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**MOHAMAD REZA
SHAMS**

Biography



It was nine. Everyone was sitting around the Haft Sin table (the table Iranians set for Nowruz, the start of the New Year), waiting for the New Year. As I was born, in my honor, they announced the start of the new year! Then somebody shouted in the radio: “The beginning of the solar year of 1336”. It was March 21, 1957.

My siblings jumped up, screaming: “Hooray...”

Then everyone kissed each other and congratulated the new year. My father took a few bills from the Quran and gave them to family members as new year gifts. He also gave me one, but I did not care as I was thinking about something else. I was thinking about my first story. A tale of a little witch that was caught in a wooden radio box.

My mother, who could read my mind, said: “Now leave the story. You have been born recently. Come and eat something to find power.”

I said, “I love writing very much. I want to be a writer.”

My father objected, “Writing is a job? Do you want to spend all your life in hunger? You’d better start as a car mechanic or government staff, or something....”

My mother said, “Now you have a lot of time to write. Put your teeth on your liver.”

By this Persian proverb, she meant me to be patient.

But I was thinking that I have no teeth, and I had to wait to get teeth. I waited a bit too much. I waited so much that I forgot what I was going to do. So, whenever someone asks me what are you going to do when you grow up? I thought a lot, and then I told them I am going to be traffic police. Why traffic police? Because ever since childhood I loved their beautiful motorcycles. I wanted to get on their motors and maneuver in the street and issue traffic tickets.

Later in my life, with the first movie I saw in the cinema, I thought of becoming an actor. I thought of other jobs like a pilot and for some time I wanted to become a footballer. But it never occurred to me to become a writer.

It was a great chance for me to meet Mrs. Mohamadi in the fourth grade of the school. She was a compassionate teacher to whom composition was very important. I wrote a piece about spring and she very encouraged me. Still, by that day, it never occurred to me to become a writer. My parents were from the village of Qarineh Dareh, near the city of Arak. My father, for his opposition to the local lord, was forced to take his wife and children overnight and flee to Tehran. My mother's uncle who was living in the Shahpour (an old neighborhood of Tehran), gave us a room and I was born there.

We lived in Shahpour neighborhood for several years. Then we moved to Naziabad (another old neighborhood in the southern areas of Tehran).

We had neither electricity nor water and the alleys were not paved by asphalt or something. Behind our house, there was an endless desert filled with wells and scary shadows that came to us at nights. Our dreams were full of wells, shadows, and monsters.

They farmed cotton and wheat in this land and around

it there was a row of berry trees. They were tall and green, full of different birds, grasshoppers, crickets, and frogs. We slept with the sound of crickets and frogs and woke up with the sound of sparrows and crows.

A great stream of water was running right behind our house, which we called Qanat. Qanat carried the dirty waters and garbage, leading right into the canal. Over the Qanat there was a wooden bridge that people walked over from a side to the other. When we were free, together with the neighboring kids, we sat on the bridge with our feet in the water. Thus, we could catch the garbage carried by the water, some of them could be used as toys: small cars with no wheels, torn balls, broken guns, dolls without hands and feet, and many other stuffs.

We were a large family. Apart from me, two brothers, two of my sisters, an aunt, and my grandmother also lived with us. I remember them narrating me tales and stories continually.

At that time, there was no television or computer. The computer had not yet arrived and a very limited number of people has TV sets at home. So, instead of sitting in front of a TV or playing video games, from early in the morning, we practiced a great variety of traditional playground games at the alley: “I saw a lion”, “ass-police”, “Tag”, “Hopscotch”, “Gilli-danda”, and of course, football”. Sometimes we played so much that we forgot the passage of time and we suddenly saw our parents who are coming after us, and it was then that the second half of my life would start. My life was very simple, it consisted of two halves, one in the alley with the other children and the other at home with night stories and dream-weaving.

When I arrived home, I started dreaming. I was after to know what my friends are doing in their homes. What fruit and food they eat? and how they pass their times? So, I would throw my cloak of invisibility cap on my shoulders and become invisible and go to my friends’ house. Aunt

Belghis has given me this cloak. Aunt Belghis had a mysterious iron box in which you could find everything. The box could become invisible as King Solomon's cloak, and only Aunt Belghis could show it. One night, when I was



beaten by my father and I was very sad, Aunt Belghis took me upstairs, read a few words and suddenly it appeared. Then she opened it and gave me this cloak. Later, she gave me Solomon's flying carpet, the magic stone, the magic mirror, the magic ring, the broom, and many other magical objects. She also gave me a magic pencil that whenever I felt upset I could draw a window and open it to other worlds, to the land of fairies, demons, and wizards; to the lands where no human being has ever stepped in. With this pencil, I sometimes traveled to the past, and sometimes to the future. After the death Aunt Belghis, I received this box and I continue to keep it.

Other than these, I had a little jinni who lived in my pillow, and a cupboard where I arrested monsters.

At night, especially long and cold winter nights, we sat under Korsi (a Persian form of foot stove) and ate raisin, roasted wheat, and different seeds that my mother had prepared. She put them in a tray on Korsi and under the dim light of a simple oil lamp, we listened to the popular and adventurous stories narrated by our father and aunt.

My father was a simple-hearted and naïve man. At times, he showed his hard-tempered and independent personality. He loved the people and the people loved him. He was the elder of the family and their

true confidant. He passed away in 1988 but his memory is here. It was my father who for the first time introduced me to Qur'an and its sweet stories. He also introduced me to *Shahnameh* (*Book of King* by Ferdowsi, a Persian epic). I loved him so much and sometimes I miss him.

