



ḤEJĀZI, MOḤAMMAD MOṬI'- AL-DAWLA

ḤEJĀZI, MOḤAMMAD MOṬI'-AL-DAWLA, novelist, short-story writer, playwright, essayist, translator, a government official and a member of the Senate (b. Tehran 24 Du'l-ḥejja 1318/14 April 1901; d. Tehran 10 Bahman 1352 Š./30 January 1974; [Figure 1](#)). Son of a high ranking Qajar official, Sayyed Naṣr-Allāh Mostawfi, Wazir Lašgar, he received his elementary and high school education in Tehran at St. Louis, the French Catholic missionary school for boys. In 1919 he was employed by the ministry of post, telegraph, and telephone and in 1921 he was sent by the same ministry to continue his education in France. There he completed a degree in telecommunications (*telegrāf-e bisim*) and electrical engineering, as well as political science (Ārianpur, p. 244).

ADMINISTRATIVE AND POLITICAL CAREER

On his return to Persia in 1929, Ḥejāzi was appointed director of the personnel department of the ministry, and in 1932 became the founding editor of *Majalla-ye post o telegrāf o telefon* (Ārianpur, p. 244; Ṣadr Hāšemi, *Jar'ed o majallāt* I, no. 343, pp. 69-71). In late 1934, he was transferred to the ministry of finance and appointed *chef de cabinet* to the minister of finance, 'Ali Akbar Dāvar (q.v.). When Sāzmān-e parvareš-e afkār (The Bureau for Public Enlightenment), a publicity organization for the regime, was established in 1938, Ḥejāzi was appointed chairman of its press committee. In order to



publicize the progress made during the reign of Reza Shah, the committee established a periodical called *Irān-e emruz* (Iran Today; Ṣadr Hāšemi, *Jarā'ed o majallāt* I, no. 244, pp. 325-30), headed by Hejāzi, subscription to which was mandatory for senior government officials. This government journal, appearing at first at irregular intervals and later monthly, continued publication until 1941, when the Allies invaded Persia. In the summer of 1943 Hejāzi was appointed director of the Office of Publications and Publicity (*Entešārāt o tabliḡāt*) and later the head of the bureau overseeing Persian students in Europe. In the cabinet of prime minister Ḥosayn 'Alā', in the spring of 1951, Hejāzi served as deputy prime minister, but he was removed from this post early in the government of prime minister Moḥammad Moṣaddeq. Following the 1953 coup d'état (q.v.), Hejāzi was invited at the suggestion of 'Alā', the court minister at the time, to weekly audiences with the shah to discuss cultural, social, and political issues. It was in these meetings that the idea for a series of books on "self-made men" took shape; the shah himself wrote a biography of his father, Reza Shah, and He-jāzi a biography of the famous painter Kamāl-al-Molk (Tehran, 1956). At the latter part of his political career, Hejāzi served for two terms, from 1954 until 1963, as an appointed senator and two more terms as an elected senator from Tehran until 1971, two years before his death. His long career as a government official, and particularly his earlier position as an official propagandist for the Pahlavi regime, had an adverse effect on his literary reputation and provided ample ammunition for the dissident intellectuals and the leftist *engagé* writers of his time, as well as sufficient material for parodies of his sentiments and pastiches of his style in satirical journals like *Bābā šamal* (Ṣadr Hāšemi, *Jarā'ed o majallāt* I, pp. 329-30, Eng. tr. in Kamshad, p. 77).

WORKS

Early novels. Hejāzi's fame rests mainly on his early novels, *Homā* (Tehran, 1928), *Paričehr* (Tehran, 1929), and *Zibā* (Tehran, 1930), all named after their eponymous heroines. He chose his characters from his own milieu, that of the urban upper middle class. Nevertheless, his depiction of these characters varies in its degree of realism and credibility. *Homā*, for example, is the portrait of a young educated girl who has fallen in love with a young man; but, realizing that her guardian, whom she greatly admires, has fallen in love with her, she decides to devote her life to him. Ultimately, the story becomes a tale of good versus evil. The young man, assisted by a rogue clergyman, engages in various vicious intrigues to avenge himself against the guardian. *Homā* is an



idealistic representation of a modern Persian woman, or at least what Hejāzi and many of his readers would have liked to believe and obviously, as his later works indicate, perhaps a model to be emulated by other women. *Paričehr*, the eponymous heroine of Hejāzi's second and less successful novel, is the exact opposite of Homā. In *Paričehr*, the authorial tone is more didactic, alerting his readers to the moral decadence and corruption inherent in modern society, a warning particularly aimed at young women, then entering the arena of social life in increasing numbers. Critics generally regard *Zibā*, Hejāzi's third novel, as his best work, mainly because it contains, along with his usual didactic moral messages of virtue and chastity, a most detailed and frank fictional record of governmental, political, and bureaucratic corruption, a subject matter which has been of great interest to the mainstream, socially conscious writers in Persia for more than a century (Kānlari, p. 153; Ārianpur, pp. 246-48; Kamshad, pp. 75-77).

Zibā. This novel chronicles the chaotic period of the 1910s in the aftermath of the Constitutional Period and World War I, and provides a panoramic view of a decadent society. The cast of characters in this world of corruption and intrigue comes to life through Hejāzi's mastery of satire and his eye for the telling detail. The rogues' gallery includes a scheming courtesan capable of fixing appointments in the highest echelons of government, tough streetwise bullies boasting of their love of the country and exploiting the lack of firm government to their own ends and not stopping short of murder and assassination, as well as ordinary, honest, and long-suffering civil servants caught in a world where the only way to survive is through cynical manipulation of others. Hejāzi's own intimate knowledge of politics at the top was doubtless an important factor in the success of the story as a convincing critical sketch of a society. However, the very fact that the writer stopped short of hectoring his readers and implanting an anti-establishment political manifesto along the way, did not go well with the more left-leaning intellectuals who became increasingly dismissive of him as a committed writer and pointed to the honors heaped on him by a government not dissimilar to the one Hejāzi had portrayed as far as questions of personal morality or social justice were concerned.

