

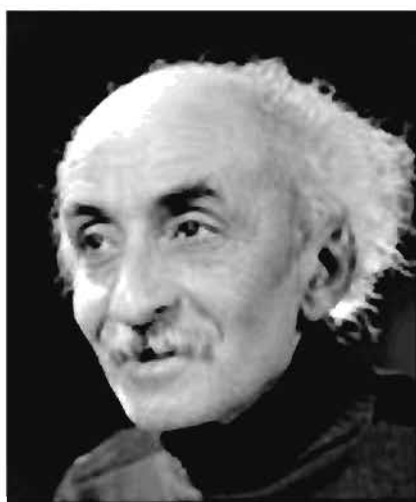
## Modern Persian poetry

With the emergence of newspapers in Iran, which opened the way for political and literary magazines, the written, and consequently the literary language, was one of the essential elements of any movement towards the modernisation of literature in general. The effects of this inevitable change are reflected in the works of such poets as Iraj Mirza (1920-1986), Arif Qazvini (1933-1988) and Mirzadeh Eshqi (1913-1993). However, all their efforts in changing the language, form and subject matter were the beginning of a real movement towards exploration and experimentation in Persian poetry.

This movement was established through the revolutionary measures taken by Nima Youshij (Ali Esfandiari, 1904-1991) to establish a new perspective in Persian poetry. Prior to him, form was, directly or indirectly, the key to the composition of a poem.

Nima Youshij is considered the father of modern Persian poetry, introducing many techniques and forms to differentiate the modern from the old. Nevertheless, the credit for popularizing this new literary form within a country and culture solidly based on a thousand years of classical poetry goes to his few disciples such as Ahmad Shamlou, who adopted Nima's methods and tried new techniques of modern poetry.

The transformation brought about



Nima Youshij

by Nima Youshij, who freed Persian poetry from the fetters of prosodic measures, was a turning point in a long literary tradition. It broadened the perception and thinking of the poets that came after him. Nima offered a different understanding of the principles of classical poetry. His artistry was not confined to removing the need for a fixed-length hemistich and dispensing with the tradition of rhyming but focused on a broader structure and function based on a contemporary understanding of human and social existence. His aim in renovating poetry was to commit it to a "natural identity" and to achieve a modern discipline in the mind and linguistic performance of the poet.

Nima held that the formal technique dominating classical poetry interfered with its vitality, vigor and progress. Although he accepted some of its aesthetic properties and

extended them in his poetry, he never ceased to widen his poetic experience by emphasizing the "natural order" of this art. What Nima Youshij founded in contemporary poetry, his successor Ahmad Shamlou continued.

The Sepid poem (which translates to white poem), which draws its sources from this poet, avoided the compulsory rules which had entered the Nima' school of poetry and adopted a freer structure. This allowed a more direct relationship between the poet and his or her emotional roots. In previous poetry, the qualities of the poet's vision as well as the span of the subject could only be expressed in general terms and were subsumed by the formal limitations imposed on poetic expression.

Nima's poetry transgressed these limitations. It relied on the natural function inherent within poetry itself to portray the poet's solidarity with life and the wide world surrounding him or her in specific and unambiguous details and scenes. Sepid poetry continues the poetic vision as Nima expressed it and avoids the contrived rules imposed on its creation. However, its most distinct difference with Nima's poetry is to move away from the rhythms it employed. Nima Youshij paid attention to an overall harmonious rhyming and created many experimental examples to achieve this end.

Ahmad Shamlou discovered the inner characteristics of poetry and its manifestation in the literary creations

of classical masters as well as the Nimai' experience. He offered an individual approach. By distancing himself from the obligations imposed by older poetry and some of the limitations that had entered the Nimai' poem, he recognized the role of prose and music hidden in the language. In the structure of Sepid poetry, in contrast to the prosodic and Nimai' rules, the poem is written in more "natural" words and incorporates a prose-like process without losing its poetic distinction. Sepid poetry is a developing branch of Nimai' poetry built upon Nima Youshij's innovations. Nima thought that any change in the construction and the tools of a poet's expression is conditional on his/her knowledge of the world and a revolutionized outlook. Sepid poetry could not take root outside this teaching and its application.

Soon Ahmad Shamloo completely abandoned rhythm and rhyme and gave to his work the natural music of the Persian language, using soft and harmonious words to make his poems different from ordinary prose. "The Fresh Air" and "The Garden of Mirror" are two collections of his poems from this experimental period. Being in search of a poetical identity, he began to employ some of the characteristics of classical Persian prose of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. He also created some compound words as well as new images. These attempts gave his poetry a relatively independent character, but failed to make it more expressive and powerful. It was more his earlier simple poems, with their politico-lyrical images, that justified his reputation among his admirers.



Ahmad Shamloo

... On my shoulder is a dove  
that drinks from your mouth,  
On my shoulder is a dove  
That refreshes my throat,  
On my shoulder is a dove,  
kind and graceful,  
That talks to me of light,  
And of Man, who is the god of all deities..  
My bird of golden song  
Nests in the foliage of your abode;  
Sweetheart, put on your best dress,  
Love is fond of us.  
With you I follow my dreams in wakefulness,  
I find my poetry in the truth of your brow.  
You talk with me of light, and of Man,  
Who has kinship with all the gods...

In the 1950 new generation of poets appeared who, like Ahmad Shamloo, wrote prose poems, but tried hard to be modern by experimenting with Dadaism, automatism, formalism, futurism, surrealism and other known and unknown trends. They called themselves the New Wave Poets. One of them, Ahmad-Reza Ahmadi, was not even twenty when his poems, because of their unusual, sometimes amazing, unyielding and wild imagery, caused controversy.

...I went up blue all the stairs;  
The sky of our house was not the same as  
our neighbours,

I went down hungry all the stairs  
To the depth of wheat.  
Searching for the whiteness of the horse,  
All over the wheat field I could see only  
one path,  
Which my father, with his grey hair, trod.  
I had crossed the wheat field alone,  
I had seen the wheat  
But still I could not say: My horse!  
They reaped my horse.

Ahmad's poetry could not give him a place among the established poets, but it did encourage many poets to break the boundaries of familiar and hackneyed imagery, pointing to a new poetical



Simin Behbahani,

horizon.

According to Simin Behbahani, Sepid poetry did not received general acceptance before Bijan Jalali's works. He is considered the founder of Sepid poetry according to Behbahani. Behbahani herself used the "Char Parh" style of Nima, and subsequently turned to ghazal, a free-flowing poetry style similar to the Western sonnet. Simin Behbahani contributed to a historic development in the form of the ghazal, as she added theatrical subjects, and daily events and conversations into her poetry. She has expanded the range of traditional Persian verse forms and produced some of the most significant works of Persian literature in the twentieth century.

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