During the nights he stayed at home and had a spirit, he narrated stories from the religious text as well as more popular stories like *Hossein Kord*, *Amir Arsalan*, and different stories from *Shahnameh*.

I liked the heroes and all the characters of *Shahnameh*, including Rustam, Esfandiar, Siavash, Rakesh, Zaal, and Simurgh. Especially, I had a strong sympathy for Sohrab. Unbelievably, I was very angry over Rustam for not identifying his son and killing him. I could not forgive him.

I was very fortunate that my aunt and grandmother lived with us. My aunt, with her legends, brought us to the sweet and dreamy world of jinni, fairies, and speaking animals, and my grandmother charmed us with songs, poems, lullabies, and proverbs. Everybody at our home, both the children and the grownups loved her caresses and the way she talked about how she loved us. She accompanied all her sincere words were with poems and folk songs.

I had a very happy and joyful childhood. From the mornings to the evenings, I played with the children, and at nights, we sat down with the family and listened to the stories of my father and aunt. We were happy together and our sadness was collective. We laughed and wept together, three generations side by side, with common emotions and experiences. I loved these tales, especially Hasan Kachal. At the very childhood, I had started telling stories to neighboring children. As soon as I heard a new story, I immediately went out in the alley to narrate it to other kids. Everywhere I felt the story to be boring for the kids, I experimented on adding new adventures. Even sometimes, to please the kids, I changed the ending of the stories to something more compatible with the mood of the kids. These experiences served as parts of my story writing exercises. Later, when I started going to the cinema, I started narrating the story of the movies to my friends. We had only one Shahla Cinema in the entire Naziabad neighborhood. The cinema owner had installed two sets of

speakers in the street to advertise for the movies. The speakers broadcasted the sound of the movie. On both sides of the walls of the cinema, there were two glass panels with pictures of various scenes from the film.

When I had no money to buy a six Rial ticket, and this covered almost every day, I went and sat on the steps, listening to the sound, and watching the pictures on the glass panel. Then on my way back to our alley, I refigured the story as I have received it. I gathered the kids, narrated the entire story, and even mimicked the actions of the actors. After some time, I developed so much skill that nobody could believe that I have never seen the actual movie.

I was in the second-grade primary school when I started reading special children's journals such as *Peik* and *Keyhan for Kids*. Then I started reading *Girls and Boys* magazine and police stories by Parviz Ghazi Saeed (a very active Iranian detective writer whose stories appeared first as newspaper columns), with the awesome adventures of Richard, Samson, Leveson, etc. Then came 'the private investigator', Mike Hammer, created by Mickey Spillane. We rented these books from a junk shop that also rented books. We gathered and collected our money, rented a book for one Rial a week and then read it in circle. The junk shop belonged to the grandfather of 'Abbas the Lizard'. He was such a frowny and silent person and had a hole in the middle of his forehead. They said he had wounded in World War II. This made him even more mysterious and respectful.

Our neighborhood did not have a library, as it did not have asphalt, water, and electricity. When each one of these was provided we were immersed with joy and delight. When they paved the streets and alleys with asphalt, when they developed the water supply network, and when they supplied electric power and we collected the old oil lamps, these were moments of joy and hope we never forget. Establishment of a library in the library also was the source of joy. The library was a great gift for the book worms. I immediately became a member and harvested all the books in a few months. I read every book I saw. I started with books for children and adolescents, then I continued with adult books.

There were some books in this library that had a great impact on me. One of them was *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson. The hero of the book was Jim Hawkins, an adolescence boy who was very brave. I also really liked Long John Silver, who was the head of the pirates. *Treasure Island* was a novel of adventure, the type of novel I found very interesting. Going after treasure and fighting with sea pirates, are the dreams I still follow.

The next book was *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe. A man whose ship drowns and he is left alone to live in an isolated island far from people and civilization. I was very interested in the adventures that happen on the ship and on the sea. The courage Robinson had in facing with problems really impressed me. I was very interested to have a similar experience to try my own way of facing the situation, most of the time I imagined myself in his place.

There were other books that influenced me were such works a *Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, all written by Mark Twain, or *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. What attracted me in these stories was the form of their life and thought that was very similar to mine and my family. The other fascinating aspect of these stories were the joyful actions of the main

characters, especially Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn whom I loved so much and often identified myself with them.

After that, I went to the books by famous Iranian writers such as Samad Behrangi, Sadeq Hedayat, Gholam Hossein Sa'edi, Mahmoud Dolatabadi, and other writers. I was in fifth and sixth grade in primary school when I started reading these books. Some of the books like the *Blind Owl* by Sadeq Hedayat were very difficult for me. However, this book impressed me very much. Although I did not understand it, I loved its strange and surrealistic atmosphere. Generally, I like



dreamlike settings. I have seen many movies in the horror genre, works like *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, etc. For the same reason, I liked the books by Gholam Hossein Sa'edi and I still appreciate them. I think that he is a great Iranian writer. The setting and atmosphere of his stories are unique. I like the stories by Bahram Sadeghi for a similar reason. These writers had a great impact on me. Among the foreign writers, I consider Gabriel García Márquez and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry to be significant and influential writers.

I did not like school very much, I still do not like it, I have always been in love with holidays, and especially the holidays of Noruz and summer vacations. These are associated with freedom from school and homework, with going to the village, eating berries, and playing with my peers.

In summer vacations, we started to go for berries in Azimabad. There was such a long way to reach there and we were idle. Azimabad has a place called forty springs, it had forty steps and forty springs that poured in a pond full of fishes. It had such a clean, cold, and running water.

