



The Inexhaustible Source of Ahmad Shamloo's Art - The Life & Struggle of the People

Different class ideologies contend sharply in the sphere of art and politics, which has an important influence on how people look at the world. We encourage you to submit reviews or suggestions for them covering any genre - theatre, literature, film, music, the fine arts or others. We are looking for art and literature that, like the poetry of Shamloo, unmask the intolerable burden of the existing order and stir the imagination of people struggling to create a different one. We also count on you to help make known the rich material covering all the regions of the world and reflecting the conditions of our class and its revolutionary ambition, which is often ignored or suppressed by the imperialist culture industry.

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The death of Ahmad Shamloo caused a wave of sorrow and grief, not only among literature and art lovers, but also among a broad spectrum of progressive intellectuals, political activists and conscious masses. He was at the forefront of an unwavering battle against the old backward culture, and his death marked the loss of one of the most steadfast figures of the progressive and new culture. The masses lost an intellectual of the people, one who expressed their life, work, struggle and interests. One who served them in the battle against ignorance, superstition and religion. Shamloo was one of those intellectuals whom the workers, peasants and other toiling masses need to overcome the deep divide that class society has created between labour and thought.

The Maoists did not always share his political and ideological positions, but he was one of the handful of living masters in the intellectual and cultural fields that the proletarian revolution in Iran acutely needs. Because pushing back the dominant reactionary culture and introducing the masses to new

thinking and beliefs is an essential part of organising and preparing for the overthrow of the ruling classes and the establishment of the new power. And because the long road to the elimination of exploitation and oppression cannot be travelled without ceaseless and intense struggle on the art and cultural front. All this Shamloo took up consciously and lovingly.

In order to achieve its historical mission, the emancipation of humanity, the revolutionary proletariat needs to advance on this front, to unite, to discuss and to struggle in a comradely way with people like Shamloo.

In training ever more workers and leaders in the realm of culture and art, we can learn a great deal from his resoluteness in the face of the oppressive rulers, and his fight against reaction in the areas of cultural and historical investigation, as well as artistic creation.

Those youth that turn to art and literature, with revolutionary fervour and political and social commitment, need a torch to light the dark nights and tortuous paths. In the arena in which a new culture is fighting the old one, in the midst of the battle against anti-people, reactionary and stupefying art and culture, they need a flag hoisted to instil courage in their hearts and to infuse the hope of victory in their souls. In the last several decades Shamloo consciously tried to light this torch and be this flag. Without a

shadow of a doubt, he succeeded in playing this role.

This high standing was not bestowed on Shamloo by an invisible, supernatural hand. It was neither luck nor "innate genius" – something he himself never believed in. The secret was that in the process of his ceaseless, tireless and multi-dimensional activities, Shamloo found an inexhaustible source of art: the life and struggle of the people. He made a basic decision about the social role of his art and the goal of his artistic creation, and he committed himself to the awakening, liberation and interests of his audience. He considered that "being born a human means becoming a mission personified". He tried to personify commitment to the oppressed masses and to revolutionary ideals and values: "Since art can present a useful thing with more beauty and give it more power of penetration, it should be ashamed to be neutral. My point is in no way to impose my will on others with do's and don'ts. The wisdom of the artist in this ailing world is to seek to cure the disease, not to alleviate the pain; to seek understanding, not adornment; to be a caring doctor, not an uncaring clown."¹

