



## NIMĀ YUŠIJ IV. FICTION

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Nimā is primarily noted for his poetry and literary essays, but he also penned several works of fiction. His interest in writing fiction is manifested in his memoirs, as well as in his writings on the oeuvres of his contemporary literati, including [Sadeq Hedayat](#) (q.v) and [Bozorg Alavi](#) (q.v.; Gol-Moḥammadi, pp. 99-112). Although neither technically sophisticated nor particularly influential, Nimā's stories bear witness to his experimentation with various literary genres and techniques, and to his unyielding urge to engage critically with social currents and historical themes. Modern fiction helped Nimā “to realize the futility of didacticism, to let a poem speak for itself, and to pay more attention to details and make them more specific and concrete” (Philsoof, p. 101), the effects of which are palpable in his later poetry. Idyllic pastoral vistas, also a salient characteristic of literature in the Constitutional period, are omnipresent in Nimā's fiction, and distinguish him as one of the most noted interpreters of the splendor of northern Iran's unspoiled physical landscape.

Nimā's first published story, entitled “Ḥasanak, wazir-e Ġazna,” appeared in 1926 in *Šafaq-e sorḳ*, a journal founded by ['Ali Dašti](#) (q.v.) in 1922 (Šadr Hāšemi, III, pp. 75-80; Mir'ābedini, 2013, p. 267). *Marqad-e Āqā* (tr. Nuri Shafii, as *The Shrine of His Holiness*), arguably his most acclaimed work of fiction, was first published in 1930 in *Afsāna* (Mir'ābedini, 2001, I, p. 87), a literary journal founded by Moḥammad Ramažāni (Tehran, 1927), then in *Āftāb-e tābān* (24/4, 1321/1942), and ultimately in a volume in 1960. Its publication coincided with the appearance of Sadeq Hedayat's “Sāya-ye Moḡol” in the



collection *Anirān* (Tehran, 1931).

Set in a village in 14th-century Iran, *Marqad-e Āqā* “is most probably an adaptation of a folktale relating the popular history of a local shrine” (Ghanoonparvar, 2009, p. 181). In keeping with a trend prevalent among the first generation of Iran’s historical novelists who mined the distant past in search of solutions to contemporary ills, Nimā’s story chronicles in forty short pages the plight of a white cotton string that has been tied to a tree branch by a woodcutter named Sattār, so that the branch may later be shaped as a walking stick. The villagers regard the string as a sacred “wish knot.” When Sattār fells the tree, he is accused by hysterical villagers of murdering the tree’s patron saint and is put to death. It does not take long for a shrine to be built on the site and venerated as the tomb of the murdered saint (for a fuller discussion of the conceptual and structural significance of the story and Nimā’s discretely ironic take on conventional notions of tradition and modernity, see Balay, pp. 237-52). Nimā’s dramatic depiction of Sattār’s death as the inescapable finale of the encounter of tradition with modernity in Iran (Mir‘ābedini, 2001, I, p. 505) echoes many of the quagmires tackled in his poetry (Ghanoonparvar, 2009, p. 195).

“Dar ʔul-e rāh” (1936) features a contemplative dialogue between the narrator and a friend on the topics of life, philosophy, art, and human nature. “Didār,” a four-page long story, was first published in the journal *Āftāb-e tābān* in 1942, and reprinted along with “Dar ʔul-e rāh” in a collection entitled *Kanduhā-ye šekasta* (1971). The collection also included “Bad na’l” and “Ġul o zanaš o arrāba-aš,” an allegorical take on Iran’s political situation in the late 1940s and early 1950s, that turns the story’s otherwise real characters into magical creatures. Nimā’s *Āhu wa parandahā*, published posthumously in 1973, was translated into English by Mariam Evans as *When the Elephants Came* (1988).

A complete edition of Nimā’s works of fiction—including five novels, nine short stories, three plays, and two travelogues—was published in 2001 as *Majmu‘a-ye kāmel-e dāstānhā-ye kutāh-e Nimā Yušij* (see Bibliography; see also Miranšāri, pp. 103, 113).