



SHAHRYAR, MOHAMMAD HOSAYN

SHAHRYAR, MOHAMMAD HOSAYN (Moḥammad Ḥosayn Behjat Tabrizi; b. Tabriz, Šahrivar 1285 Š./August 1906; d. Tehran, 27 Šahrivar 1367 Š./18 September 1988), outstanding, prolific contemporary poet ([Figure 1](#), [Figure 2](#)).

LIFE

Shahryar was the son of Sayyed Esmā'il, known as Mir Āqā (d. 1934), a calligrapher and erudite man (Zāhedī, p. 37). His childhood years coincided with the social and political unrest of the [Constitutional Revolution](#) that had prompted the family to relocate to rural areas as a preemptive security measure. Thus, Shahryar's education began at a *maktab* (see [EDUCATION iii. THE TRADITIONAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS](#)) and then continued at the Ṭālebiyeh School in Tabriz. He also studied Arabic literature, and French with a private tutor. His school years in Tabriz brought him into contact with friends, classmates, and teachers, many of whom went on to become scholars and poets of note: Yaḥyā Āryanpur, [Gholam-'Ali Ra'di Azarakhshi](#), [Reżā Ganja'i](#), Sayyed Moḥammad Ḥosayn Ṭabāṭabā'i, the celebrated cleric philosopher, and [Esmā'il Amir Kizi](#), the poet and political activist who was his teacher (Alizādeh, 2000, p. 7).

In February 1920 Shahryar relocated to Tehran. He completed his education at [Dār-al-fonun](#) in 1924 and, following his father's advice, enrolled at the School



of Medicine (Madrasedh-ye ‘āli-e ṭebb; see [Faculty of Medicine](#); ‘Alizādeh, 1995, p. 3). In Tehran he made close acquaintance with the musician [Abu’l-Ḥasan Ṣabā](#) and the young poet Amiri Firuzkuhi. His elegiac *mathnavi* (rhymed couplets) in memory of the noted singer, Parvāneh (“Ruḥ-e Parvāneh,” *Kolliyāt-e Divān-e Ṣahryār*, Tabriz, 1967, pp. 451-59), and his *ghazal* in praise of the pioneering singer [Qamar-al-Moluk Vaziri](#), whose first name means “moon” in Arabic, earned him instant recognition:

Az kuri-e čašm-e falak emšab Qamar injāst

Āri Qamar emšab, be kodā, tā saḥar injāst

(“Yek šab bā Qamar,” *Kolliyāt-e Divān-e Ṣahryār*, Tabriz, 1967, pp. 190-91)

Spitting in heaven’s eye, tonight is the ‘moon’ here

Yes, by God, tonight till dawn, the ‘moon’ is here

His first poetry collection, entitled *Divān-e Ṣahryār* was published in Tehran in 1931, with introductions by such celebrated poets and scholars as Sa‘id Nafisi, [Ḥosayn Pežmān-e Baḳtiāri](#), as well as [Malek-al-Šo‘arā Bahār](#), who praised his eloquent language, and his innovative and well crafted imagery (Bahār, “Introduction” to the collection; see also ‘Alizādeh, 1995, pp. 588-89). The collection included some of Shahryar’s most celebrated ghazals, strongly tinted by the reverberations of his ill-fated love for a girl whose parents disallowed their marriage and instead married her off to another man (for details, see ‘Ali-Ašgarpur, pp. 210-27). Emotionally distraught, Shahryar left the School of Medicine in his final year in 1929 and never resumed his medical education (Eḥtešāmi, pp. 48-147).

In 1931, Shahryar began work at the State Office for the Registration of Deeds and Properties, and he was commissioned to [Nishapur](#) the following year, where he met the painter [Kamāl-al-Molk](#) and praised him in a long poem, entitled “Ziārat-e Kamāl-al-Molk” (*Kolliyāt-e Divān-e Ṣahryār*, Tabriz, 1967, pp. 443-51). During his stay in Nishapur, Shahryar was a valued presence in literary circles and was among those who participated in Ferdowsi’s [millennial celebration](#) (“Yādgār-e jašn-e Ferdowsi,” *Kolliyāt-e Divān-e Ṣahryār*, Tabriz, 1967, pp. 725-28; see also Puršadri, p. 323). A year after his father’s death in 1934, Shahryar returned to Tehran and was employed by the Ministry of Health as an inspector. He was later transferred to the Bank of Agriculture (see [BANKING](#)), where he worked as an accountant. His poems in glorification of Iran’s national unity during the ascendancy of the Democrat Party of [Azarbaijan](#) (e.g. “Be pišgāh-e Ādarbāijān-e ‘azizam”; “Ideāl-e melli,” *Kolliyāt-e*



