



## IRANI, HUSHANG

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**IRANI, HUSHANG** (Hušang Irāni, b. [Hamadan](#), 1304 Š./1925; d. Kuwait, Šahrivar, 1352 Š./ September 1973), poet, translator and critic ([Figure 1](#), [Figure 2](#), [Figure 3](#)).

### LIFE

Few literary scholars have shown any interest in writing about Hushang Irani's life, and his antisocial nature has further added to the cloud of mystery surrounding his persona. Although Hamadan is cited as the city of his birth, Ḥoquqi has alternatively suggested Qazvin (Ḥoquqi, II, p. 1052). Similarly, various sources have listed Kuwait as the place of his death (Pahlavān, p. 7; Āqāmoḥammadi, p. 28), while others give France (Asadi Kiāras, p. 11) and Tehran (Ḥoquqi, II, p. 1052). However, he was most probably born in Hamadan in 1925, and died in Kuwait in September 1973.

Irani completed his primary and secondary education in Tehran, and in 1942 he received his high school diploma in mathematics. In 1945 he graduated from the [University of Tehran](#) with a bachelor's degree in mathematics (Ṭāhbāz, ed., 2001, p. 7). He enrolled in the navy in 1946 and was sent to England for further training; however, not finding himself well suited for naval life, he soon left England for France, where he lived for a year before returning to Iran. In 1948, he went to Spain and in October 1950, received his doctorate degree in mathematics, for which he wrote a thesis entitled "Fazā o zamān dar tafakkor-e Hendi" (Time and space in Indian thought; Šams-e Langerudi, 1999, I, p. 497).



In the years following 1956, Irani retired from the literary community, immersed himself in Eastern mysticism and solitude, and succumbed to alcoholism. In 1973 he died in Kuwait, where he had gone for medical treatment after being diagnosed with throat cancer. His last wish to be cremated was not fulfilled, and his body was brought back to Tehran from Kuwait and buried in the [Behešt-e Zahrā Cemetery](#) (Pahlavān, p. 7).

## WORKS

Although Irani's translations of scientific and philosophical articles had appeared in 1949 in *Dāneš* (1949-55), a monthly journal founded by Nurollāh Iran-parast in Tehran (Barzin, p. 128), his literary career commenced with the instrumental role he played in the publication of the second series of the biweekly *Ķorus jangi* (The fighting cock), the eponymous publication of the artistic circle he joined in 1950. *Ķorus jangi* (Figure 4), of which only four issues were published (1 Ordibehešt-15 Ķordād 1330 Š./22 April-6 June 1951), was overseen by Ķolām-Ķosayn Ķarib, Ķassan Širvāni, and Irani himself, who considered themselves advocates of the 'art of the living.'

Regarding their primary task as the destruction of the archaic artistic notions of the 'idols of old,' the *Ķorus jangi* circle formulated a manifesto of art and artistic creativity, entitled "Sallāk bolbol" (Nightingale butcher) and published it in all four issues of the journal. It was written in a caustic and biting tone in 12 segments and served as an all-out announcement of the elite of the *honar-e now* movement, informing its audience that "the artists of *Ķorus jangi*, in the most extreme fashion, will struggle against the publication of all works trite and passé" (for full text of "Sallāk bolbol," see Šams-e Langerudi, I, 1999, pp. 456-57).

Irani, in all four issues of the series, published poems of his own, as well as articles on the appreciation of art and beauty. Pieces of his that were published in the series include "Honar-e now," "Ballet," "Formalism," and "Arzeš-e honari-e ejtema'. His notorious poem, "Kabud" (Blue) appeared in the second issue of *Ķorus jangi*. The poem, in which the term, *jiĝ-e banafš* (purple scream), was introduced, stirred a sensation and was used to devalue Irani by his detractors due to the idiosyncrasy of its wording and meaning.