This viewpoint made his poetry into a finger pointed at the enemy. His poetry was not a shield of pity to guard the weak and oppressed. It was a sword that tore apart masks of hypocrisy, an arrow targeting the ideas and actions of the powers that be, and its twang was the raging cry of the slaves. The rage of the poor, who bind the poetry book of their life with blood, who kill their lives of slavery so that they can be reborn as masters of history.² In life a poet who writes like this, could never conciliate with or surrender to the reactionary powers. Shamloo never gave in to lures and inducements. Whilst in prison after the coup in the summer of 1953 [the CIA coup against Dr Mossadeq, that brought the Shah back to power], with his poetry he excoriated the weaklings who had knelt down to the monarchist executioners and repented. In prison he felt deeply the heroism and sacrifice of Tudeh party members, such as Varthan Salakhanian and Morteza Keyvan, on the one hand, and the opportunism and betrayal of the Central Committee of that party on the other. He understood that the blood shed by these heroes did not flow down the

latter's path. So once and for all he demarcated himself from the "party of wind", as he called it.³ Years later, after the 1979 revolution [the revolution that swept away the US-backed Shah's regime and brought Khomeini to power], when Tudeh party forces within the Circle of Writers of Iran tried to turn the Circle into a conciliatory institution and justify the repressive policies of the reactionary Islamic Republic, Shamloo, along with other unrepentant friends like Comrade Saeed Soltanpoor (who was later martyred), insisted on maintaining the progressive and pro-people positions of the Circle. They exposed these shameless accomplices of Islamic reaction and expelled them from the writers' group. It is despicable that this treacherous bunch paid hypocritical "homage" to Shamloo, who clearly, and on every occasion, opposed them.

Over half a century, Shamloo experienced the defeat of a vast political movement (1941-53) [which included moves to nationalise Iranian oil, and ended with the CIA-backed coup] and a big mass revolution (1979). He saw the masses in their millions taking to the streets for liberation. He witnessed the decades following the 1953 coup, marked by suppression and silence, and then again the masses pouring into the streets. And, with rage and frustration, he experienced the coming to power of the duplicitous Islamic reactionaries and the ensuing bloody repression. Unlike those intellectuals whose hope for victory was smashed with the defeat of the 1979 revolution and who ended up in the abyss of conciliation and surrender to the enemies of the people, Shamloo did not abandon the struggle. He remained disobedient and undaunted. He had learnt much from the coup d'état [1953] and the first defeat, and from the crystallisation of a new revolutionary movement and the masses rising up again: "We suffered years of repression, terror and humiliation. Our bodies and souls wore out through those dark years but our belief in the high ideals of humanity prevented us from breaking. We aged, we weakened, but we did not kneel down, we did not bow our head in surrender. We went through the darkest hours of hopelessness and misery, but we did not say yes to the devil, because we did not want anything for ourselves, and we did not hope to see the sun again. Our

sun was shining from within; we were warmed by the proud certainty that even if we died in loneliness and despair, what had been entrusted to us would not be thrown away, we would not throw it away. Such was yesterday, and no doubt, such will be today." "The world has not come to an end and the oppressive rule of the devil on earth will not last for ever."⁴ And he never doubted his responsibility and mission as a committed artist and awaited the people's conspiracy to break the chains.

Shamloo endured the eternal wrath and curses of the reactionary rulers. Because he stood on the same side of the barricades as the masses in opposition to the Islamic Republic, because he confronted reaction and superstition both politically and culturally, he was subjected to much pressure and faced many accusations, but he did not pull back. In the early 1990s, when word spread that some literary figures were conciliating with the regime in the hope of getting permission to re-establish the Writer's Circle, Shamloo warned them, as well as the masses, against the trap the Islamic regime had set to lure in the intellectuals and lull them into a stupor. He said that the stench of this plan could be smelt already. "The government is giving us the green light so that we will remain quiet while the people continue to be kept behind the red light. But our freedom as writers and artists cannot and must not be separated from the basic freedom the masses are deprived of."