Divān-e Šahryār, Tabriz, 1967, pp. 340-45, and 335-36, respectively), earned him an exemption from showing up in the bank by the order of ‘Ali Maṣṣūr (Maṣṣūr al-Molk), the then prime minister of Iran (‘Alizādeh, 1995, p. 5).

Following his mother’s death in 1953, Shahryar returned to Tabriz and continued to live there for the rest of his life. In Tabriz he married ‘Azizeh ‘Abd-al-Ḳāleqi, a distant relative and a primary school teacher. They had three children: Šahrzād, Maryam, and Hādi. He retired from the bank in 1965. In appreciation of his achievements as a poet, Tabriz University awarded him an honorary professorship in 1967, and the day 16 of the month Esfand was announced as “Ruz-e Šahryar” in the cultural calendar of the province (Āryanpur, p. 511; Figure 3). Shahryar was a competent calligrapher and wrote his own copy of the Qor’an. He had a keen interest in music, had many friends among musicians, and, for a time, used to play the *tār* and the *setār* (Sepantā, pp. 27-32).

Following a period of hospitalization in Tabriz, Shahryar was transferred to a hospital in Tehran, where he died on 18 September 1988. He was buried in the Poets’ Graveyard (Maqbarat-al-Šo‘arā’) of Tabriz, where Ḳāqāni Šervāni is also interred (Figure 4). His house was transformed into a museum.

POETRY

Shahryar’s passion for poetry was recognized at an early age. While still in high school in Tabriz, his first poems appeared at *Adab*, the school’s journal, under the pen name Behjat. Although his verse has taken diverse forms throughout his life, he composed some of his most appreciated poems in the traditional genre of ghazal:

Nālad be ḥāl-e zār-e man emšab setār-e man
Ān māyeh-ye tasalli-e šabhā-ye tār-e man
 (“Setār-e man,” *Kolliyāt-e Divān-e Šahryār*, Tabriz, 1967, pp. 219-20)

My setar weeps for my sorrows tonight
 That source of solace in my dark and dismal nights

Emšab ey māh be dard-e del-e man taskini
Āker ey māh tow hamedard-e man-e meskini
Kāheš-e jān-e tow man dānam o man midānam
Ke tow az duri-e Ḳoršid čehā mibini
 (“Ney-e maḥzun,” *Kolliyāt-e Divān-e Šahryār*, Tabriz, 1967, p. 182)



Oh moon, you comfort my aching heart tonight
After all, oh moon, in my anguish you share
The slow waning of your life, I know, and only I know
How, in separation from the sun, you suffer

Shahryar's lyrical poems that earned him the applause of such poets as 'Āref Qazvini (see *Šahr-e š'er-e Āref*, Moḥammad 'Ali Sepānlu, 1996, pp. 242-43), among many others, could be roughly divided into three broad categories of religious, panegyric, and love poems, although the lines between the three is often blurred (Puršadri, p. 327). His poetical sensibilities, combined with his understanding of Persian music, is echoed in his skillful employment of internal rhyme and alliteration, which, by extension, has made his ghazals rewarding choices for some of the great composers and vocalists of his time. "Ḥālā čerā" (Why so late), one of his love poems in which letter "ā" is repeated in various arrangements, was set to music by Ruḥ-Allāh Kāleqi, and sung by Gōlām-Ḥosayn Banān, the renowned singer, who paid careful attention to his choice of lyrics:

Āmadi jānam be qorbānat vali ḥālā čerā
Bi-vafā ḥālā ke man oftādeh-am az pā čerā
Nušdāru'ī o ba'd az marg-e Sohrāb āmadi
Sang-del in zudtar miḵ'āsti ḥālā čerā
(“Ḥālā čerā,” *Kolliyāt-e Divān-e Šahryār*, Tabriz, 1967, p. 163)

