



## SHAHRZAD

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**SHAHRZAD** (Rezā Kamāl, b. Tehran, 1277 Š./1898; d. Tehran, 1 Šahrivar 1316 Š./11 September 1937), dramatist and translator.

Reza Kamal was born to Mirzā Ḥasan Monši Bāši, known as Kamāl Al-Dowla, special secretary to Mirzā Yusof Mostowfi-al-mamālek (1227 Š./1848-9 to 1303 Š./1924-5). Raised in a well-educated and cultured family from a venerable line of secretaries and state treasurers, he was introduced to classical Persian poetry in his early childhood. He chose 'Shahrzad' as his pseudonym out of fascination with the famous storyteller in the *One Thousand and One Nights* (see [ALF LAYLA WA LAYLA](#)). In 1911 he entered École Saint-Louis, the first French Catholic Mission school founded in Tehran in 1862 (Šarifi, p. 1129; see [FRANCE xv. FRENCH SCHOOLS IN PERSIA](#)). He studied French language and literature and like many of his contemporaries was fascinated by French Romanticism. This influence first inspired him to try his hand at translating the works of Romantic writers into Persian, but it is thought to have contributed subsequently to his eventual suicide at a relatively young age.

Introduced toward the end of the 19th century, modern drama flourished in Iran in the first decades of the 20th century (Ghanoonparvar, p. 529). Reza Kamal, motivated by a performance of the *Āršin Mālālān* operetta, staged by a Caucasian troupe in Tehran in 1919, established a musical theater along with his friends, Ġolām-'Ali Fekri, Mojtabā Ṭabāṭabā'i, and Sa'id Nafisi, among others (Pākṛavān, P. 77; Ārianpur, p. 437). Within a few months he wrote his first musical for the stage, titled *Paričehr o Parizād*. The lead role was given to Pari Āqābābov (1900-?), an Armenian artist who had just returned to Iran after



completing theater studies in Europe. Having developed romantic feeling for her, Shahrzad dedicated *Paričehr o Parizād* to Āqābābov calling her the ‘Star of the East.’ The romantic relationship gradually turned into animosity due to conflict over the production rights. The operetta, however, was staged repeatedly throughout the coming years to great applause. Shahrzad, who was also familiar with musical arrangement and played setār, composed the music for the first production of *Paričehr o Parizād* himself (Jannati-e ‘Aṭā’i, p. 16).

Kamal joined Anjoman-e Iran-e Javān in 1921, where he staged some of his plays, and sparked a revival of interest in classical themes and motifs (Fekri, p. 149). The enormous success of Kamal’s adaptation of the *One Thousand and One Nights* stories marked a turning point in the history of modern Iranian drama. Special mention should be made of his “Šab-e hezār o yekom” (1930), which was posthumously published in 1956 in *Sepid o siāh*, a literary magazine founded in 1953 by ‘Ali Behzādi (1925-2010). His play “Mojassama-ye marmar” (Marble statue, 1929), a dramatic adaptation of George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion* (1912), in which he played the lead role, garnered critical recognition and high popular success (Ārianpur, II, pp. 311-13). The theme of a sculptor falling in love with the statue he creates, a recurrent motif in Western literature, was first introduced to the Iranian audience by Shahrzad’s play, and reappeared in variations in several subsequent literary works, including [Nader Naderpour](#)’s celebrated poem “Peykar-tarāš” (Šafi’i Kadkani, p. 199). His repertoire of plays in vogue, which were mostly adaptations of Molière’s plays and deliberated social problems, gradually gave way to historical romantic dramas and contributed to the development of drama in Iran as a commentary discourse parallel to the poetry tradition of ethical and moral reasons.

In 1932 Shahrzad co-founded Kānun-e Šan‘ati Art Group with Ġolām-‘Ali Fekri, Ḥabib Etteḥādiya, Moḥammad Šams, ‘Abd-al-Ḥosayn Nušin, and Lauretta and Maryam Nuri (Osku’i, p. 154; Košmaneš, p. 51); together they performed Kamal’s “Abbāsa, Kāhar-e Amir” (Abbaseh, The sister of Emir, 1930) at the summer theater of Jāme‘a-ye Bārbod (est. 1926), as well as his *‘Aziz o ‘Aziza* at another venue, to high applause (Nafisi, pp. 324-29). The operetta was published in 1923 in *Mehr* journal. Shahrzad’s plays are written in an eloquent poetical language, bordering on poetry (Jannati-e ‘Aṭā’i, p. 18), and are characterized by coherent structures and dramatic overtones (Šarifi, p. 1180). He has been also credited for his pioneering efforts to portray female characters, often with sympathy and admiration (Sepānlu, p. 308; Mir‘ābedini,



p. 102).

Shahzad's translations, which include Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* (1922) and Alfred de Vigny's *Moïse* (1923), have played a significant role in drawing the public attention to the European writers and literary world. He also wrote *Zardošt* (1919), *Doktor-e az farang āmada* (1924), *Golhā-ye ḥaram* (1931), *'Arus-e Sāsāniyān* (1932), and *Parvāna* (1928).

Shahzad's works and translations appeared in such literary magazines as *Irān*, *Ārmān* (est. 1930 by Širāzpur Partow), and *Mehr* (est. 1932 by Majid Movaqqar). "Ākarin monājāt-e Musā," his translation of a poem by Alfred de Vigny was published in 1923 in *Vafā* (1/6-7, p. 167), a literary journal managed by the poet Neẓām Vafā. However, due to meager box office results, he started working for Tehran Municipality in 1921 and for a brief period of time he ran *Majalla-ye baladiya*, the in-house magazine of the Municipality, founded in 1907.

Shahzad was among the intellectuals who found themselves at odds with the autocratic government of the time and took refuge in the reclusive world of their works (Ārianpur, p. 437). Absorbed by the works of the French romantic writers, whose works he had translated into Persian, Shahzad was haunted by an ideal vision of life, which he tried to fulfill by repeatedly falling in and out of love and by pursuing an unorthodox lifestyle befitting, as perceived in those days, a romantic writer and poet.

The suicides of his close friends, Ḥabib Meykada, Sayyed Reẓā Šadr, and Sayyed Mojtabā Ṭabāṭabā'i, all in 1937, followed by Shahzad's own suicide on September 11 of the same year, was later remembered as a suicide pact (Jannati-e 'Aṭā'i, p. 26), or rather, the last resort and a dramatic finis to a turbulent artistic life and career.

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