



ḤAMIDI ŠIRĀZI

ḤAMIDI ŠIRĀZI, MEHDI, poet, man of letters, literary scholar and critic, translator, journalist, and university professor (b. Shiraz, 14 Ordibe-hešt 1293 Š./4 May 1914; d. Tehran, 23 Tir 1365 Š./14 July 1986; [Figure 1](#)). His father, Sayyed Moḥammad-Ḥasan Teqat-al-Eslām, was a member of the first Parliament (Majles) and his mother, Sakina Āġāzi, was a pioneer in the struggle for the promotion of women’s education; she was also the founder and principal of the ‘Effatiya School, the first modern school for girls in Shiraz. Ḥamidi lost his father when he was three years old and was raised by his mother, who was also his first teacher. He received his first formal education at Šo‘ā’iya Elementary School, where he was inspired by his teacher and later close friend the poet Loṭf-‘Ali Šuratgar, and later in Solṭāni High School, whose principal, Bahā’-al-Din Ḥosāmzāda Pāzār-gād, encouraged him to develop his poetic talent.

Ḥamidi left Shiraz for Tehran in 1934 and enrolled in the Teachers College (Dāneš-sarā-ye ‘āli) of Tehran University, where he received a B.A. degree in Persian Literature in 1937, graduating at the top of his class. He returned to Shiraz as a high school teacher, and a year later he published his first collection of poems, *Šoku-fahā* “Blossoms” (Emdād, 1987, p. 319; *Ḍu’l-faqāri*, p. 18; Šuratgar, p. 10; Ḥamidi, 1972, p. 219). Overwhelmed by the sudden death of his fiancée in 1938, he became withdrawn and for over a year did not write any poem except “Ārāmgāh-e ‘ešq” (the graveyard of love) in memory of his first love. In 1939, however, he fell passionately in love with and was engaged to Maniža Šādravān, a girl distinguished in her native city, Shiraz, for her



glamorous beauty. This was a rousing love that broke Ḥamidi's silence with the publication of *Ba'd az yak sāl* "After one year" (1940), in which he illustrated his brooding silence in a poem titled "Čakāma-ye safid" (Blank poem). Meanwhile, he was drafted for military service and had to leave Shiraz for six months. Maniža's father, who opposed their marriage, eventually succeeded in annulling their engagement after six months. This left a lasting effect on Ḥamidi and set the tone for a good number of his later poems. Ḥamidi immediately expressed his deep frustration in a number of poems that he published in 1940 in Shiraz newspapers and later in a three-volume prose work called *Ešq-e dar ba dar* (two vols. were censored for some time), making his own love affair the talk of the town (Emdād, 1987, p. 320).

In 1942, after doing the military service and a year of teaching at Shiraz high schools, Ḥamidi went to Tehran and married Nāhid, a girl of Širāzi descent. She gave birth to a son (Nušyār) and a daughter (Nāzanin). In the same year he published *Ašk-e ma'suq* (The tears of the beloved), a collection of his poems in two sections: *Ešq* (Love) and *Enteqām* (Revenge), in which he most passionately exposed his love story with outright, and not always complimentary, references to his beloved who, in the meantime, had been married. *Ašk-e ma'suq* soon became popular, particularly with the younger generation, and went into its 10th impression during the author's lifetime, disseminating Ḥamidi's name and the story of his frustrated love affair as common knowledge. In 1942 he published two prose works *Fereštaḡān-e zamin* (Angels of the earth) and *Sabok-sarihā-ye qalam* (The frivolities of the pen), and a year later he joined his old friend Torāb Baširi to publish the weekly paper *Oqiānus* (Ocean) in Shiraz. Fereydun Tavallali, a former high-school student of Ḥamidi, was a regular contributor to this paper with his critical essays written in the same humorous style that he later used in his *al-Tafāsil* (Ḥa-midi, *Divān*, pp. 32-33; Emdād, 1987, p. 321; Roknzāda Ādamiyat, p. 376; Du'l-faqāri, p. 18).

In 1944 Ḥamidi was transferred to Tehran, where he worked as a high school teacher and at the same time enrolled at the Ph.D. program of the Faculty of Letters. In the same year he had a meeting with Nimā Yušij 'Ali Esfandiāri, the pioneer of modern Persian poetry (*šer-enow*), and a year later he published in Tehran the literary weekly *Kahkešān* "Galaxy." He sharply denounced Nimā's innovative style in a long *qašida* that he started to read before Nimā and his fans in the Congress of the Writers of Persia and the Soviet Union held in Tehran in 1946, but the congress chair, Moḡammad-Taqi Bahār, did not allow



him to finish. The poem immediately initiated an intense debate between him and Nimā's followers that lasted throughout Ḥamidi's life and often made him and his poetry the target of vituperation.