His commitment to the interests of the people, his far-sightedness and clarity of vision enabled Shamloo to see through the ruse of "national compromise" and the vacillations in the wake of the "Second Khordad" [the date of the presidential elections when Khatami became president, in May 1997]. Despite great pressure, he refused to take sides in inter-ruling class quarrels and to play the games of the different ruling factions, which would have only resulted in the deception of the masses. He refused to bow to the ruling apparatus by putting the freedom-killing and superstitious phrase "in the name of the God of soul and wisdom" on the masthead of the declaration of the Writer's Circle. He refused to support, much less admire, Mohajerani, the Guidance Minister of this censorship regime (who had devised cultural-literary justifications for

the death warrant issued against Salman Rushdie).⁵

The conciliating "Second Khordad" intellectuals considered Shamloo's resolute stand against the ruling Islamic reactionaries and his refusal to shake hands with Khatami and company a thorn in their side. They not only tried to ignore and hide this bright and lofty aspect of his political life, but also were intolerant of his poetic language. They strove in vain to keep the new generation away from the "mis-teachings" of Shamloo's language! They called his language "power-seeking and anti-people" because it did not correspond to the "tolerance and forgiveness" they preached,⁶ because it was not the language of compromise and kow-towing to the ruling powers, because it was proud, defiant and rebellious. He ridiculed and humiliated the enemies of the people, he instilled hope and courage in his listeners, and, with a violent torrent of words in prideful rhythms, he aroused them against despair, oppression and tyranny. Even after his death, Shamloo's living poetry and language creates a problem for the pioneers of compromise and the foes of advanced art and culture. So today they are forced to try to render him harmless, to put him safely behind museum walls using much false fanfare, and at the same time keep the youth away from studying his works and halt the regeneration of the values he left behind.

**THE ESSENCE OF
SHAMLOO'S POETRY**

Shamloo's poetry, as a reference and clear example of the new poetry in Iran, is the product and reflection of the movements and revolutions, defeats and victories that the workers and oppressed masses lived through in the twentieth century, both in Iran and internationally; he kept his eye on new horizons and conveyed new class interests and inspirations.

Shamloo's poetry, with its new content and its own new rhythms and wording, became worthy of the great and daily struggle for liberation of hundreds of millions of "nobodies" throughout the world. It reflected the revolutionary epics created on this road. His commitment to the high ideal of the emancipation of humanity made his poetry socially conscious and pro-

The Beginning*

Untimely
in a land unknown
at a time yet not arrived.
Thus, I was born
 within the forest of beast and rock.

My heart
 in void
 started beating.
 I abandoned the cradle of reiteration
in a land with no bird, no spring.

My first journey was a return
 from the hope-abrading vistas of thorn and sand,
 without having gone far
 on the inexperienced feet of the fledgeling that
 was I.

My first journey was a return.
 The vast distance
 taught no hope.
 Trembling,
 I stood on the feet of the novice that was I
 facing the horizon ablaze.

I realized that there was no tidings
for in between stood a mirage.
The vast distance taught no hope.
I learnt that there was no tidings:
This boundless
 was a prison so huge
that the soul
hid in tears
from shame of impotence.

A poem written on returning to the newly-established Islamic Republic after a trip abroad, describing his feelings about the Khomeini regime.

people. It was a poetry of life that wanted to fight shoulder to shoulder with its unknown comrades in China, Korea or France, that wanted to hang the false gods of literature on his gallows [a reference to a Shamloo poem that says "I will hang them—leave them to dangle, like dead men—on the 'gallows' of my poetry"]. Thus, his poetry could not be gentle and delicate, so as

to avoid muddying the waters⁷ or disturbing the sleep of butterflies. Shamloo wanted his poetry to be "a bugle and not a lullaby".⁸

The mirror of Shamloo's experience of political activity and political parties was darkened by the dust of reformism, opportunism and the betrayal of false leaders. But even though Shamloo called politics "a dirty word"

and considered "politicking and power games" to be inextricably associated with those "who have no respect for the life of anyone", politics was ever-present in his poetry. He believed that artists should be "free from the chains of sectarianism and party partisanship, a commitment free from politics",⁹ but his poems were inevitably closely tied to political developments in society and the world. Even when his poetry depicted the abstract individual, outside the boundaries of class, the footsteps of politics were still visible. It could not have been otherwise, because in his poetry general concepts such as: love, beauty, justice, deliverance and humanity passed through this world of classes and politics, thus finding a class and political nature.