As always, when we finished eating berries, we went down the stairs to drink water. Suddenly, somebody throws a large stone in the middle of the pond. We were terrified and jumped up to escape. A mad boy was standing there, laughing. One of the kids who was a few years older than us, said: “That’s it. One idiot throws a stone in the well, and a hundred wise men cannot get it out.” He was reciting a famous Persian proverb, making me learn the true meaning of a proverb. I had this in mind when I wrote *The Mad and the Well*, the story that received so many awards including diploma of honor from IBBY.

I said I did not like going to school, I even preferred to work in the summer over going to school. I have worked on so many shops and workshops including sewing, embroidering, furniture making, bakery, baking, etc. I had an income enough to buy my textbooks and school supplies. However, I liked to practice selling things, therefore I practice street selling ice creams, dried fruits, fortune tickets, and even Kebab and had enough income to afford a cinema ticket.

Some summers we traveled to Qarineh Dareh, my father’s birthplace village. Qarineh Dareh (the name of a village, literally meaning mirror to a valley) is a large and beautiful village, opposite to a deep and green valley. The valley was full of strange geometric shapes that sit side by side that from different angles find different shapes. Sometimes they are yellow and sometimes green, sometimes they are seen as violet, sometimes red. Sometimes the colors mix and form a range of different and unseen colors. A dream valley with rare animals and birds not found anywhere in the world. Pheasants with brilliant feathers that fly at night. Rabbits with hanging blue ears and hogs with red eyes shining like emeralds. They appear just once a year. They come from the other half of the village that has been destroyed and disappeared by the flood. They return, copulate, lay eggs, bred and return. Many people have sought for the disappeared half of the village but have not found it.

The valley had a very delicate air and flowing rivers. We were swimming in the rivers and we were fishing. It was very enjoyable. I usually rode an ass, going to reap the wheat. Or I was riding a special device called “Chan” for separation of the wheat from the chaff. Or I would be like the village kids to be a shepherd

to go out into the plains with a herd. Many times, we were disputed with the kids of the neighboring village. We prepared and cooked our food and then made tea on the fire. I learned most of my life skills is such an atmosphere.



When I was in the eleventh grade, a major event made me think more seriously on poetry, writing and acting. I was studying in a technical high school when I met with the theater group of the Naziabad Family Center. An amateur group that was organized and run by a few passionate young people from different neighborhoods and districts.

One day at high school I saw a poster of “Shetilla” play on the wall and it captivated me. Iraj Amini, who studied electricity has brought the poster. I went to register in the group. There I met some actors who later became the great actors of Iranian cinema, figures like Parviz Parastooi, Rahman Bagherian, and Abolfazl Shah Karam. I started acting on some plays with them. *Eyes Against the Eyes* by Gholam Hossein Sa’edi, *Rainy House* by Faramarz Talebi and *The Night* by Amin Faghiri are among these. There, with acting, I began composing poetry and writing screenplays. My military service interrupted the pursuit of the theater, but I played *Mother*, a play by Bertolt Brecht. Together with Iraj Amini, we composed the Persian versions of the poems. *Mother* was the first performance staged after the 1979 revolution and it found a great welcome by the audience. Afterward, I played in two street shows directed by Mohamad Nami and Jamshid Jahanzadeh. We staged these shows in most cities in the country.

With acting, I wrote stories and plays. The *Curious Scarecrow* puppet show was my first experience with the TV, written together with Reza Fayazi. I was the author, assistant director, and actor in this serial puppet show.

During these years, I made my way to poetry sessions and pages of *Keyhan for Kids*, and later I entered the storywriters circle of *Shaprak* magazine.

The first poem I composed was “My Lotus”, which was published in *Shaprak*. My first book, *If this Stick Was Mine* was published by the Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults. Then I started to collaborate with many magazines published for children and adolescents, including *Roshd*, *Golak*, *Soroush for Children and Adolescents*, *Poopak*, *Salaam Bacheha*, *Doost*, *Woman of the Day*, *Keyhan for Science*, *Hamshahri*, *Bicycle*, *Island Stars*, and others.

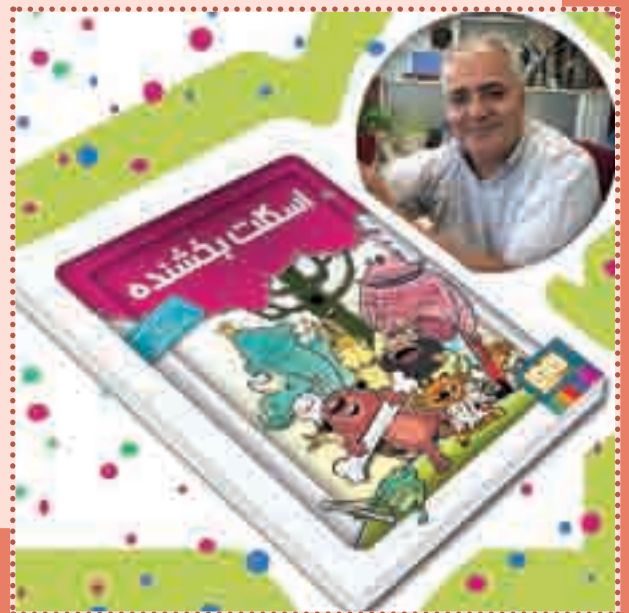
During this time I had accepted some responsibilities. I collaborated with various publishers for children and adolescents as a literary expert and I was judging numerous literary awards and festivals.

Organizing story writing workshops and courses is among the other works I have done. I have been teaching story writing to primary and secondary school children at several schools. It was a hard and sweet experience that I continue today.

Organizing one-day workshops for teachers, coaches, students, and especially children in many cities of Iran including Isfahan, Shiraz, Kerman, Saveh, Varamin, Qeshm, Bandar Abbas, Tabriz, etc.

