



MO'JEZ ŠABESTARI

MO'JEZ ŠABESTARI (Šabostari), Mirzā 'Ali (b. Šabestar, 26 February 1874 d. Šāhrud, 3 September 1934), a satirical poet in Azarbaijani whose works were not published for a long time; he remained fairly unknown during his lifetime. His father, Ḥāji Āqā, was a merchant of declining fortune, but Mirzā 'Ali managed to receive a good traditional education. He learned Arabic and became well acquainted with Persian classics. Soon after his father's death in 1889, Mo'jez traveled through Tbilisi, Batumi and the Black Sea to join his two brothers, Ḥasan and Ḥosayn, in Istanbul, who owned a bookstore there. Of his activities and life in Istanbul we know next to nothing, but it is quite clear that he started writing poetry in this period, and his stay in this cosmopolitan city changed and shaped his world views. In the summer of 1906, after sixteen years in Istanbul, Mo'jez returned to his native Šabestar, a town near the northeastern shore of Lake Urmia, where he resided most of his life. This was the most productive period of his life when he "proclaimed war" against injustice, lawlessness, superstitions and ignorant clerics, illiteracy of masses, and victimization of women (*Kolliyāt*, ed. Qāsemzāda, p. 5).

Mo'jez was greatly influenced by the famous Azarbaijani poet Mirzā 'Al-Akbar Ṭāherzāda Šāber, and like him he felt an obligation "to express good and bad of his society." (*Kolliyāt*, 1978, p. 6). In a poem Mo'jez alleges that he had been accused of "being an unbeliever and faithless" for telling the truth (*Kolliyāt*, 1978, p. 139). His poetry resemble that of Šāber both in terms of the subject matter and the form. In the poem called "Qalam" (Pen), he pays tribute to the memory of Šāber and ranks him equal to great poets of Iran (*Kolliyāt*, 1978, p.



102). In some cases Mo'jez answers or rather writes *nažiras* to the poems of Šāber. Though in a limited scale, like Šāber, Mo'jez contributed to the satirical journal *Mollā Naşr-al-Din*. In 1921, during the uprising of Shaikh Moḥammad Kiābāni, when its editor Jalil Mehmed Qolizāda (Moḥammadqolizāda) was in Tabriz and eight issues of the journal were published there, Mo'jez contributed two poems, which are probably the only poems that he published during his life time. "Our public baths" (Ḥammām ḳazinesi *Mollā Naşr-al-Din*, no. 5, Nov. 1921) humorously depicts the pollution and filth in public bathhouses in those days (Sardārniā, p. 213). "Olsun gerek" is a satirical poem about the month of Ramažān, which was anonymously published in the same year in the journal (no. 6). Apparently there were other contributions by Mo'jez to the journal, but their attribution has not been ascertained definitely (Hibibbegli, pp. 352-53).

A social problem is addressed in every one of Mo'jez's poems. The sham piety of the clerics, ignorance of masses, corruption of the ruling classes, living condition of the poor, illiteracy, and status of women are among many social issues that he makes the butts of his biting satire. Demagogical clerics and what they do under the pretext of Islam are bitterly criticized. His criticism of Islamic practices ranges from superstitious belief in self-flagellation or self-mutilation to humorous depiction of suffering of the people during Ramažān. The plight of women in being abused and deprived of their rights is the recurring point in much of his poetry. For instance, he refers to sexual relation as an act that is not consensual as far as the woman is concerned, since it is forced upon her as a duty due to her ignorance and poverty. In spite of living in a small and far off town, Mo'jez was aware of world politics and international events. In his poem "Wilhelm," he criticizes the Prussian king for many problems at home, and in a number of other poems he expresses his bewilderment at the senselessness of World War I and the destruction of nature and human lives (*Kolliyāt*, 1978, p. 46). Thematically Mo'jez's poetry is very much similar to the poets of the Constitutional and post-Constitutional periods in Iran, poets like Abu'l-Qāsem Lāhuti and [Iraj Mirzā](#). Ideologically he was bitterly against monarchy and believed it to be one of the reasons for the slow pace of progress in Iran. The impact of the 1917 Revolution and the establishment of the Communist regime in Russia and Azarbaijan is very much in evidence in his poems (cf. poems "To Lenin" and "Naḳjavān has turned soviet," in Sarybelli, pp. 247, 253 Sultan-Qurraie, p. 19), although he does not seem to have been a Communist.

In summer of 1933, on his way to Šāhrud, Mo'jez stayed for a few days with his



friend Moḥammad Naḳjavāni and told him that he had left the manuscript of his poems with a friend in Šabestar as security for a fifty-toman loan. Naḳjavāni traveled to Šabestar, paid off the loan and received the manuscript. Eleven years later, during the so-called Autonomous Government of Azarbaijan under Sayyed Ja'far Pešavari (see [Azarbaijan v](#)), two scholars from northern Azarbaijan, Mirzā Ebrāhimof and Ğolām Memmedli, worked on this manuscript and for the first time published a selection of the poems in Tabriz. (Mo'jez, 1982). After the fall of the Pišavari government, like many other Azarbaijani publications, this 240-page first edition of Mo'jez's poetry became an underground book. In 1959 a second selection of his poetry was added to the first and clandestinely published in Tabriz with no publisher or editor's name. The banning of Azeri publications during the most part of the Pahlavi period explains why Mo'jez has remained virtually unknown in Iran while several editions of his works have appeared in northern Azarbaijan. In a hand-written autobiographical note, Mo'jez explains why did he write most of his poetry in Azeri and little in Persian: "Many people in Azarbaijan, being illiterate they would not benefit from my Persian poems. My purpose was to covey my message in a way that all women and men could understand it" (Sultan-Qurraie, p. 22). His language is simple and often colloquial. He has some lyrical and old style poems, but even in such poems he invariably brings in social issues and discusses them in simple and straightforward language. Mo'jez died of tuberculoses in Šāhrud at the age of sixty-one on 3 September 1934).

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