With publication of *Ķorus jangi* having come to an end, Irani, together with a few colleagues, in March 1952 founded *Mowj* (Wave), in which his translations of poems attributed to the Buddha and by J. W. von Goethe (1749-1832), Henri



Michaux (1899-1984), and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), along with his own poem “De Profundis,” were published (Šams-e Langerudi, 1999, I, p. 525). The poem was named after Oscar Wilde’s (1854-1900) *De Profundis* (Latin: “from the depths”), which Wilde wrote while imprisoned in Reading Gaol in 1897. Only one issue of *Mowj* in 500 copies saw the light of the day. It was followed by the appearance of *Āpādānā* in July 1956 (only two issues published) and *Honar-e now* in December 1956, virtually the third and final issue of *Āpādānā*, which included “Čahāršanbeh-ye kākēstar” Irani’s translation of T. S. Eliot’s (1888-1965) *Ash Wednesday*, along with a memorable introduction (Šams-e Langerudi, 1999, II, pp. 278-86).

Irani’s first collection of poetry, *Banaš-e tond bar kākēstari* (Deep purple on grey), of which 200 copies were published in September 1951, included 13 poems, an epilogue entitled “Dar šenākt-e nehoftehā (On the appreciation of the intangible), and a number of black-and-white drawings that Irani referred to as ‘designs.’ The book had no publisher, page numbers, or table of contents, and featured an unconventional and peculiar typeface. Most of the collection’s poems, although not in line with either classical or Nimaic meters (see [FREE VERSE](#)), enjoy a melodic quality. The repetitive appearance of strange words and vague phrases (e.g., *taḵ taḵ, dānen dānen dānen*) is among the distinguishing features of the collection:

.....Az hezārān qarn duri  
 Az *ḵame čine šenelhāye siah gowdālhā*  
 .....*ḡorrad dahāne āhanin*  
*Iḵidarru hāi yām mā bi yee dān noon*  
 (*Banaš-e tond bar kākēstari*, p. 19)

.....From thousands of centuries of separation  
 From the wrinkles of the cloaks of dark holes  
 .....Roars the iron mouth  
 Ikhidarru haye yam ma bi yee dan noon

In “Sohāngarān” (The filers), the first poem in the collection, Irani introduces himself as “the filer of traditions and conventions” (Ātaši, p. 10), who files away the ‘strand’ of classical Persian literature:

... *Hān sohāngarān*  
*Bengarid česān*  
*Sāyad o ze ham foru pāšad*



*In reštehye kohan*  
*In zanjire sonan*  
*Nābud mišavad aždare sonan*  
*(Banafše tond bar kākestari, p. 4)*

... O! Filers  
See how it is filed away and how it breaks apart  
This ancient strand  
This chain of tradition  
The dragon of tradition becomes naught

With the reappearance of “Kabud” (Blue) in this collection the term, *jiḡ-e banafš* forever became associated with Irani and his poetry.

Irani’s subversive approach toward language is less operative in *Kākestari* (Grey, 1952), his second collection of poems, which was published in 110 copies and 22 pages. The collection, with a cover featuring Irani’s ‘design,’ comprises eight prose poems, all immersed in modern mystical overtones. The first poem in the collection, *Unio Mystica*, featuring Sanskrit letters and sounds in a particular geometrical arrangement unintelligible in Persian, can be categorized among the first examples of concrete or visual poetry in Persian poetry.

“Ā, yā  
“ā”, bun nā  
“ā”, “yā”, bun nā  
Ā um, ā umān, tintāhā, diž dāhā  
Mig tā udān: hā  
Humāhun: hā  
Indu: hā  
Hā  
(*Kākestari*, p. 1)

Irani’s third collection of poems, *Šowleh-i pardeh rā bar gereft o Eblis be darun āmad* (A flame embraced the curtain, and Iblis entered in, Tehran, 1952), containing seven prose poems was published in 110 copies and 24 pages. The poems and Irani’s prologue to the collection exhibit his deep immersion in mysticism. Examples include “Rahrow” (Wayfarer), which delves into the mystical journey as experienced by the modern man, and “E‘terāf” (Confession), which features a detailed conversation with Buddha.



Irani's final collection of poems, *Aknun be tow miandišam, be towhā miandišam* (I think of you now, I think of all like you), featuring nine prose poems, along with a cover drawn by Irani himself, was published in 24 pages and 230 copies in 1955. Irani's introduction to the collection was later described as "the first on the modern mystical poetry" (Šams-e Langerudi, 1999, p. 255).