You have come at last, my dearest, but why so late?
Oh faithless, now that I have so fallen, why so late?
A panacea, and you have arrived after Sohrab's death
Oh stone-hearted, you might have come sooner, why so late

Shahryar's poetry is characterized by his skillful placing of non-literary words in his poems, bringing the genre of ghazal close to unadorned colloquial idiom and slang language (Šāmlu, p. 8; Yusofi, p. 626; see Abu'l-Faḏl Moḥammadi, *Farhang-e ešṭelāḥāt-e āmiāneh dar š'er-e Šahryār*, Tabriz, 1992). His intimate, idiomatic mode of expression and almost conversational tone initiates a new trend in the Persian ghazal and enriches the genre's lexical repertoire by drawing on popular culture and expressions (Behbahāni, p. 83; Mortaḏavi, p. 624). The sincerity of his language makes his poems readily comprehensible by a broad segment of the public.

Although his effortless use of slang and colloquial language has contributed to



the appearance of some grammatical or lexical lapses in his poetry, he is generally admired for the elegance of his language, and his fame has surpassed almost all the poets of his time (Zarrinkub, p. 153).

Shahryar's familiarity with music, along with his fascination with the musical harmony and the intricate aesthetics of the poetry of [Hafez](#) is well manifested in his conscious attempts to employ phonetic patterning, particularly consonance and assonance, not too often stipulated as stylistic objectives in modern poetry (Šafi'i-Kadkani, p. 475).

As noted by other critics, however, Shahryar's ghazals occasionally betray his attempts to imitate the lyrical mood and typical expressions of the classical lyricists and often fail to conjure up the elegant language of a poet like [Sa'di](#), or the resourceful ambiguity by which the lyrics of a poet like Hafez is recognized and appreciated (Yusofi, pp. 636-37).

Shahryar's poems in rhymed couplets (mathnavi), most noted among them "Afsāneh-ye šab" (The tale of night) in 1,624 lines (*Kolliyāt-e Divān-e Šahryār*, Tabriz, 1967, pp. 574-625), has further earned him popular recognition and critical eminence. The poem consists of 40 sections, which follow the same meter. In 1946 Shahryar recited an unpublished section of the poem, subtitled "Nāmzad-bāzi-e rustā'i" (The rural love affair) at the First Iranian Writers Congress, sponsored by the Perso-Soviet Society of Cultural Relations (Anjoman-e ravābeṭ-e farhangi-e Iran va Etteḥād-e Jamāhir-e Šowravi). It was met with high acclaim and earned a special mention by Eḥsān Ṭabari, who praised the poem's modern outlook and thematic novelty (Šams-e Langarudi, I, p. 305).

"Taḳt-e Jamšid," a poem related to "Afsāneh-ye šab" in 571 lines (*Kolliyāt-e Divān-e Šahryār*, Tabriz, 1967, pp. 626-54), also in the genre of mathnavi, sets forth in an emotional and archaic language a glimpse into the turbulent history of [Persepolis](#). Although his early poems were mostly composed in classical meters, he also experimented with the modernist trends in literature:

Gāh bā sāz-e ḡazal Ḥāfez be Širāzam barad
Gāh bā Afsāneh-aš Nimā be Yuš ārad marā
 (*Kolliyāt-e Divān-e Šahryār*, Tabriz, 1967, p. 156)

There are times that Hafez leads me to Shiraz with the song of his ghazals
 And times that Nima takes me to Yush with his *Afsaneh*)