Shamloo was always moved by the struggle and sacrifice of the revolutionary vanguard of the people. In his poetry he recorded great social and political upheavals and the role of "those who know why they die", those who in times of darkness stand up to the thunder to bring light to the house. Through the torrent of events and historical turning points, Shamloo's vocabulary was polished and his poetry developed. In the years prior to the 1953 coup, the singing children of the sea, the great sacrificed stars and the red blossoms from Granada and Athens to Abadan [in Iran] pulsed in the veins of his poetry, and in the mid- to late-1960s, when gunfire announced the birth of a new generation of revolutionaries, his poetry took on a different beat. This poetry, in turn, influenced, above all, the young revolutionaries and the advanced fighters to see their role and mission more clearly, more decisively and more victoriously in Shamloo's mirror - to blossom and to be the harbingers of the end of winter, even if they themselves would not live to see the victory of springtime.¹⁰ Shamloo's poetry brought warmth to the souls of political prisoners, who carved it on prison walls so as to point to a horizon beyond the bulwarks of captivity.

Many of Shamloo's poems speak to, and are needed by, the revolutionary cadres and the advanced among the masses. Like any committed artist of the people he faced two tasks: [firstly] to practice criticism and popularise other people's artistic works, encouraging the masses to make art, and discovering the work they have

already done; and [secondly] to raise artistic standards and the quality of the work produced. His poetry mainly involved the second task. In his valuable and unambiguous work, he consistently sought to find windows through which he could enter the souls of the broad masses.

BREAKING THE MOULDS

Shamloo's poetry was a deluge of great and stormy thinking, an expression of the rebellion of the new against the old. This poetry was not to be chained, tamed or turned into a bed for capitulationist and collaborationist whining. Shamloo's poetry sought its own forms, a structure that could not, and would not, become a cage for this rebellious soul, forms that would not become moulds. Even the most colourful, most open framework, would, in the end, confine and restrict his varied and ever-changing subjects, feelings and passions, thwarting the constant innovation and creativity of his poetry. This idea was at first mostly a question of feeling, and inevitably his work initially suffered from imperfections. Later, after delving deeply into his own writing and comparing it critically to that of others, this understanding and belief took wing in his poetry. Shamloo, correctly, considered himself a student of the pathbreaker Neema, who found the old poetic rules insufficient to express the emotions and thinking of today's world. Shamloo understood the essence of Neema's message, which was a revolution in the internal structure of poetry; and he did what Neema could not, or would not, do.¹¹ He totally broke the old moulds, the established metres and rhythm schemes and the rigid understanding of their interrelationship, opening the way for the innovative and restless flow of his poetry. In this way each poem, with its own pace and pauses, its own beat and melody, and a form that matches its content and thought, would be born, live and end. Thus, with unique daring and courage, Shamloo stood on Neema's shoulders. From atop the high poetic tower that Neema had built, he discovered new horizons and marched to their conquest.

Shamloo's ability to see differently and change the meaning and form of poetry arose from his new and advanced vision of human society and nature. In Iran, it has become a habit

to present innovation in poetry, literature, journalism and song as a result of the influence of the [1905] Constitutional Revolution, but in fact this development was only one branch of the variety of movements in thought, literature and art that flourished in the aftermath of the 1917 victory of the October Revolution in Russia. In Shamloo's words: "To a considerable degree, after so much fruitless repetition, this poetry owes its awakening and awareness to the great poets of other countries and other languages.... Masters who taught us pure poetry and mapped out for us the paths of commitment."¹²

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE OF THE MASSES

Another of Shamloo's brilliant achievements and outstanding contributions was the collection and transcription of the language and culture of the masses. The social and cultural yield of this work cannot yet be fully appreciated, and it will take time to harvest. This work was derived from Shamloo's overall stance toward the basic masses and their role in creating history, culture and language. In his eyes, the masses were not insignificant, identical peons worthy only to cheer the elite and carry their burdens. He encouraged mistrust of official history, which reflects the interests of the oppressive states and ruling exploiting classes throughout history. This history is full of distortions and lies. Its first goal is to implant the concept of a "God-King" and the idea that "the ordinary people do not deserve to lead society". Thus, this kind of history has slandered countless revolutionary undertakings of the masses and turned their meaning upside down.¹³