Irani was recognized from the outset as an unconventional poet. His idiosyncrasies were manifested, not only in his poetry, but also in his views on art, which created a commotion among the Iranian literati. He enjoyed few supporters, mostly close friends, including [Manuchehr Atashi](#) and Yadollāh Ro'ya'i (Ātaši, pp. 11-12; Āqāmoḥammadi, pp. 41-43), and he suffered from numerous detractors from every walk of life, notable among them Aḥmad Šāmlu and 'Ali Dašti, who explicitly expressed their distaste for Irani's poetry (Āqāmoḥammadi, pp. 46-47).

Too ahead of his time, as posited by Atashi, "Irani was Iran's first postmodernist poet—in a sense, Dadaist, on account of his tender style—a factor that has largely contributed to the dynamics of his failure to earn critical acclaim and public reception" (Ātaši, p. 12). Similarly, Šams-e Langerudi considers Irani's 'newfangled thoughts' as possessing great 'depth' and has remarked that "one might wonder whether [Irani] was successful or not, but one cannot deem him the harbinger of a mindless sensation, or a fame-hungry pseudo-journalist ... *jiḡ-e banafš* was the conscious choice of a form of modern art, the result of the artist's reliance on the unconscious sphere of the mind and the free association of ideas" (Šams-e Langerudi, 1991, p. 28).

Other critics, however, deem the very nature and essence of Irani's poetry as the prime source of its failure. The complete disregard of parameters in classical poetry and social conventions, the absence of well-defined criteria for distinguishing poetry from non-poetry, and the lack of consistency (Nuri 'Alā', p. 225), along with the over-dreamy landscape of his poetry, have contributed to his failure to earn critical acclaim and public reception (Bābāčāhi, as quoted in Āqāmoḥammadi, p. 46) or, as held by another critic, have formed its 'Achilles heel' (Sami'i, p. 93).

Moḥammad Ḥoquqi and Sirus Ṭāhbāz were among the few who took a moderate stance towards Irani's poetry (Ḥoquqi, I, p. 34; Ṭāhbāz, 1965, p. 112). Adopting two conflicting attitudes, Šafi'i Kadkani considers Irani as "one of the most outstanding talents in prose poetry" who "unfortunately due to the usage



of the term *jiġ-e banafš* has been the subject of ridicule and mockery” (Šafi’i Kadkani, 1989, p. 258), and as a poet whose most famous contribution was that same ridiculous *jiġ-e banafš* (Šafi’i Kadkani, 2013, p. 600).

Although Irani did not succeed in establishing his novel ideas and techniques in the Iranian literary landscape, there were poets who effectively built upon his innovations in poetry. Sohrab Sepehri drew inspiration from the Eastern mysticism in Irani’s poetry and reached the zenith of new-wave mysticism to great acclaim (Šams-e Langerudi, 1999, I, p. 553); Aḥmad Šāmlu presented a ‘mature’ version of the prose poetry that Irani had pursued and termed it ‘white poetry’; and the poetry of Aḥmad Reżā Aḥmadi and Yadollāh Ro’yā’i visibly exhibits traces of Irani’s work.

*Translations.* Between the years 1948 and 1956, a series of translations by Irani were published. A number of them were published as small books or even notes that were never again printed, while others remain scattered throughout various magazines of the time. Several books by Oscar Wilde and articles on Indian mysticism are among the most noteworthy of these translations (see Bibliography).

In January 1952, Irani published a collection of articles entitled *Šenākt-e honar: dar rāh-e yek jahān-bini-e honari* (Understanding art: in search of an artistic worldview), which contained Irani’s reflections on the nature of art and beauty as treated in literature. In May 1952 he published a collection of his drawings in a small booklet as *Čand desan* (for samples of his designs, see Tāhbāz, ed., 2001). Mention should also be made of *Nāmeḥ be Āqā-ye Ḥosayn Kāzemzādeh Irānšahr darbāreh-ye majmu’eh-ye išān ke be nām-e Mokālemāt-e Confesius dar Tehrān montašer šodeh ast* (Tehran, 1956; [Figure 5](#)), which is Irani’s critique of *Mokālemāt: aṭar-e Confesius*, translated by Ḥosayn Kāzemzādeh Irānšahr and published by [Bongāh-e tarjoma va našr-e ketāb](#) (Tehran, 1956).

(Translated from Persian by Joobin Bekhrad)



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