



IRAJ MIRZĀ

IRAJ MIRZĀ, JALĀL-AL-MAMĀLEK, a major Persian poet and satirist of the early 20th century and one of the most popular poets of the late Qajar period (b. Tabriz, Ramaẓān 1291/October 1874; d. Tehran, 27 Ša-'bān 1344/12 March 1926; [FIGURE 1](#)).

Life. Iraj Mirzā was the son of Ġolām-Ḥosayn Mir-zā Qājār, a grandson of Fath-'Ali Shah Qājār. His father was the poet laureate of the court of the crown prince, Moẓaffar-al-Din Mirzā, at Tabriz. He was given the title of Šadr-al-Šo'arā' and wrote poetry under the pen name of Behjat. Iraj received his primary education in Tabriz from private tutors and also attended the Dār-al-Fonun School there. His poetic talent drew the attention of Amir Neẓām Garrusi (q.v.), the governor of Azarbaijan, who encouraged him to continue his studies and made him join his own son to study science and foreign languages with private tutors (*Divān*, ed. Maḥjub, pp. xvi-xvii, xx-xxii). He acquired some knowledge of French, Turkish, Arabic, and Russian; and he alludes to his linguistic abilities in a verse (*Divān*, p. 38, v. 679). He married at the age of sixteen, but three years later lost both his wife and his father. These tragic events, along with the suicide of his son Ja'farqoli Mirzā in 1917, are reflected in his poetry.

At the age of eighteen, Iraj was appointed by Amir Neẓām as the assistant principal of the Moẓaffari School, which the latter had founded in Tabriz. A year later, after the death of Iraj's father, Amir Neẓām, whom Iraj had already panegyricized, chose him as his father's successor. He had been given the title of Faḵr-al-Šo'arā', which he does not seem to have cared for or ever used,



although he did serve for some time as the official poet of the crown prince Mozaffar-al-Din Mirzā (*Divān*, pp. xxvi-xxviii; Āryanpur, p. 383).

Iraj Mirzā's first official appointment was in 1896 as private secretary to Mirzā 'Ali Khan Amin-al-Dawla (q.v.), when the latter was serving in Azarbaijan; and when he resigned from his post and came to Tehran, Iraj also came to the capital in his entourage. Some time later Iraj left for Europe as a member of a delegation led by Dabir Ḥożur Aḥmad Qawām (later Qāwām-al-Salṭana). On his return to Persia in 1900, he was appointed the head of the Tabriz chamber of commerce (*oṭāq-e tejārat*) by Neẓām-al-Salṭana Māfi and came to Tehran with him in the same year (Āryanpur, pp. 384-85). In 1901 Iraj started to work as a translator at the customs office in Kermānšāh and stayed there until 1904. He was then transferred to the Ministry of Education, where he served for five years and founded the ministry's secretariat office (*dabir-kāna*). In 1908, he went back to Tabriz as the personal secretary of Mahdiqoli Mokḥber-al-Salṭana Hedāyat (q.v.), the new governor of Azarbaijan. He returned to his old job after about two years and became instrumental in instituting an office dealing with archeological excavations, *Edāra-ye 'atiqajāt* (later *Edāra-ye bāstān-šenāsi*) in the ministry. In 1915, after serving for a while as the deputy governor of Isfahan, the governor of Ābāda, and at the customs office of Anzali, he found new employment at the Ministry of Finance, where, after four years of service, he was transferred to Khorasan as the deputy director of the finance department in that province. The five years that he spent there proved the most significant and productive period in his life as a poet (Āryanpur, pp. 386-88). It was during this period that he met the noted poet and literary scholar of the time Adib Nišāburi, to whom he was indebted for the full development of his poetic talent (*Divān*, p. xl, n. 1; Āryanpur, p. 391, n. 2). His famous work, *'Aref-nāma*, a witty poem imbued with homoeroticism (see HOMOSEXUALITY iii.) in rhymed couplets addressed to Abu'l-Qāsem 'Āref Qazvini (q.v.; *Divān*, pp. 75 ff.; Āryanpur, pp. 391-93, 398-401) also dates from this period.

Two years later, in March 1926, Iraj Mirzā died of a heart attack and was buried in the Ẓahir-al-Dawla cemetery in Šamirān. A moving poem he had composed as his own epitaph is inscribed on his modest tomb (Iraj Mirzā, p. 152; tr. in Arberry, 1964, p. 85). Moḥammad-Taqi Bahār (q.v.) also wrote an elegy commemorating his death, and Moḥammad-'Ali Amir-Jāhed composed a song entitled "Amān az in del," addressing Iraj Mirzā: "treasure of knowledge, where are you?" (*ganj-e dāneš kojā'i*). It was sung by the foremost chanteuse of



the time, Qamar-al-Moluk Waziri (q.v.), who began her performance by saying that the song was “in memory of Iraj Mirzā” (*dar sug-e Iraj*).

Poetry. Iraj Mirzā has had a strong influence on many later poets. His intimate, idiomatic mode of expression and almost conversational tone initiated an entirely new trend in Persian poetry, which some critics have referred to as “the journalistic style” (*sabk-e ruz-nāma’i*; Iraj Mirzā, Maḥjub’s Introd., pp. xxxix-xl). It was the simplicity of his language that, according to Rašid Yāsami, caused his poetry to conquer the whole country, and, according to Sa’id Nafisi, made him “the most sweet-spoken poet of our time” (apud Yusofi, pp. 358, 369). He has been called the Sa’di of his time by Moḥammad-Taḳi Bahār, “the unrecognized famous” (*nāmāvar-e nāšenākta*) by Nāder Nāderpur. Ḡolām-Ḥosayn Yusofi, referring to his beautiful, affectionate verses on motherhood and maternal love, has called him “the poet of mother” (Yusofi, p. 357). Edward G. Browne used the best-known poem of Iraj on maternal love in the dedication of the fourth volume of *A Literary History of Persia* to his mother.

