

# Sadeq Hedayat

His work and his wondrous world

*Edited by*

**Homa Katouzian**

# Sadeq Hedayat

This is a new, comprehensive, critical study of Sadeq Hedayat's life and work based on the contributions to the international conference held in his centenary year at the University of Oxford. Most of the contributors are leading scholars of Iranian studies and/or comparative literature.

Hedayat is the author of *The Blind Owl*, the most famous Persian novel both in Iran and in Europe and America. Many of his short stories are in a critical realist style and are regarded as among some of the best written in twentieth century Iran. But his most original contribution was the use of modernist, more often surrealist, techniques in Persian fiction. Thus, he was not only a great writer, but also the founder of modernism in Persian fiction.

Yet both Hedayat's life and his death came to symbolize much more than leading writers would normally claim. His personality and psychological moods, his intellectual flare, his cultural values, his social rebelliousness towards virtually every established order in society including that of the opposition, and, ultimately, his sense of alienation from existence itself, placed him in a unique position among modern Iranian intellectuals. He emerged as an embodiment of the most sophisticated – but also the least patient and most radical – social and cultural Europeanism of his time. He still towers over modern Persian fiction. And he will remain a highly controversial figure so long as the clash of the modern and the traditional, the Persian and the European, and the religious and the secular, has not led to a synthesis and a consensus.

This volume addresses Hedayat's life and work in light of his multi-dimensional personality and intellectual legacy.

**Homa Katouzian** is a social scientist, historian, literary critic and poet. He is The Iran Heritage Foundation Research Fellow, St Antony's College and Member, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford, and editor of *Iranian Studies*, Journal of the International Society for Iranian Studies.

## **Iranian studies**

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**To the memory of Firoozeh Khazrai (1959–2005)**



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# Preface

The year 2003 was the centenary of the birth of Sadeq Hedayat, the best and most celebrated Iranian writer of the twentieth century. Various academic seminars and conferences, intellectual gatherings, and commemorative meetings were held across the world and in different languages.

This collection is based on papers presented to the Sadeq Hedayat's Centenary Conference held at St Antony's College, Oxford, in March 2003. Homa Katouzian convened the conference which was organized by the Iran Heritage Foundation and by the Oriental Institute and St Antony's College, both of the University of Oxford. Apart from the generous contribution of the Iran Heritage Foundation, the British Academy, Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute and Awards for All also sponsored the conference with generous additional funding. I am grateful to Hossein Shahidi, Syma Afshar and Roya Jahnbin for their invaluable assistance in organizing the conference.

Scholars from Canada, the USA, Britain, France and Iran presented papers and joined in the conference discussions. Some of the conference papers were subsequently withdrawn and two other papers – one by Homa Katouzian and another by Ramin Jahanbegloo – were added to the collection. The reason why it took longer than usual for the collection to be sent to press was that it was earmarked to be published in the ISIS Iranian Studies Series which in the meantime was being negotiated with Routledge.

Sadly, while the volume was thus awaiting publication we had to witness the tragic and untimely loss of our friend and colleague Firoozeh Khazrai, a young and promising teacher of Persian, literary critic and musicologist who continued to teach and write until the last moments of her terminal illness. It is to her memory that this volume is dedicated.

Homa Katouzian  
St Antony's College and the Oriental Institute  
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# 1 Introduction

## The wondrous world of Sadeq Hedayat

*Homa Katouzian*

Sadeq Hedayat was born on 17 February 1903 and died on 9 April 1951. He was descended from Rezaqoli Khan Hedayat, a notable nineteenth-century poet, historian and historian of Persian literature, and author of *Majm' al-Fosaha*, *Riyaz al-'Arefin* and *Rawza al-Safa-e Naseri*. Many members of his extended family were important state officials, political leaders and army generals, both in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including Mokhber al-Dawleh, Nayyer al-Molk I (Hedayat's grandfather), Sani' al-Dawleh, and Mokhber al-Saltaneh, who was prime minister between 1928 and 1933.