Starting as a youth, Shamloo took an interest in the language and culture of the masses, and this later inspired him to take up compiling and writing *The Dictionary of the Street*. He worked on this project with such perseverance that even though twice he lost all the notes he had gathered during years of investigation, he was not discouraged, but continued with even more determination. His awareness of the role of the lives, work and struggle of the masses in the creation and constant development of language and culture committed him to put this into writing and popularise its strength and

positive values. He saw the life and struggle of the people as a never-ending source of raw material for literature and art – raw, untreated material, but the most lively, rich and basic raw material there is.

The most important and far-reaching fruit of Shamloo's efforts in putting together *The Dictionary of the Street*, as a continuation of Dehkhoda's contributions in this domain, was to overthrow the restrictive reign of the dry and arid, old and religious, unclear and overly sophisticated language of the privileged and high-ranking strata of society in cultural, scientific and political works. Thus, he made these works and ideas more understandable and accessible to the broad masses. By recording the language of the people and following its changes and development, intellectuals can find a common language with the masses.¹⁴ They can become more familiar with the life, work and struggle of the masses, get a better understanding of their values and creativity and come to believe in them. They can more consciously try to close the chasm class society has opened up between the intellectuals and the makers of history.

Shamloo understood that in order to develop a relationship with a broad readership and to touch them deeply, a mastery of the language and culture of the masses is essential. At the same time, in order to revolutionise and develop the culture and language (or, better said, the cultures and languages) of society and write rich and accessible work from short stories and poetry to articles and reportage, one must take up and rely on the inexhaustible resource that is the language of the masses of people. He knew that "the stern official language can in no way match the subtlety of the playful and lively language of the masses". And he asked: "I don't know why one should not take advantage of the achievements of this developing language, since it contains a great treasure of the newest, beautifully-structured and rich words, and at the same has its own recordable grammar. Why should it not be allowed in the dull hall of the languages of the 'cultured'?"¹⁵

But Shamloo's reference and attention to popular culture was not a matter of populism and tailing the old. He had a critical approach to this culture, and he never took up the wor-

The Gap

To be born
on the dark spear
like the open birth of a wound.

To travel the unique exodus of opportunity
always

In chains

to burn on one's flame
to the very last spark
consuming a reverence
found by the slaves
in the dust of the way,
thus red and coquettish
to bloom on the thorn-bush of blood
and thus tall and proud
to pass through the scourge-field of degradation
and to travel through to the extreme of hatred....

Oh, who am I speaking of?

We are the living with no reason.

They are conscious of the reason for their death.

This poem was written in memory of Khosrow Golesorkhi, a revolutionary communist, who was executed by the US-backed Shah regime in the early 1970s. His trial was broadcast on nation-wide television. Though on trial for his life, Golesorkhi defiantly upheld his revolutionary convictions and declared that the real reason he was on trial was for being a communist. In his final statement, facing imminent death, he concluded that, I am not defending myself, I am defending my people. His name, Golesorkhi, means "red rose".

ship of the negative, superstitious and oppressive values that have penetrated it through the centuries. He ruthlessly criticised and exposed the chauvinist and oppressive attitude prevalent among the Fars nation [Iran's dominant nationality] and Shiite Moslems [Iran's dominant Muslim sect] against the oppressed national and religious minorities in Iran. He believed that all these negative aspects should be put before the masses clearly and openly, so that in this mirror they could see their cultural weak points and the harmful result on their own thought and action. He called for the breaking of taboos

and for the masses to dust their minds. He said the age-old ideas should be put in museums and there must be a cultural revolution or at least a serious re-evaluation of those beliefs, writings and spoken ideas that for a long time have been held to be unchangeable in books.¹⁶