Influenced by Nimā's *Afsāneh*, he composed such poems as "Do morġ-e behest" (Two birds of Paradise), and "Haḍyān-e del" (Delirium of the heart; *Kolliyāt-e Divān-e Šahryār*, Tabriz, 1967, pp. 502-16 and 553-67, respectively; see also Nāderpur, p. 40; Nuri'alā', p. 150). These poems, although modern in both vision and language, stay within the confines of the classical genre of *mosammaṭ* (*stanzaic* verse), which was used by Nimā in *Afsāneh*. Regarded by Shahryar as the Persian original of *Heydar Bābā-ye salām*, his most noted poem in *Azeri Turkish* (Tabriz, 1953; see below), "Haḍyān-e del" earned the praise of Nimā for its romantic mood and novel imagery (Nimā Yušij, p. 26). After the 1950s, however, Shahryar composed several poems in *free verse*, including "Ey vāy mādam" (pp. 516-19), "Payām be Anštan" (pp. 122-24), and "Mumiā'i" (pp. 541-48; *Kolliyāt-e Divān-e Šahryār*, Tabriz, 1967). In these poems, hemistiches do not contain the same number of syllables, and the rhymes do not follow a regular pattern. Nevertheless, Shahryar considered the free verse as being only modestly different from *baḥr-e ṭawil*, a genre of Persian poetry in which the same foot is repeated throughout (Shahryar, "Introduction," *Kolliyāt-e Divān-e Šahryār*, Tabriz, 1967, pp. 50-55)

Shahryar speaks of his notion of poetry as a medium to express love and passion in various contexts, including the epilogues of his poetry collections and interviews. His conviction that poetry should epitomize the poet's affections and moods (Aḳavān-e Tālet, 2003, p. 176) is well manifested in his turning the rhythms and language of everyday speech into a medium for rendering a wide range of emotions. Quite a number of his ghazals and most of his *qeṭ'as* (topical verse) seem to have been composed as his spontaneous reflection on incidents he had witnessed and are marked by his insertion of references to actual circumstances (*še'r-e voqu'*; Kāviān, I, pp. 131-45). Throughout the years, Shahryar's poetry inched closer and closer toward mysticism, and was increasingly colored by his religious convictions (Alizādeh 2000, p. 76; Sepantā, pp. 27-32). He composed highly passionate and extremely popular poems in praise of 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb, the first Shi'ite Imam:

'Ali ey homā-ye raḥmat, tow ĉe āyati, kodā rā
Ke be māsevā fekandi hameh sāyeh-ye kodā rā
(“Monājāt,” *Kolliyāt-e Divān-e Šahryār*, Tabriz, 1967, p. 76)

Ali, oh angel of mercy, which verse are you from God,
that have cast the shadow of God upon all but God

Shahryar, in contrast to many of his contemporaries, demonstrated little



engagement with political issues and ideologies (Aḳavān-e Tāleṭ, 1990, pp. 10-20), and praised political figures diametrically different in their political stance or religious conviction (e.g., “Dāḡ-e Amir” and “Sorud-e istgāh o dorud-e šāhanšāh”; *Kolliyāt-e Divān-e Šahryār*, Tabriz, 1967, pp. 300-302 and 274-77, respectively; see also *Divān-e Šahryār* [Congreh-ye bozorgdāšt-e Šahryār] IV, 1992, Tehran, pp. 269-313; Aḳavān-e Tāleṭ, 1990, pp. 10-20). He was, however, a man of intense nationalistic sensitivity. Imageries in praise of Persepolis, [Zoroaster](#), and [Ferdowsi](#) are recurring motifs in his poetry (e.g. “Šivan-e Šahrivar,” and “Taḳt-e Jamšid,” *Kolliyāt-e Divān-e Šahryār*, Tabriz, 1967, pp. 569-70 and 627-54, respectively; see also *Enḡelāb dar še’r-e Šahryār* (Tehran, 1982); *Naḡmehā-ye ḳun* (Tabriz, 1984); and *Šahryār o enḡelāb-e Eslāmi* (Tehran, 1993), all edited by Ašḡar Fardi.

Heydar Bābā-ye salām (Tabriz, 1953), a long poem in two parts addressed to Heydar Bābā, a mountain near Tabriz, is Shahryar’s most acclaimed poem in his mother tongue, a colloquial Azeri Turkish idiom. The poem was first published in 1951 in *Erādeh-ye Ādarbāijān*, a journal founded by Raḡim Zehtāb-e Fard, who was noted for his vigorous opposition to the dominance of the Democrat Party in Azarbaijan. *Heydar Bābā-ye salām*, in which Shahryar reflects on and speaks about his years of childhood spent near this mountain, quickly became famous, not only in Azarbaijan but across the rest of the Turkic world (Ergin, p. 293). Shahryar “turned the Azeri Turkish into a masterful literary language.” (Javadi and Burrill, p. 254; see also Barāheni, 1995b, p. 358)