Hedayat is the author of *The Blind Owl*, the most famous Persian novel both in Iran and in Europe and America. Many of his short stories are in a critical realist style and are regarded as among some of the best written in twentieth-century Iran. But his most original contribution was the use of modernist, more often surrealist, techniques in Persian fiction. Thus he was not only a great writer, but also the founder of modernism in Persian fiction.

Yet both Hedayat's life and death came to symbolize much more than leading writers would normally claim. His personality and psychological moods, his intellectual flare, his cultural values, his social rebelliousness towards virtually every established order in society including that of the opposition, and, ultimately, his sense of alienation from existence itself, placed him in a unique position among modern Iranian intellectuals. He emerged as an embodiment of the most sophisticated – but also the least patient and most radical – social and cultural Europeanism of his time. He still towers over modern Persian fiction. And he will remain a highly controversial figure so long as the clash of the modern and the traditional, the Persian and the European, and the religious and the secular, has not led to a synthesis and a consensus.

Tragedy in Greek classical literature is a personal drama; comedy, a shared experience. It is lived and acted by the hero (or anti-hero) in silence and solitude. It ends up in failure, defeat, death. But it does so in full honour. It was lived – among others in the history of modern European art and literature – by Byron, Shelley, Keats; by Rousseau, Baudelaire, even Dostoevsky; by Beethoven, Schumann, Tchaikovsky. Many a genuine Persian mystic must have experienced something similar, though records of this are less precise. Hedayat lived and died a tragic life in this classical sense.

Having studied at the exclusive *St Louis* French missionary school in Tehran, Hedayat went on a state grant to study in Europe, spending a year in Belgium in 1926 to 1927, a year and a half in Paris in 1928 to 1929, two terms in Reims in 1929, and a year in Besançon in 1929 to 1930. He had been sent to study architecture with the obligation of working for the Ministry of Roads and Communications, but he did not like the subject and eventually (in April 1929) obtained permission to read French literature in a teacher training context. However, he did not finish the course and gave up his scholarship and returned home in the summer of 1930. This provides a clue to his personality in general, and his perfectionist outlook to performance in particular, which sometimes resulted in nervous paralysis.

Back in Tehran, Hedayat became the central figure among the *Rab'eh* or Group of Four, which included Mojtaba Minovi, Bozorg Alavi and Mas'ud Farzad, but had an outer belt, including Mohammad Moqaddam, Zabih Behruz and Sheen Partaw. They were all modern-minded and critical of the literary establishment both for its intellectual traditionalism and classicism, which they mocked as “grave digging” and “the science of fossils”, and for its seeming subservience to the state which, paradoxically, beat the drums of Aryanism and modernity. They were also resentful of the literary establishment’s contemptuous attitude towards themselves, and its exclusive hold over academic posts and publications. Decades after the formation of the *Rab'eh*, Farzad wrote the following epitaph for its members:

Hedayat died and Farzad was wasted (*mordar shod*)  
Alavi went leftwards, and was arrested (*gereftar shod*)  
Minovi took the right path and was rewarded (*puldar shod*),

which incidentally reflects the subsequent loss of friendship between Farzad and Minovi.

Back in the 1930s, Hedayat drifted between clerical jobs, and had a brush with the censors, until 1936, when he went to Bombay at the invitation of Sheen Partaw who was then an Iranian diplomat in that city. Having just returned from France in 1930, he wrote to his friend Taqi Razavi in Paris about his appointment in Bank Melli, then the central bank as well as a commercial bank, with a measure of contentment if not joy. Only eight months later he wrote again:

As far as my own work is concerned I'd better be silent. Every day, all the year round, I am being suffocated in the God-forsaken Bank. It's a filthy and mechanistic kind of existence.<sup>1</sup>