JOURNALISM

At different periods, Shamloo took up editing journals and weeklies. This was part of his constant effort to propagate popular culture, art and thought. Even at the height of the repression under the Shah, he tried to pierce the

dark curtain of tyranny and reach the people. With much effort he would put out independent journals and anthologies, and when half-hearted friends left him or when poverty and censorship and finally the security apparatus closed his publications down, he would seek another outlet. With commitment and perseverance, he would find even the smallest opening allowing the legal publication of progressive work, even in big publications belonging to the Shah's stooges. He provided advanced thinking for parched throats, even if only a few drops. What made this effort truly valuable and deserves the most credit was that he walked on the sharp side of the blade but did not fall into self-censorship or distort the content of his own or others' work in the guise of "realistic tactics". In fact, he didn't fall into capitulation in any way at all. He was not one of those intellectuals that turn their back on the people's aspirations and, in return for petty privileges, never dare to cross the line, nor was he one of those who, out of fear of "contamination", remain passive and sit outside the ring with an "unsullied conscience".

In his several periods of rich journalistic activity, Shamloo recognised young people with talent and ability, helped them flourish, and established new and positive criteria for collective work, including serious and deep investigation, attractive and new forms and styles, and penetrating language in journalism. *The Book of the Week* (Keyhan Publications), which came to life in the early 1960s thanks to his efforts, is a lasting and brilliant model for cultural and social journals even today. Later, this journal was taken away from Shamloo by the managers of Keyhan, to be put into the hands of Behazin and other Tudeh Party stooges who collaborated with the Shah's regime. In 1979-80, he took up the publication of *The Book of Friday*. Influenced by the convulsive political atmosphere of that period of revolution and its urgent needs, this journal sought to intervene in relation to the burning questions of the day. It dealt with: the question of Kurdistan, Turkeman Sahra and other oppressed regions; the oppression of women; the life and work of the oppressed masses; and the situation of the workers and shanty town dwellers. It criticised the rotten beliefs and murderous deeds of

the reactionary religious forces that took power under the leadership of Khomeini, and looked at the revolutionary experience and struggles in other countries. *The Book of Friday* did its best to meet the needs of different strata of the people and at the same time exposed the repressive acts and tricks of the newly-installed reactionaries. This journal soon stopped publication due to the pressure and threats of the Khomeini regime.

HORIZONS AND HERITAGE

Shamloo was the product of the masses, not only in Iran but around the world. He considered himself to be fate- and blood-bound with the deprived and chained inhabitants of the earth, not only through poetry and literature, but on the basis of his overall thinking and world outlook. He stood against the devaluing of the oppressed nations by the dominant imperialist culture and, at the same time, wholeheartedly assimilated the revolutionary and advanced culture of the masses from all the corners of the world. He considered himself to be related to all human beings who do not hide a back-stabbing knife up their sleeve, who do not frown, whose smile is not a trick meant to deprive others of their rights, bread and shelter. He said "I am a Lor-Balutch-Kurd-Persian, a Farsi-speaking Turk, an African-European-Australian-American-Asian, a Black-Yellow-Red-White-skin who does not have the slightest problem with myself and others, but without the presence of others I feel the horror of solitude and death under my skin. I am a human being among others on this sacred planet Earth and have no meaning without others."¹⁷ His love for the dispossessed and oppressed was, of course, paired and tied with hatred for the oppressors and exploiters who bottle the blood of African-Americans in Harlem and the Bronx, set up crematoriums in Auschwitz, come to kill the light in the night, and start bonfires by burning songs and poetry. Shamloo clearly declared himself and his work to be uncompromising towards the imperialist system that dominates the world: "We consider the existing system in the world an extremely strong motivation for making art, expanding human knowledge and broadening our outlook, even if only for the elimination of this system! That

is the only goal that can justify poetry and literature in this era of horror and hunger."¹⁸