Iraj Mirzā’s poetry has been influenced by, besides Adib Nišāburi, the works of Amir Neẓām Garrusi, who was distinguished for his skillful use of colloquial language in literary works, and by Abu’l-Qāsem Qā’em Maqām Farāhāni, whose poem *Jalāyer-nāma* served Iraj Mirzā as the model for his own *maṭnawis*, in particular *’Āref-nāma* (Iraj, p. 30, v. 538, p. 96, vv. 509-11; Maḥjub’s Introd., pp. xxi-xxii, xl, n. 1; Bahār, III, p. 363).

Iraj Mirzā is a master of light verse, but behind the apparent levity there is much scathing criticism of the social and political conditions of the country. A frequent theme is the question of the use of the veil (*ḥejāb*) by women, which effectively barred them from active participation in social affairs. He was writing in the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution (q.v.), when the country was facing a multitude of new social, political, and cultural challenges (according to Malekzāda, II, pp. 73-74, Iraj was an ardent supporter of the Revolution). A broad-minded, liberal intellectual such as Iraj Mirzā could not escape the impact of the Revolution, which, *inter alia*, had re-invigorated the literary movement that had started in the mid-19th century to address more immediate social and political questions. Many poets and writers (e.g., Dehḳodā, Ašraf Gilāni, qq.v.) used colloquial idioms, even slang, in their serious works, but none with such effortless ease as displayed by Iraj Mirzā. The cultural milieu created by the Constitutional Movement also encouraged poetry to undergo certain changes in terms of diction, form, and vocabulary as well as content. Politics of the day became the focal point of a good deal of



poetry produced at this time, as oblique expressions and intricate imagery gave way to direct and robust language, which, even in lyrical poetry, often addressed social issues while criticizing the guardians of the old order. Narrative verses in rhyming couplets (*manẓuma*) gained great popularity, overshadowing other forms. Iraj Mirzā composed several pieces in this genre. The best and the most popular among them is a love story titled *Zohra o Manučeher*, which is a versified version of an incomplete translation of William Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* by Loṭf-'Ali Şuratgar (Iraj Mirzā, pp. 97 ff.; Āryanpur, pp. 403 ff.; Yusofi, p. 362 n. 1; Ḥakimiān); others of note are *Āref-nāma, Enqelāb-e adabi* (Literary revolution), and *Şāh o jām* (The king and the cup).

A major characteristic of his poetry is the fact that he rarely recognizes any bounds in his diction. He freely and skillfully uses non-literary and even obscene terms in his seemingly serious poems, in a way which might shock a casual reader unfamiliar with the thrust and historical background of his works (e.g., *aldang, qoromdang, kačal kalāča, alpar, susa mardaka, deqq-e del, dabanguz*, etc.; see *Divān*, p. 31, vv. 545, 548, 552, p. 81, v. 144, p. 103, v. 661, p. 116, vv. 979, 985, p. 122, v. 1089). This feature of his work often provided the grounds for authorities to have his *Divān* removed from the shelves, while at the same time explaining the *succès de scandale* with which many of his poems were received at publication and their wide circulation and immense popularity. His poetry is rich in linguistic innovations. His application of Arabic morphological rules to Persian words is one of his favorite ploys, creating a scope for satire (e.g., *mostamandin* "miserable ones," *ajfang* "more nonsensical" < *jafang* "nonsensical," *qalil-al-kerad* "of little wisdom" [Ar. construct made of Ar. *qalil* and Pers. *kerad*]; *Divān*, p. 15, v. 25, p. 31, v. 557, p. 121, v. 1081). He also coined some new compound nouns and adjectives, which are solely used in his own poetry (*nasrin-tan, mäh-ġabġab, kar-mollā, geryekar*, etc.; see *Divān*, p. 76, v. 18, p. 78, v. 76, p. 85, v. 235, p. 95, v. 475). He also coined new verbs of his own (e.g., *farāridan* "to escape," *jahannamidan* "to go to hell"; *Divān*, p. 96, v. 501, p. 178, v. 265) that often add a witty twist to the line, but none of them seems to have gained currency. He has also used reduplicated nouns such as *mādar-kāhar* (p. 81, v. 139) *ājil-mājil* (p. 96, v. 500), *lira-mira* (p. 214, v. 19), etc., which had never been used in literary works. This was apparently part of his effort to break with the traditional norms of Persian poetry as well as to create a more natural atmosphere commensurate with the theme of a given poem. Another obvious feature of his poetry is the excessive use of foreign words, mostly Turkish and French. Moḥammad-Ja'far Maḥjub



has provided a list of these words in his edition of the *Divān* (pp. 303-4), in which seventy-seven out of eighty-three words listed are French (see also Āryanpur, pp. 317-19).

His *Divān*, comprised of panegyric odes (*qaṣida*), lyrics (*ḡazal*, q.v.), and rhymed couplets (*matnawī*), was first published by his son Ƙosrow as *Kolīyāt-e divān-e Iraj Mirzā* (n.d., Tehran). It was later edited with notes and a detailed introduction by Moḥammad-Jaʿfar Maḥ-jub, and this edition has undergone several reprints with many additions and corrections. His total output does not exceed 4,000 verses, a rather small figure in comparison with other poets of the Qajar era.

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