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The other works include collab-



oration with charity foundations and staging performance shows in different rural and far from the central areas.

I had a great childhood and I like all children to fully enjoy and use this stage of their life. This is their right. This is the reason I chose to write for children and teenagers. I knew it very well and I had experienced.

With every story I write, I am greatly excited. When I write, I feel like an actor who is set to enter the scene and play his role. I feel both excited and nervous. I know I am going to enter a dream world, full of imaginary events and creatures, a pure and cheerful world. It sets me from every external attachment. Your mask is removed and you become yourself, your true self. With every story I write, I return to my own childhood and live it and what is more fascinating that this marvelous process.

From the day I started writing, I left every do and not to do, and did what I felt is the right thing to do. It was such a hard job. Many people blocked my way and stopped me, but I did not surrender and increased my efforts to find a place for my writing style. I expanded the scope of imagination and used the capacities of adult literature in the literature for children and adolescent. From the very beginning, I was looking for topics that were new and novel. The subjects and themes covered by no one. I wanted them to be novel and pure and to match my outlook. I searched for topics that could stretch the sweet childhood days and reduce the suffering of children.

In my opinion, literature is a tool for communication with others. Literature is a device to challenge life. With literature, the world becomes more beautiful. The hardness becomes more tolerable.

With literature, you achieve self-knowledge.

What matters to me most, is to know the importance of

children and teenagers. We should recognize them as fully developed human beings. They are real people passing a certain period of their life. We must respect their demands and meet their needs. Without children and adolescents, the world is not a beautiful place at all. They should not be humiliated; they should not be forced to leave their childhood. They should not work in factories, workshops, and street, instead of studying, playing and entertaining.

We must restore children and adolescents back to their real position. They should live their real life. A society whose children have not naturally and fully passed childhood is a helpless and unsuccessful society. These are the things that have engaged my mind, and I wish to reflect them in my works.

I have a special style of writing and developing stories and there are publishers who do not like it. Possibly you would not believe me that for the past sixteen years, no publisher has published my stories. I negotiated with many publishers and finally, I published *The Mad and the Well* and *The Crazy Girl* on my own capital.

The mountain that moves; the house goes on a journey; the water tap that falls in love with flower plate; a knife named Nasser, who recites poetry; the gun that draws paintings; a pistachio this is left on a road; a watermelon that waxes the shoes; the mad person who throws rocks in the well every day, the boy who goes to cinema together with his well and people talk about their griefs to his well; an archivist staff who buys a waterfall, a river, and a spring and installs them in his archive room to change the boring landscape, and a well... these are the topics and subjects of my stories.

I take the well out of my pocket, magnify it, and place it next to me. An Egyptian caravan arrives. They throw their rope into the well and discover Joseph. Joseph is so beautiful that everyone who looks at him immediately falls on the ground. The Caravan covers his face with a blanket on his face and takes him to Egypt.

I sink my head into the well and throw my sorrows in it. This makes

me light. Then I pick it up and put it back in my pocket. If someone knows this, everybody in the office would be informed. Nobody can control the consequences of this. Everybody would stretch his head to see inside the well, throw their sorrows into it and fill it. Nobody could stop them. I install the waterfall on the wall on my left and put the river under it. It is very beautiful. The waterfall makes so much noise and pours into the river. It breaks the silence of the room. The smell of Qarineh Dareh fills the room, climbs up the wall and infiltrates into the dusty profiles and records. I make two deep breaths and fill my lungs with the smell of our village. Then I sit down by the river, and take off my shoes and socks and soak my feet in the water. The water is so much icy and that my whole body is frozen up to the top. I shake my legs in the water and look at the waterfall, that is streaming like the way hairs of a beautiful lady, and I enjoy. Even looking at the water relaxes me.



Resume

Activities

Literary expert and journalist, *Keyhan for Kids*, 1987 – 1990.

Literary expert of the Agricultural and Fisheries Project, Under the supervision of Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, 1988 – 1996.

Literary expert on the study of the aspects of drama in myths at the request of the Department of Performative Arts, Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, 1989. Reporter for the Second International Puppet Show Festival in Tehran, 1990.

Organizing literary meetings at the first cultural and artistic festival of children and adolescents, Bam, 2000.

Manager of Workshops on Children's Story, Soroush, 2000 – 2004.

Literary expert and reference judge for literary works in Astan Quds Razavi Publications, 2002 – 2006.

Manager, Storytelling Session, Association of Writers for Children and Adolescents, 2001 – 2006.

Literary expert, Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, 2002 – 2003.

Literary expert and writer of pre-school educational packs, 2000 – 2003.

Representative of Ministry of Culture, Bologna Book Fair, 2005.



Literary expert and writer, citizenship development project of Tehran municipality, 2006.

Performative Activities

Actor, Seven Labors, Street Performance, directed by Jamshid Jahanzadeh, 1975.

Actor, Mother by Bertolt Brecht, performed at the Rumi Hall, 1979.

Actor, The Epic of Mother Melon, performed in Rudaki Hall, 1980.

Actor, Street Revolution with 200, directed by Mohamad Nami, 1981.

Actor, Ashura, directed by Jamshid Jahanzadeh, 1981.

Puppeteer and Scene Manager, Useful Stick, 1982.

Puppeteer and Scene Manager, Little Mouse Story, directed by Hasan Dadshekar, 1983.

Voice Actor, Grandfather, and Radish, directed by Behrooz Gharibpour, 1985.

Puppeteer and Assistant Director, Curious Crow Puppet Collection, IRIB Channel One, 1985.

Actor and Assistant Director, The Stories of Our Alley, IRIB Channel One, 1987.