He knew that this perspective could only be realised through humanity's long march and that his own lifetime would not suffice. But the belief that, one day, the oppressed would build a just world and free their dreams from the nightmare of poverty, injustice and ignorance motivated Shamloo to continue his effort and struggle. He was kept alive by the hope that he was helping to plant seeds that would flower on that blessed day when humanity realises that it is trapped by unnecessary fear, the first result of which is total obedience. Shamloo considered the cultural contributions of committed intellectuals like himself to be an invitation to the celebration that will take place on the dawn of that day.¹⁹

It was with this hope that, despite all the limitations and barriers the reactionary rulers posed on the publication of his works in the last two decades, he did not withdraw from creation and investigation. His amazing hard work and persistence seemed to allow him to surpass the short time life grants us. His life was so fruitful that we who he left behind cannot help murmuring, as we thirst for more, "His time was short...."

His lasting works and the memory of his rebellion and path-breaking contributions cry out to the youth and coming generations, calling on them to break open the locks on the gates of the future with open eyes and hopeful hearts.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Nasser Harriri, *On Art and Literature – A Discussion with Ahmad Shamloo*, Summer 1993, pp. 128-129.

² See the poem "Ode for the Human of Bahman" [Bahman is the month when Arrani, head of a Marxist group, was killed]. In the 1950 collection *Ghat-nameh* (Declaration), reprinted in the *Collected Poems of Ahmad Shamloo*, p. 70.

³ There is an expression that says, "he is like the winnowers of Lanjan, he works with the wind". The winnowers are peasants who clean wheat by throwing it into the air to separate the wheat from the chaff. Lanjan is a very windy area near Isfahan. The expression implies that the winnowers of Lanjan are so expert in their work that the change of direction of the wind does not hamper their work, and they can continue. Here Shamloo is referring to those who subordinate themselves to the pre-

vailing opportunism. Explanation by Shamloo in response to readers of *The Book of the Week*, No. 32, Spring 1981.

⁴ The first quote is from the article, "The Sunrise Is Cancelled!", printed in Teheran in *Mossavar*, No. 22, Summer 1980. The second quote is from *The Book of the Week*, No. 34, Summer 1981.

⁵ See *A Critique of the Satanic Verses*, by Ayatollah Mohajerani. In this book Mohajerani tries to argue – as if it mattered – that the "problem" with Rushdie is that he is a "bastard" born from the rape of an Indian woman by an English man. Based on his sick mind, rotten values and religious misogyny, Mohajerani declares that only a "bastard" could even think of such ideas about Mohammed, let alone write them down! His book was supposed to be the cultural justification for Khomeini's *fatwa* (religious edict) that Rushdie be killed.

⁶ From an interview with Abdollah Kossari by the editors of *Farhang-o-Tosee* [Culture and Development], Winter 1999, pp. 119-121.

⁷ A reference to a poem by Sohrab Sepehri, a famous Zen Buddhist poet. [The Iranian film-maker Kiarostami's movie, *Where Is the House of My Friend*, inspired by another poem with the same title by this poet, was made in homage to Sepehri.]

⁸ Hariri, *On Art & Literature*, p. 173.

⁹ Hariri, *On Art & Literature*, pp. 125, 134.

¹⁰ See the poem entitled "Twenty-Three" in *Resolution*, as well as "Death of Nasli" reprinted in *The Collected Poems of Shamloo*, Volume I.

¹¹ Paraphrased from the article "I was Born

in the Form of We" by Javad Mojabi, on poetry influenced by Shamloo, published in the collected works entitled: *Knowing Shamloo*.

¹² Introduction to *Like an Endless Alley*, a selection of poems from the world's great poets, translated by Ahmad Shamloo, 1995.

¹³ "How Vulnerable the Truth Is", speech at the University of California at Berkeley in the US, from Mojabi, ed., pp. 508-9.

¹⁴ Paraphrased from "I Was Born in the Form of We", from Mojabi, ed.

¹⁵ Hariri, *On Art & Literature*, p. 145.