In 1948 Ḥamidi joined the faculty of Religious Studies (Dāneškada-ye ma'qul o manqul) of the University of Tehran. He wrote his dissertation on Persian poetry in the 19th century ("Še'r-e fārsi dar qarn-e sizdahom") under the supervision of Badi'-al-Zamān Foruzānfar, and received his doctoral degree in literature in 1949. Despite his desire, he never got to teach in his alma mater, the Faculty of Letters and Humanities. In 1951, he won first prize in a contest for composing a poem on patriotic themes under the title "Mihan" (Homeland), organized by the Department of Broadcasting and Public Relations (Edāra-ye koll-e entešārāt wa tabliḡāt), for his poem "Dar anwāj-e Send." The poem was repeatedly broadcast, and twenty years later received another first prize in a similar contest organized by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

The debate between Ḥamidi and the modern-style poets flared up again in 1965 and spread to other literary circles with the publication of a series of his articles in the periodical *Yaḡmā* (vols. 18 and 19), in which he sharply criticized Farid-al-Din 'Aṭṭār's poetry and referred to him as the initiator of loafing around (*velgardī*) in Persian poetry, and as a poet with a great deal of talk and very little thinking (*porguy obesyār kamandiš*; Ḥamidi, 1966, p. 525). The controversy intensified in 1968 with the publication of his comprehensive study of 'Aṭṭār, which even led some Sufis to curse him in their prayers (Emdād, 1987, p. 322). Years later, in 1971, after 'Abd-al-Ḥosayn Zarrinkub cautiously praised Nimā's innovations and the works of his followers, Ḥamidi responded with new vigor in a series of lectures as well as in his book *Fonun o anwā'-e še'r-e fārsi*. This time he had the active support of 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Farāmarzi, the chief editor of the daily *Kayhān*, who publicized in his paper another first prize awarded to Ḥamidi in the BBC poetry contest, and the fact that Ḥamidi had been referred to as "the uncrowned king of Persian poetry" (*solṭān-e bitāj o taḡt-e še'r-e fārsi*) in his subsequent interviews with the contest organizers (Emdād, 1987, pp. 322-23; Du'l-faqāri, p. 19; Ḥamidi, 1973a, pp. 1-55).

Upon retirement from the University of Tehran in 1976, Ḥamidi accepted the offer of a professorship at the University of Shiraz and received a warm welcome from his fellow townsmen. He had, however, to return to Tehran in 1979, where he lived until his death in 1986. He was buried at the Ḥāfeẓiyya in



Shiraz, next to the graves of Şuratgar and Rasul Parvizi (Emdād, 1987, p. 323; *Ḍu'l-faqāri*, p. 20; Şuratgar, pp. 10-51; Yusofi, p. 615). One of his poems, a ghazal beginning *az ġam-i misuzam o nāčār suzad az ġam-i/Har ke-ra dard-e derāz-i bāšad o 'omr-e kam-i . . .*, is inscribed on his grave.

Ḥamidi was a prolific poet whose passion for classical poetry did not stifle his creative power to turn him into a mere imitator of the past masters. Many of his poems, although composed in traditional forms with perfect technical control, are distinctly fresh and fluent in their skillful use of a simple, but sophisticated, language and the creative treatment of the content with innovative images. Ḥamidi considered *Šokufahā*, *Ba'd az yak sāl*, *Ašk-e ma'şuq*, and *Sālhā-ye siāh* as his major collections of poetry, and *Zamzama-ye behešt*, *Fonun o anv-wā'-e še'r-e fārsi*, *Dah farmān*, and *Fonun-e še'r wa kālbohdhā-yepulādin-e ān* as his best anthologies (Ḥamidi, *Divān*, p. 10).

For nearly half a century (1938-86), Ḥamidi was one of the most productive and influential poets of the traditional style in Persia. His poems “Marg-e Šabdiz” (The death of Šabdiz), “Marg-e qu” (Death of the swan), “Bāġbāni-e šā'er” (The poet as gardener), “Gol-e nāz” (The flower *nāz*), “Morġ-e saqqā” (Pelican), “Morġ-e tuḑān” (Petrel), “Malaka-ye 'oryān” (The naked queen), “Dar amwāj-e Send” (In the waves of the Indus), “Jām-e šekasta” (The broken goblet), “Musā” (Moses), and “Botšekān-e Bābel” (The iconoclast of Babylon), have gained the most popularity amongst contemporary traditional poems. Many of his poems—e.g., “Payām ba Ādarbāyjān” (Message to Azarbaijan) and “Dar amwāj-e Send—” are notable for their powerful patriotic tone and for moderating the extremes of modern poetry. While love is the spirit of his poems, humanistic themes and concern for people can always be also seen in its depths. *Sālhā-ye siāh* “Dark years” is a prominent example of such poems. Ḥamidi firmly believed in the superior excellence of his own poems to the extent that, at times, he regarded himself as superior to the greatest Persian poets of all time, an attitude resented by some traditionalist poets. Ḥamidi is one of the major Persian poets of the 20th century, though his name is not mentioned in Yaḥyā Ārianpur's survey of contemporary Persian literature, apparently because of his uncompromising stance against the advocates of the new poetry. In Zarrinkub's view “Ḥamidi is inherently a romantic of the Lord Byron and Victor Hugo world, but is more related to our own great poets like Nāşer-e Kōsrow, Kāqani, and Neẓāmi . . . In thought and expression, he is a son of Neẓāmi and a nephew of Hugo” (Zarrinkub, p. 278).



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