



NIMĀ YUŠIJ V. LITERARY CRITICISM

Nimā Yušij never achieved a systematic theory of literary criticism as such, but he nonetheless has articles, notes, and letters that reflect his views on various topics related to poetry and prosody. Especially noted among them is his essay “Arzeš-e eḥsāsāt dar zendagāni-e honarpišagān,” and his *Ḥarfḥā-ye hamsāya* (tr. M. R. Ghanoonparvar, with an introduction and addendum, as *The Neighbor Says ...*, 2009). Although Nimā considered his “Arzeš-e eḥsāsāt” a simplistic, rather banal essay written for a general audience (Nimā, *Bargozida*, 1990, p. 214), it, nonetheless, imparts valuable insight into his thinking on the proposition that art derives from the mysterious essence of the artist’s life. In it, Nimā “appears conscious of the task of evolving a viable esthetics that would guide the steps of other poets” (Karimi-Hakkak, 1978, p. 9), and attempts to explain art and literature from a critical point of view with a dialectical logic and to show the imprint of economic and historic factors on artistic creativity—a point of view uncommon in the intellectual output of the period. In spite of its often questionable use of the works of philosophers, intellectuals, and psychologists, “Arzeš-e eḥsāsāt” is worthy of attention because of its innovative approach to literary criticism and its original perspective (Pārsinežād, pp. 25-31). It has even been praised as “the most substantiated theoretical work on modern Persian poetry yet” (Langarudi, I, p. 211).

Ḥarfḥā-ye hamsāya is a collection of 137 of Nimā’s letters, written between



1939 and 1955. Addressed to an imaginary neighbor, his thinly masked alter ego, the letters delineate Nimā's contemplations on composition and interpretation in modern Persian poetry. He chose the epistolary form so that he could freely and informally present his suggestions and ideas concerning poetry and poets (Nimā, *Nāmahā*, 1989, pp. 107). The aptly chosen vessel also conjured up an imaginary and, thus, ideal audience for his ruminations. He puts forth, "often in detail, what he means by modern Persian prosody...and how his vision and understanding of modern life and modern man differs from those of his predecessors" (tr. Ghanoonparvar, pp. 17-18). He questions the notion of "easy-but-difficult" poetry, an ease of understanding "that is difficult to create" (Nimā, *Nāmahā*, 1989, p. 112). That endeavor must not be regarded as art, Nimā advocates, because it is "the primitive poetry of the world [that] has this character... For me what you must hear is 'difficult-easy,' meaning difficult to understand and easily said. Poetry, music, and painting in our era have arrived at this narrow but deep juncture" (Nimā, *Nāmahā*, 1989, pp. 31-32).

Nimā understands ambiguity in poetry both as the determining factor that distinguishes it as a genre as well as that which gives it its beauty and power and facilitates multivalent interpretation. The music of modern poetry must closely imitate natural speech, Nimā argued, and he was convinced that his own poetry, which appropriated the best of classical poetry's rhythm in its prose-like qualities, successfully approximated a natural form of expression that resembled speech (Nimā, *Nāmahā*, 1989, p. 143).

Unhappy with the misinterpretation of his views by emerging poets who passed off derivative and careless work as poetry, Nimā decries the output of many of his self-styled emulators, insisting that they must first master the fundamental principles of meter and structure before writing poetry. "Even in chaos," he admonished, "there must be order" (Ṭāhbāz and Lāhuti, pp. 31-32). Nimā's contribution to the development of modern literary criticism in Iran is the subject of monographs by Iraj Pārsinežād, Manṣur Tarvat, and Mohammad Reza Ghanoonparvar (2009).



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