¹⁶ Hariri, *On Art & Literature*, "Addendum: A Talk with Faraj Sarkouhi", pp. 193-194, first published in *Adineh* no. 72. In the same context see the article "Traditional Music: A Dark Trade", Shamloo's sharp and smashing critique of the backward, narcotising music that is called "traditional music" in Iran, where he responds to old-worshipping views of the well-known composer Mohamad-Reza Lotfi.

Another of Shamloo's efforts, aimed especially at the younger generation, is his critical approach to official history and the great heroes worshipped throughout history. This brought him many enemies. To clear society's mind of anti-values, false heroes and models and superstition that justify oppression and exploitation, he stepped forward to take the necessary first steps. As he would say, "What am I to do? Don't touch anything, don't criticise any opinion because the heart of the believer is thin and brittle, and they get cold before you say ice? ... Is there not enough mis-education in *Shahnameh* [a 14th-century epic written by Ferdousi]? Are there not

enough weak-minded people who, to attest to their backward ideas, refer to the deceased master [Ferdousi] who says: [the following sayings are from *Shahnameh*]: Woman and Dragon are both better buried. The world is better purified of these two impurities. Or If you admire women, admire dogs. As a dog is better than a hundred devout women. Or If woman and her name were good. Her name would have been no-woman not woman. [The Farsi word for "woman" is *zan*, but *zan* also means "to beat", so here "no-woman" means "don't beat", and "woman" means "to beat".]... "You can say whatever you want. I say these are really shameful and must be erased from the mind of society. It is as if somebody became carved in the brains of these shameless and painless guardians of the culture of this land, and no one would ever dare to tell them that they have an eyebrow above their eyes [i.e. no one dared criticise them]....

"The truth, however, is not necessarily what has been whispered in our ears, and it can sometimes be the opposite of our inherited beliefs". (From the introduction to "The Meaning of Rend and Rendism" in Hafez's *Ghazal*, Spring 1991.)

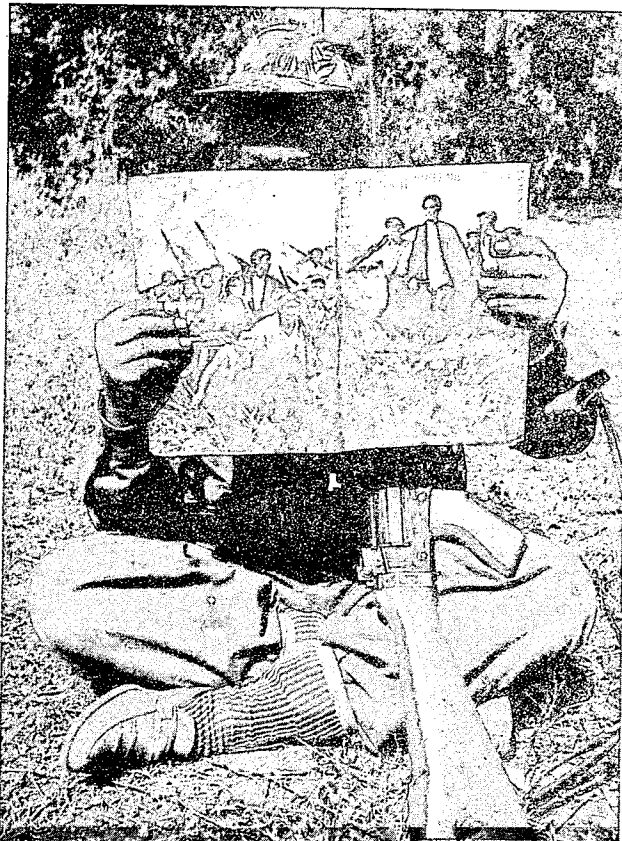
¹⁷ Hariri, *On Art and Literature*, p. 131.

¹⁸ Speech at the International Writers' Forum, Germany.

¹⁹ Paraphrased from Hariri. ■

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