Written in a lively, stanzaic form, *Heydar Bābā-ye salām* contains a wealth of local tales, songs, proverbs, sayings, aphorisms, references to festive and funeral rites, historical and religious beliefs, and food and clothing, as well as descriptions of nature (Kārang, p. 25). *Heydar Bābā-ye salām* is written in two parts (Tabriz, 1954, 1966) and consists of 76 segments, each of five hemistiches with eleven syllables. The first three hemistiches end in the same rhyme, while the other two are rhymed differently. The prosodic meter of this poem is well known in Azarbaijan and frequently used in the composition of love songs (Āryanpur, p. 516). The widespread success of the poem is mainly due to its folkloric charm and pleasant popular language (Mortažavi, “Introduction,” *Heydar Bābā-ye salām*, p. ḡ). As contended by [Mohammad-Ali Jamalzadeh](#), Shahryar’s Azeri poems have also contributed considerably to the flourishing of Persian language beyond the boundaries of Iran, as far as the Republic of Azarbaijan and Turkey (Alizādeh, 1995a, pp. 12, 31). *Heydar Bābā-ye salām* has



earned the immense affection of the both Turkic and Persian speakers. It has been translated into many languages and has been adapted into a few plays (for a Persian translation of the poem see, *Kolliyāt-e Divān-e Šahryār*, Tabriz, 1967, pp. 655-76). The text, as commented by Shahryar himself, is his adaptation of the two translations of the poem into Persian by Pari Jahānšāhi and Nāhid Hādi (Figure 5). The poem is also available in Persian translation by Ḥosayn Monzavi (Tehran, 1990), Moḥammad ‘Ali Sajjādieh (Tehran, 1991), Mir Šāleḥ Ḥosayni (Germany, 1993), Bahman Forsi (London, 1993), Karim Mašruṭehči (Tehran, 1994), Behruz Tervatiān (Tehran, 1995), and Fereydun Nowbahār (Tehran, 2005).

Shahryar’s “Sahandieh,” is his patriotic response to a versified letter by Bolud Qaračorli Sahand (1926-1979), another poet from Azarbaijan, who denigrates Shahryar for rendering his poems in Persian, rather than Azeri Turkish. Sahandieh begins by Shahryar’s romanticized depiction of Sahand Mountain and ends with his portrayal of himself as a poet who narrates the sufferings of his birthplace in Persian language.

Shahryar has been regarded as “amongst the very last guardians of classical poetry (Mortāzavi, p. 634), and “a remarkable finale to the long tradition of classical Persian poetry, (Barāheni, 1995a, p. 74). He has also earned the praise of a literary scholar as the most noted representative of the short-lived Persian romanticism, whose poems are romantic and lyrical in imagery and tone, and are often composed in intense moments of epiphany (Šafi’i-Kadkani, p. 472-74; see also Ja’fari Jazi, p. 195). Shahryar’s poetry has influenced many of his traditionalist and neo-traditionalists contemporary poets, noted among them Fereydun Moshiri, Nader Naderpur, and above all, Hušang Ebtehāj (Sāyeh), who has praised Shahryar in several poems, including in “Be Šahryār,” a poem he has dedicated to Shahryar following the death of Nimā Yušij (‘Ābedi, pp. 36-45; Bāstāni-e Pārizi, p. 253; Figure 6, Figure 7)

*Bā man-e bi-kas-e tanhā šodeh, yārā tow bemān
Hameh raftand az in kāneh, Kodā rā tow bemān
Man-e bi-barg-e kazān-dideh degar raftaniyam
Tow hameh bār o bari, tazeh Bahārā tow bemān*
 (“Ba’d az Nimā,” Kāmyār ‘Ābedi, *Dar zolāl-e še’r: zendegi o še’r-e H. E. Sāyeh*, Tehran, 2007, pp. 202-3)

Now that I am forlorn and alone, dear companion, you stay
All have forsaken this house, by God, you stay



Me, the leafless autumn tree, shall soon depart
 You, so full of bound and promise, fresh as spring, you stay

For a music sample, see [Hālā čerā?](#)

For a music sample, see [Heydar Bābā](#).

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