Shortly afterwards he wrote optimistically about the possibility of opening a bookshop; “It doesn't take much capital,” he wrote, “and we intend to *lancé* [*sic*] ourselves by means of *publicité* [*sic*].”<sup>2</sup> This daydream did not turn into reality and we find him writing in October 1932 that he has resigned from the Bank and is working at the Office of Trade. He did not last there either and was

unemployed for some time when he was given a translator's job in the Foreign Ministry. He left a few months later when his boss asked him why all the verbs in his translations were in the subjunctive mood. He said he could only think of subjunctive verbs in the afternoons. "Why don't you translate in the mornings, then?," his boss asked. "In the mornings I'm not in a translating mood at all", Hedayat answered.<sup>3</sup> It took him some time to find a clerical job in the state Construction Company. Predictably, he ran foul of the official censors and was made to give a pledge not to publish again. That was why when he later issued the first, limited, edition of *The Blind Owl* in Bombay, he wrote in the title-page that it was not for publication in Iran, predicting the possibility of a copy finding its way to Iran and falling into the hands of the censors.

He was unhappy and wished to travel abroad. In 1935 Jamalzadeh invited him to go to Geneva as his guest. He sold all his effects but he could not obtain foreign currency due to the official foreign exchange policy. A year later, on a visit to Tehran from Bombay, his writer friend Sheen Partaw who was a diplomat there invited him to go as his guest to Bombay, and so he resigned his job and went there in 1936.<sup>4</sup>

In his year in Bombay, he learned the ancient Iranian language Pahlavi among the Parsee Zoroastrian community, wrote a number of short stories and published *The Blind Owl* in fifty duplicated copies most of which, through Jamalzadeh, he distributed among friends outside Iran. From there he corresponded with his friends in Europe, especially with Jamalzadeh, Minovi and Jan Rypka, the Czech scholar of Persian literature, telling them about his new Pahlavi studies and complaining about his situation in life. In a letter to Rypka, for example, he wrote once:

I've been learning Pahlavi for some time ... though I don't think it would do me much good in this or the other world. Everyone tries to make a living by some sort of trade. For example, somebody draws the arc of the letter *nun* well, another memorises classical verse, and somebody else writes flattering articles, and till the end of their days they enjoy a living from what they do. I can now see that whatever I've so far been doing has been useless.<sup>5</sup>

He was back in Tehran in September 1937, although he had returned with great reluctance and simply because he did not feel justified in continuing to depend on his friend's hospitality in Bombay. He went back to the Construction Company for a short while, and then returned to Bank Melli, this time as a trainee. "I am busy," he wrote to Minovi, "adding and subtracting and doing some other dirty jobs, and if they're not satisfied, I get the sack."<sup>6</sup> But a year later he resigned his post and became a member of the newly instituted Office of Music, and an editor of its journal, *Majelleh-ye Musiqi*, *The Music Magazine*. It was literary work among a small group of relatively young and modern intellectuals, including Nima Yushij, founder of modernist Persian poetry. He might well have regarded this as the most satisfactory post he ever had.

It did not last long. After the Allied invasion of Iran and abdication of Reza Shah in 1941, the Office of Music and its journal were closed down, and Hedayat ended up as a translator at the College of Fine Arts, where he was to remain until the end of his life. He also became a member of the editorial board of Parviz Khanlari's modern literary journal, *Sokhan*, an unpaid but prestigious position. Even though the country had been occupied by foreign powers, there were high hopes and great optimism for democracy and freedom upon the collapse of absolute and arbitrary government. The new freedom – indeed licence – resulting from the Shah's abdication led to intense political, social and literary activities. The modernist trends were centred on the newly organized Tudeh Party, which was then a broad democratic front led by Marxist intellectuals, although by the end of the 1940s it had turned into an orthodox communist party. Hedayat did not join the party even in the beginning, but had sympathy for it and had many friends among Tudeh intellectuals, including Bozorg Alavi, Khalil Maleki and Ehsan Tabari, as well as younger men such as Jalal Al-e Ahmad. For a time, he also wrote for *Peyam-e Naw*, the journal of VOKS, the Society of Irano-Soviet cultural relations.

