a novel), Los Angeles, 1992.

Dast-e tārik, dast-e rawšan (five short stories), Tehran, 1995.

Jenn-nāma (a novel), Stockholm, 1998.

Šāh-e siāh-pušān, attributed to Hušang Golširi, Sweden, 2001; originally published in an Eng. tr., as *King of The Benighted*, written under the pseudonym Manuchehr Irani, tr. Abbas Milani, Washington, D.C., 1990.

Nima-ye tārik-e māh: dāstān-hā-ye Hučang-e Golširi, (a collected volume of his short stories) ed. Farzāna Ṭāheri, Tehran, 2001 (contains a valuable autobiographical introduction by Golširi).

(2) Critical essays and autobiographical sketches. “Negāhi ba ḥayāt-e ḵod,” *Češmandaz* 8, winter 1991, pp. 111-16.

Autobiographical account recorded and translated Mino Ramyar Buffington, in Michael C. Hillmann, ed, “Major Voices in Contemporary Persian Literature,” special edition of *Literature East and West* 20/1-4, 1976, pp. 245-50.

Jadāl-e naqš ba naqqāš (a critique of Simin Dānešvar’s fiction), Tehran, 1997.

“A Proposal,” tr. from Persian by ‘Abbās Milāni, in Stephan Guth, Priska Furrer, and Johann Christoph Bürgel, eds., *Conscious Voices, Concepts of Writing in the Middle East*, Proceedings of the Berne Symposium July 1997, Beirut, 1999.

Bāḡ dar bāḡ (a collection of his articles), 2 vols, Tehran, 1999, continuous pagination.

Secondary literature: Māšā’allāh Āujudāni, “Goftagu bā Hušang Golširi,” *Faṣl-e Ketāb* 2/2, 1990, pp. 115-32.

‘Abdal’alā ‘Azimi, interview with Golširi, *Kār-nāma* 12, 1990.

Diana Darab, “The Rhetoric of Intertextuality and Doubtful Authority: A Comparative Study of William Faulkner, Houshang Golshiri, and Alain Robbe Grillet,” Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1994.

Ardavān Dāvarān, “Man ḵod ba čašm-e kvištan,” *Irān-nāma* 18/2, 2000, pp. 133-42.



Mohammad R. Ghanoonparvar, “Hushang Golshiri and Post-Pahlavi Concerns of the Iranian Writer of Fiction,” *Iranian Studies* 18/2-4, 1985, pp. 349-73.

Moḥammad Ḥoquqi, *Šā’r o šā‘eran*, Tehran, 1989. Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, “Protest and Perish: A History of the Writers’ Association of Iran,” *Iranian Studies* 18/2-4, 1985, pp. 189-229.

Idem, “Hušang Golširi (1937-2000),” *Irān-nāma* 18/2, 2000, pp. 143-47.

Šahriār Mandani-pur, “Dariġ-e ān sāya-sār-e hemmat,” *Kār-nāma* 12, 1990.

‘Abbās Milāni, “Sarzamin-e satarvan” *Irān-nāma* 7/4, 1989, pp. 693-705.

Idem, “Taming the Shrew: Unveiling the Prince, Women in Golshiri’s *Prince Ehtejab*,” unpublished lecture delivered at the Conference on “Iranian Women’s Cinema,” University of Virginia, March 24, 2001.

Idem, “King of the Benighted and the Poetics of Persian Culture,” unpublished lecture delivered at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, May 25, 2001.

Ḥosayn Mir‘ābedini (‘Abedini), *Sad sāl dāstān-nevisi dar Irān*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. in 2, continuous pagination, Tehran, 1998.

Nāšer Mo‘addeh, ed., *Dah šab*, Tehran, 1978.

Rita Offer, “Literature in Pre-revolutionary Iran: Golshiri’s Prose Fiction,” Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, Princeton, 1983.

Eric Pace, Obituary of Houshang Golshiri, *The New York Times*, June 12, 2000.

Sadeq Saba, Obituary of Hushang Golshiri, *The Guardian*, June 20, 2000.

Several journals published commemorative issues on Golširi in June 2000, including *Aftāb*, Oslo; *Šahrvand*, Toronto; *Jahān-e ketāb*, Tehran; *Kār-nāma*, special ed. Maḥmud Dawlat-ābādi, Tehran; *Kelk*, Tehran.