Puppeteer, Hadi and Hoda Puppet Show, IRIB Channel Two, 1987.

Puppeteer, Devil 2 movie, directed by Behrooz Gharibpour, 1988.

Actor, Blind War, directed by Behrooz Gharibpour, 1989.

Puppeteer, Six Crows Chickens and a Fox, Directed by Behrooz Gharibpour, 1990.

Actor, Abbas the Car-washer, directed by Mohamad Haghghi, 1991.

Assistant Director, One Tableau, One Epic (Serial), IRIB Channel Two, 1994 – 1996.

Supervisor of Writers, Photographing TV Program, IRIB Channel Two, 2004.

Assistant Director, The Stories of Me and My Daddy, Puppet Show Collection, IRIB Channel 2, 2005.

Awards

The Story of Spring, Award of the Second Festival of Books, Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, 1991.

Lili Houzak Show, Diploma of Appreciation, 4th International Puppet Show Festival in Tehran, 1992.

The Mad and the Well, Crystal Pen from the Sixth Press Festival, Ministry of Culture, 1999.

The Mad and the Well, Golden Medal from the Fourth Press Festival, Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, 1999.

Award of Appreciation from the First Children and Adolescent Cultural Arts Festival, 2000.

The Voice of Baby Goat, Honorary Diploma, Festival of the Story of the Year, *Soroush for Children Magazine*, 2001.

The Mad and the Well, Honorary Diploma from the Book of the Year, Council on Children's Book, 2002.

The Bridge That Is No Longer There, Diploma of Appreciation



for Book of the Year of *Hello Kids Monthly* and *Poupak Magazine*, 2002.
Diploma of Appreciation, 3rd National Basij Fiction Festival, 2003.
Colorful Wishes, Diploma of Appreciation for Book of the Year of *Hello Kids Monthly* and *Poupak Magazine*, 2005.
The Mad and the Well, Diploma of Honor from IBBY, 2004.
The Mad and the Well, and *Crazy Girl*, Listed in Munich Library, 2004.
The Balloon and the Hippo, Nominated as the Selected book of the Association of Publishers and Book of the Year of *Hello Kids Monthly* and *Poupak Magazine*, 2007.
Dad's Lady, Dad's Nose, Selected by Association of Publishers, 2008.
Dad's Lady, Dad's Nose, the Selected Book of the Sixth Literary Award of Isfahan, 2008.
Fairy Tales, Awarded by the Association of Publishers, 2008.
Are You My Mother, and *Joking with Words*, Awarded by the Association of Publishers, 2009.
Are You My Mother? Book of the Year of *Hello Kids Monthly* and *Poupak Magazine*, 2009.
Lazy Hero, Awarded White Crow Badge, Library of Munich, 2011.
The Aging Gap, Nominated for National Book of the Year, 2011.
One Name and Some Stories, Nominated in National Book of the Season, Shahid Ghanipour Book of the Year, and Roshd Book of the Year, 2012.
Three books of *Muhammad (PBUH)*, *They Call Me Rain*, *The Sky of Angles*, Selected Book of the Council on Children's Book, 2012.
Naneh Golab, Diploma of Appreciation from the Center for Children Literature Studies of Shiraz University, as one of the 10 Selected Books of the Years 1979 – 2011, and nominated for Book of the Year of Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults and Ministry of Culture, 2012.
Tales of Top and Bottom, Awarded as Book of the Year Shahid Ghanipour Literary Festival and nominated for Book of the Year of the Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults and Ministry of Culture, 2013.
Diploma of Honor as Excellent Writing in Last Decades, (from 1979 to 2011)

by the Center for Studies into Children Literature, University of Shiraz, 2013.

Tales of Top and Bottom, Listed in Flying Turtle List, with 4 Points, 2013.

Uncle's Mustache, Listed in the Flying Turtle List, with Three Points, 2014.

Bald Apple, Listed in the Flying Turtle List, with Five Points, 2015.

The Bus and the Sea, Listed in the Flying Turtle List, with 4 Points, 2015.

The Aging Gap, Listed in the Flying Turtle List, with 4 Points, 2015.

Headstrong Calf, Listed in the Flying Turtle List, with 4 Points, 2015.

The Playful L, Listed in the Flying Turtle List, with 4 Points, 2015.

Octopus, Listed in the Flying Turtle List, with 3 Points, 2015.

Three Girls, Listed in the Flying Turtle List, with 4 Points, 2016.

The Sock that was Searching for a Foot, Listed in the Flying Turtle List, with 4 Points, 2016.

Aunt Cherry Set, Listed in the Flying Turtle List, with 4 Points, 2016.

Alphabet Tales, Listed in the Flying Turtle List, with 4 Points, 2016.

Charitable Skeleton, Listed in the Flying Turtle List, with 3 Points, 2016.

This Way, Listed in the Flying Turtle List, with 3 Points, 2016.

The Drop and the Moon, Listed in the Flying Turtle List, with Three Points, 2016.

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The myths of this side of water and myths of that side of the water, Listed in the Flying Turtle List, with 3 Points, 2016.

The Up and Down of the Road, Nominated for Sixteenth Roshd Book Festival, 2018.

The Mad and the Well, Badge of the Sun, Ma'am Charity, 2018.





Judgments

Referee, the first cultural-artistic festival of children and adolescents works, Bam, 2000.

Referee, 17th Children and Youth Film Festival, Isfahan, 2002.

Referee, Eleventh Press Conference of the Ministry of Culture, 2004.

Referee, 19th Children and Youth Film Festival, Isfahan, 2004.

Referee, Festival of a letter to God for the children of Bam, 2005.

Referee, Story of the Year, Storytelling Sessions, Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, 2006.