The plot of the novel is a complex one with many twists and turns. The main narrative, however, focuses on Ḥosayn, a young seminary student, who has come to Tehran for his education. As a child he had witnessed his father, whom he thought to be the most powerful man in the world, humbly kiss the



hand of the village cleric. The impact of this incident drives him to study religious jurisprudence and become a learned cleric. Initially, while completing his early studies with the village cleric, then in a nearby city in his province and later in the capital, his aim is to reach the highest levels of piety by abandoning worldly concerns. But after meeting Zibā, the best-known courtesan in town, the course of his life changes. Because of her intimacy with high-ranking government officials, Zibā has become very influential, and can indirectly hire or fire people at will. Ḥosayn undergoes a spiritual conversion through Zibā and forsakes his ideals of asceticism and piety for worldly ambitions and a ruthless drive for power; he changes his clerical robes for European suits and relishes all the newly found luxuries. From then on, for the sake of personal advancement and success, he does not hesitate to commit any sort of deception and becomes involved in every kind of corruption, including the exploiting of his mistress, Zibā, to gain money, power, and a place in high society. Eventually, he succeeds in the fulfillment of his dreams by marrying the daughter of the chief of the cabinet, who provides him with higher position, power, and wealth; but once the minister is changed, Ḥosayn is accused of theft and is dismissed. By and large, *Zibā* is a novel of disillusionment. While Ḥosayn finally realizes that absolute power is only a mirage and that his efforts to gain it have only resulted in the destruction of himself and his family, Zibā's dream to have a family some day is also no more than an illusion in a society that uses and shuns her.

Other works. Ḥejāzi published a number of other works, including two novels in the early 1950s. His earlier collections of short stories, *Āyena* (Mirror, Tehran, 1937) and *Andiša* (Thought, Tehran, 1940) as well as those published after World War II, *Sāḡar* (Goblet, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1951), *Āhang*, (Melody, Tehran, 1951), and *Nasim* (Breeze, Tehran, 1961). While some of them (e.g., “Šā'er-e Beljiki,” “Fāteḥ-e Rumi,” “Bābā kuhi,” all in the collection *Āyena*) are well-wrought short stories, others are constructed more as anecdotal vehicles for a display of euphuistic prose and moralization, more akin to the style of the *maqāmāt* genre of classical literature than to modern short stories (Kānlari, p. 163). His novels during this period include *Parvāna* (Tehran, 1953) and *Serešk* (Tears, Tehran, 1954). The first is a sentimental tale of unrequited love in which the female protagonist ends up committing suicide, thereby bringing about the “spiritual awakening” of the poet with whom she had fallen in love. In contrast to the previous novels, in *Serešk* Ḥejāzi chooses a non-Persian setting and non-Persian characters, but his theme, subject matter, and style remain essentially the same. Set in America, which is described by the



author as an idyllic land with enterprising people, it is a story about a young man, William, who grows up in an affluent family. Because of his physical beauty, he develops a sense of superiority over others and believes that few women would be worthy to be his wife. After rejecting a series of women, each of whom he thinks lacks one of the collection of attributes he seeks in a wife, he finally marries a beautiful, educated girl. Her only shortcoming is that she possesses an extremely jealous nature and forbids William to even look at other women. Her jealousy eventually results in her blinding William in his sleep, for which she is put on trial. William refuses to blame his wife and the couple decide to live the remainder of their lives together quietly.

In addition to prose fiction, Ḥejāzi also wrote several plays, including “Maḥmud Āqā rā wakil konid” (Pick Maḥmud Āqā for Parliament, Tehran 1951), “Arus-e farangi” (European bride), “Jang” (War), and “Mosāferat-e Qom” (A trip to Qom). “Maḥmud Āqā” is generally regarded as his best play and has been compared to Şādeq Hedayat’s story, *Hāji Āqā* (q.v.), as they both deal with corrupt practices and influence-peddling in the Persian elections.

A study of Ḥejāzi’s life as a writer, politician, and bureaucrat reveals him as a member of a small group of Persians with Western-style education in the early twentieth century who display a sense of responsibility and mission to change and modernize Persia and to introduce Western ideas and modes of behavior to the young people of their country. In keeping with this sense of mission and responsibility are, for instance, Ḥejāzi’s efforts in translating into Persian works such as Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (tr. as *Ro’yā*, Tehran, 1953), and the short treatise written while a student, *Telegrāf-e bisim* (Wireless Telegraph, Berlin, 1923). In fact, Ḥejāzi continued his efforts in the latter decades of his life through his involvement in writing several high-school textbooks.

However, his fiction, particularly in the post-Moşaddeq period and during the ensuing political repression and martial law, rather than serving his purpose of moralization and giving direction to the development of minds, as he would have liked to believe, provided escape from the realities of life for his Persian audience. His writings enjoyed a wide readership and went through many reprints, but his meandering between naturalism and romanticism and the contradictions inherent in his life and work had been remarked upon earlier in his literary career, when he had been criticized for lacking a coherent world-view (*jahān-bini*; see Sayyāḥ, p. 182), and these same criticisms were repeated in increasingly harsher tones by later and more pugnacious critics



(Barāheni, p. 351).

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