Conversations

The Childhood of Today's Writers, Zari Naeimi, *Speaking Doll Monthly*, 176, July 2006.

What Does Modern Literature Means?, Zari Naeimi, *Speaking Doll Monthly*, 178, September 2006.

The wells were part of us and our dreams, Naghi Soleimani, *Soroush for Teens Magazine*.

Good Movies Are the Result of Interactions, Gisoo Faghfour, 19th Children and Youth Film Festival.

Today with ..., Sayer Mohamadi, Iran newspaper.

One Word and Two Words, Fatemeh Mashhadi Rostam, *Hello Kids Monthly*, 199, October 2006.

Let's go to the world of stories with the train of imagination, Nahid Adelian, *Hello Kids Monthly*, 176, November 2004.

Our city is just a slogan, Amir Jalal al-Din Mazlomi, *Hamshahri Neighborhood*.

These recreations are not Qur'anic, IKINA News Agency, August 2004.

Articles and Notes

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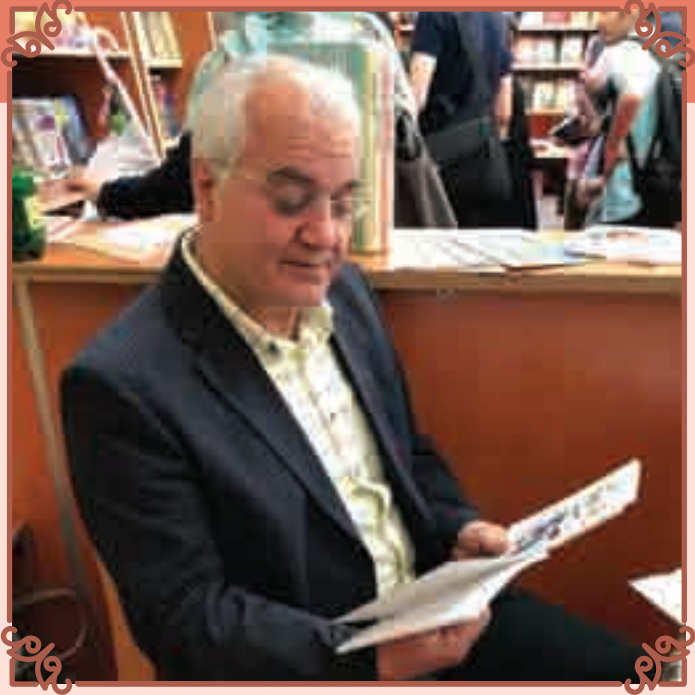
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Overview of Work

Mohamad Reza Shams a great and indeed one of the best fantasy writers for children and adolescent in Iran. Susan Taghdis, herself a prominent Iranian writer, introduces Shams “In the new age of Iranian children’s literature, or more precisely, since the revolution, Mohamad Reza Shams is the first writer who truly innovated in the creation of the stories for children. This finds its significance when we consider a special time when all the writers and critics were heavily clinging to the classical and traditional approaches to writing, repeating that this is literature and nothing else. At that time, many of the new moves were rejected, and many of these writers either left innovating or writing. But Mr. Shams did not diminish his efforts in this field, he also developed and polished his method of storytelling.”

Shams is a writer who has found his place in literature through theater and performing arts. In his first year of technical high school, he becomes a member of the Naziabad Family Welfare Theater Group and starts experiences with the theater. Following puppeteering, he finds his way in writing children’s and adolescent plays and meets important and influential circles of children’s literature of the time like *Keyhan for Kids*. Playwriting has an obvious influence on his works. Giving priority to dialogue, using everyday language of the people, and episodic structure of stories are among the unique features of his stories, that are derived from performing arts.

In his stories, he creates abstract and fantasy settings. These are the characteristics that were not observed before in the literature for children and adolescent. Shams finds his ideas for a story in folk tales and legends, in oral culture, myths, spells, and dreams, and combines these elements with the individual imagination to create his stories.

After publishing *The Mad and the Well*, Shams



revolutionized Iranian children and adolescent literature. In this book, he uses the element of imagination without any limit and has passed all the limits.

The Mad and the Well is the story of a mad man who throws a stone into a well every morning. Every day, one hundred wise men come to take the stone out, but they cannot, and every day the mad man himself takes the stone out of the well. The well, who is disturbed by the actions of the mad man in the mornings, after deeply falls in love with the mad man. The rest of the story is about the incidents that happen after this love and affection. After a while, the mad man falls in love with the well too and even the moon who is a witness to all these becomes jealous. At the end of the story, the well and the mad man marry.

In this book, the author chooses a mad person as the main character or hero of the story. The mad character has great potentials for the development of fantasy events and incidents in the story.

The fantasy setting is the other great feature of the book especially when we consider the fact that when this book was published no other book dared to be so innovative.

Another important fantasy story by Shams is *The Crazy Girl*. This story is about a girl named ZanBass, who is also the main character of the story and the story is narrated from her point of view. The story happens in the rural setting of Arak city with its especially traditional culture, customs, and superstitious beliefs.

Using a mad narrator, both in this story and in *The Mad and the Well*, has led the writer to use the stream of consciousness technique in writing. This made his stories very close to postmodern narratives.

The Crazy Girl, reveals the critical view of Shams toward

society. In all his stories, he suffers from injustice and portrays poverty with all its bitter aspects. His imaginary world is not a singular world, free from contemporary society and its contradictions.

the feature that makes the works of Shams find a postmodern characteristic, is his abandoning of the linear course of time. In many of his stories, he has been making parallel narratives, even he has attempted to narrate stories from the end.

Another feature of the works of Shams is his splendid use of legends. In Shams's stories, one can clearly see the traces of legends and follow them. The influence of myths and stories that he has already heard in his childhood are evident in his works. Myths are an important part of Iranian culture. Shams has created contemporary stories using this culture. The famous characters of the ancient tales enter his contemporary stories and create a familiar setting the reader. These characters recall a story with all its details and foregrounds. This creates a new relationship between the writer and the reader and provides a new space for the reading of ancient texts.

Indeed Shams's stories are like a tree with its smart and strong roots in the legends of the past, and its branches and leaves in contemporary literature for children and adolescent.

The other features of his work is the powerful and influential use of satire as a device. To create a humorous space, Shams starts using what the children already have. He uses the way they see and talk and creates a new world that is alive for the children and is closer to the mind and imagination of the children.

Mohamad Reza Shams has his own special approach in seeing the events. His perspective is manifestly fanciful. He avoids cliché, an attribute that has made him very different from other writers.

According to Susan Taghdis:

“Mohsen Reza Shams, with his thirty years of efforts, has changed the path of the river of Persian literature for children that was going to stop to a new setting, making a magnificent waterfall with those silent waters. Certainly, he has affected all the other writers and the entire field of writing for children.”

Fantasy Breakfast



Fantasy Breakfast is in three parts: before writing, the story of the birth, wedding, and death, after writing.

Suppose your bag is pregnant and is now giving birth to a baby. She (or he?) brings a triplet. Two girls and one boy! But this is not all the story. You are supposed to eat breakfast with your fancy.

What breakfast! Cheese with Okamaj! But right when you are immersing in this fanciful setting, they inform you that your bag is giving birth. A Triplet, one boy, and two girls.

When the sounds fade away, you go back to your fancy to take a nap, but it is impossible. You must leave home, lest the office will be late. Everything is possible here in the world of this story. You can miss your pride in the house and return from the middle of the alley to take it. You can go shopping with your shadow, your pride, and your fancy and buy a well from an old hunchback; an original well and not a fake one! You can celebrate Lady Crow's wedding. But you should not forget that anyway, and in any case, you are a state staff and that you are very late by now. And again, you should not forget that no golden fish can fulfill your dream of returning a deceased father to life or resurrecting a recently dead cousin.

Fantasy Breakfast personifies such concepts as

imagination, fancy, and pride. In this story, fancy sits like an ordinary personality and plays a role. This creates a setting for abstract concepts to play a role as a character. Shams has extensively used traditional sources of narrative including folklore culture as well as and stories from oral literature and mythology. He has also incorporated a diversity of elements from religious, national as well as contemporary literature to create a haunting story.

The Balloon and the Hippo

Hossein Parsaee

Mohamad Reza Shams, in his stories, invites the reader to more hidden aspects of being. Concision, imagination, the minimalist point of view, and the discovery of relationships beyond the ordinary are among the main features of the writings of Mohamad Reza Shams. This is the way to reach the hidden truth by talking about simple phenomena.

This makes his stories like a tree with its roots in history and tradition and its branches stretching to the house of every reading child.

In *The Balloon and the Hippo* collection, the writer mainly emphasizes a set of binary concepts. He prefers to present two conflicting and somewhat contradictory elements in his stories, and by forming a link between them, he shapes his story. Finding binary and contradictory elements both in nature and in social life is a very easy task. However, the special point of view of the stories and the innovative approach of the writer has made the subjects interesting.

These set of binary opposition are evident both in the stories as well in their very title: *The Balloon and the Hippo*, *Butter and Cheese*, *Train and Tunnel*, *Apple and the Bird*, etc. This approach



is largely evident in many other works of Mohamad Reza Shams.

These works have been written with admirable wisdom and profundity and are mostly charming for teens. The important point in writing these stories is that the philosophical traces of the works never shadow over its storyline and does not find a stereotypical form. They are within the text of the story, visible to the reader.

Mohamad Reza Shams has a deconstructive approach to dismantle the ordinary approaches to seeing and reporting the events and to create innovative and fresh rules. Even he reverses the title of the story of *The Man Who Moved Backward*, is written in reverse. His approach to writing is truly his own and very innovative.

In this context, he uses new themes and settings and applies such rhetorical devices as synaesthesia to reach a new layer of meaning. He turns every experience into a subject for story and narration.

The expressions of Mohamad Reza Shams, even when it purely narrates a story, is charming and fascinating.

The Mad and the Well

The Mad and the Well show how everything that was impossible becomes possible and this the miracle and magic of the story. Narration is like a tree that blossoms every year and finds a new life. The roots of this tree stretch across thousands of years all over Iran and the entire earth.

The Mad and the Well is the latest manifestation of this tree with the expected and unexpected miracles, in every line of the book, the past and present life of humanity is miraculously and mysteriously linked and comes to blossoming

and fruition. In all three stories of this collection, “The Mad and the Well”, “Daddy Sholezard” and “I, Malek Jamshid” everything, everybody and every space can turn to a fictional character. At one point, the well falls in love with a madman, and somewhere else, the sweep screams with a pitching voice: “its bridal ceremony, full of kisses,” and start dancing. Mr. Shadow brushes his teeth and the sink tap falls in love with the flowery plate.

In every story, reality, imagination, truth, lie, whisper, sweetness and bitterness are so interconnected and intermingled that they are inseparable. The delicate lines that separate one from the other constantly disappears to the extent that the possible and the impossible become the same phenomenon. In this context, what is more mysterious both more real and more charming.

Despite all its different and controversial features, *The Mad and the Well* is very familiar and close to the mind of the reader. All age groups can follow the stories, and this has no reason other than the writer’s resourceful and ingenious use of familiar imaginations and memories and the common cultural heritage of Iran. Stories of *The Mad and the Well* Crazy are strange, unrealistic, and strongly imaginative; they are very close to childish imagination: the fact that the narrator talks with his shadow, he wants to be in place of Hasan the Bald (a folklore character), and wishes that to pass a hundred-year-path in an overnight, or sees the moon as a row of melons or as a white flower that can be taken from the sky.

Hearing familiar fairy tales is like dim lights that guide us even in the dark and prevents us from going out of a thrilling but spectacular road of the story. The presence of such familiar characters from



ancient literature and folklore and even modern literature make it possible for the reader to feel being in a familiar and intimate atmosphere. The feel more at home within the story and fully communicate with the story.

Mountain Shouldering Monster

Mehdi Ebrahimi Lam'e



In *Mountain Shouldering Monster* we encounter a strange and crowded family. The narrator (the younger son of the family) is called Esmail and lives together with his mother, father, his two brothers, a grandmother, and an aunt. After a few short, fanciful, and funny short stories, introducing strange characters such as monsters, the book presents the narrator's life in his own language. Esmail is a very fanciful boy who, in his own words, was born at the age of fifty! He has been in his mother's womb for 50 years, and after much effort, he finally exits through her mother's navel and is born. In the first episode, he goes to a village with his family to visit a rural personality and on the way, he is introduced with a group of the dead who are back to life. In another parallel episode, the narrator in his own house meets with a character called Divsalar (a monster that has human appearance). Divsalar is a reporter and, in his own words, he wants to know the strange life and biography of the narrator; the narrator tells his true life story from the beginning of his birth (fifty years old), and for the same reason he describes his imagined conflicts with different monsters, demons, people, creatures and things. In fact, these parallel episodes and narratives created the main body of the novel.

Besides the fantasy element, what is most prominent in this novel is the narrator's tone and language, which is filled with funny and humorous words.

The volume and intensity of fantasies in this novel are very high so that in many scenes it seems that all borders are traversed.; as if, to create this new and pristine world, the writer has closed his eyes and dived into the deep ocean of imagination and fancy! The author's audacity in his experiencing of a vast and new range of awesome fantasies is worthy of consideration and admiration. The purpose of this experience can be summarized as follows: achieving a new style of storytelling, developing audience imagination, pushing and removing stereotypes, giving special attention to the entertainment aspect of the story, and rebuilding the world on storytelling, and borderless and pure imagination.

The fluent and humorous prose of the text is also a very significant aspect of the book. The sentences of the novel are often simple, expressive and polished, and they can easily convey their message to the reader. However, the language of the story is more prominent than its prose. Using popular, intimate and contemporary language, the writer creates a bridge between the subject and the reader, making historical concepts and ideas familiar to the reader. Thus an intimate relationship is created between the text, its themes, and the reader. These comic and humorous approaches to presentation and expression make the reading a sweet experience.

The Crazy Girl

Rouhollah Mehdipour Omrani

The Crazy Girl is the story of a half-mad girl, as narrated through her point of view in a rural setting. The girl is called Zambass (literally meaning stop female). She is the last child of a woman whose children were girls and many of her children died during childbirth. The

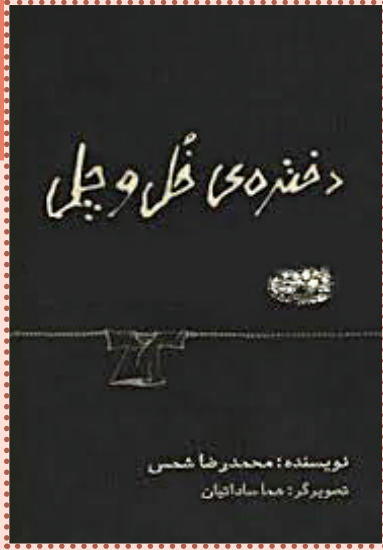
narrator's father, who wanted a boy, marries Roghani, as his second wife. Naneh Amineh is another character of the story who is the midwife of the village, her relation to the narrator is never revealed but she is very close to her. Also, Marian, a young man was killed in the village's water disputes has a fundamental importance in the story, because the narrator and he had romantic relationships.

The Crazy Girl, narrates of a series of events around these characters, according to the confused and disordered mindset of the narrator. This composition creates a story that happens on the borderline between dream and reality, madness and reason, and finally life and death.

Mohamad Reza Shams, in the first place, uses a prominent technique to make his work meaningful in terms of narrative logic. His technique is the full use of the narrator's madness, for linking different narrative lines. Because the narrator is insane and the point of view of the text finds its expression through the stream of consciousness, the writer feels free to move in any direction.

Mohamad Reza Shams fuses the effects of objective facts with mental subjectivities and creates another reality which, despite the presence of all surreal characteristics, is more rigorous and accurate than reality. He presents the reality itself, but in a sweet and pleasurable approach to enjoy the reader.

The stories of this book are the unwritten and verbal history of Iranian villages, as part of the history of the social life of the Iranian people: stories about land reform, the peasantry system, relations between local lords and the peasants, early phases of authoritarian modernization through centralized promotion of knowledge and



health, the resistance of traditional beliefs, and violation of women's rights, multiple marriage, poverty, ignorance, illiteracy and the spread of superstition.

In such a difficult situation, and in this social setting, there will surely be people like those characters of *The Crazy Girl*.

The style of Mohamad Reza Shams has its own characteristics. In most of his stories, he opens text passages and, by creating open spaces, extends the events and weaves them together like a puzzle or a maze. This reminds us of the ancient forms of storytelling that was forgotten in the contemporary period. Mohamad Reza Shams has successfully revived an accident approach to telling stories.

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