But the party's support for the Soviet-inspired Azerbaijan revolt in 1946, which led to intense conflicts within it, and the sudden collapse of the revolt a year later, deeply upset and alienated Hedayat from the movement.<sup>7</sup> He had always been a severe and open critic of established Iranian politics and cultural traditions, and his break with radical intellectuals made him a virtual émigré in his own land. It made no small a contribution to the depression in the late 1940s, which led to his suicide in 1951. A measure of his growing anger, frustration and depression may be gauged from many of his letters of that period. He wrote to Jamalzadeh in 1947:

I'm very tired and lack interest in everything. I somehow go through the days, and every night – after soaking myself in drink – bury myself, and spit on my grave as well. But the other miracle that I perform is that I get up in the morning and start all over again.<sup>8</sup>

A year later, in October 1948, he explained to Jamalzadeh that he had “lost the habit of writing” and was “sick and tired of everything”. It was a reflection of his total isolation when he added that “besides, in our life, environment and everything else there's come a terrifying rift such that we can no longer understand each other's language”. He then burst out:

I neither have the stomach to complain and belly-ache, nor can I deceive myself, nor have I got the guts to commit suicide. It's just a kind of vomity condemnation which I have to bear in a filthy, shameless, fucking environment.<sup>9</sup>

For some time his close friend Hasan Shahid-Noura'i who was serving as a diplomat in France had been encouraging him to go to Paris. There were signs

that his depression was deepening day by day. He was extremely unhappy with his life in Tehran, not least with his life among intellectuals, many of whom were regularly describing him as a “petty bourgeois demoralizer”, and his work as “black literature”. Others were publishing books and articles against him in the guise of biographical essays and literary criticism. He wrote of them and their works to Shahid-Nura’i:

One must ready oneself literally for anything in this shameless and stinking environment. On the other hand, they’re absolutely right. Whatever they may say and do [to me] isn’t enough. When one’s surrounded by the rabble and sons-of-whores, and doesn’t join them in thieving, duplicity, fraud, sycophancy and lack of shame, one’s naturally guilty. And if he doesn’t like it, he can lump it.<sup>10</sup>

Here in these letters, beneath and beyond Hedayat’s apparent cynicism, iconoclasm and so on, we may observe, not far from the surface, his anger and despair, his acute sensitivity, his immeasurable suffering, his continuously darkening view of his own country and its people, and his condemnation of life as it is, rather than it ought to be. Through the letters perhaps more than his fiction one may see the three faces of his predicament: the personal tragedy, the social isolation and the universal alienation. “Thank God you’re familiar with the black dog of my mood and know that I find letter-writing a tremendous effort, and that the inertia is unintentional.”<sup>11</sup>

I don’t just regard myself as a subject of the kingdom of the Rose and Urine [Gol-o-Bawl; cf. Gol-o-Bolbol]; I also feel like a man condemned . . . I only wonder what a shameless son-of-a-whore I must have been to be able to carry my own *carcasse* [*sic*] in this son-of-a-whore set-up till this moment.<sup>12</sup>

Again, “What an accursed, base and rotten country we’ve got, and what malevolent and infernal people it has! I feel that all my life I’ve been a plaything in the hands of whores and sons-of-whores.”<sup>13</sup> And again, “Throughout life we have been a *bête pourchassé* [*sic*]. Now the animal has been *traquée* [*sic*] . . . only a few *reflexes* [*sic*] stupidly go on doing their work. And our crime is that we’ve been living for too long.”<sup>14</sup> There: the personal, the social and the universal.

The specific contribution of Hedayat’s own country and society to the agitation and alienation of his sensitive soul is not in doubt, but the wider universal predicament was perhaps more deeply ingrained. Hedayat wrote two of his most important works in the mid- to late 1940s when he was regularly corresponding with Shahid-Nura’i, and much the same that may be observed in his letters may also be discerned from these two imaginative works. In his *Peyam-e Kafka* (*The Message of Kafka*), which is largely his own sober, measured and studied message in the guise of a review of Kafka’s life and literature, there is neither a mention nor even an allusion to Iran and the Iranians; “the message” is global, even universal. *Tup-e Morvari*, *The Morvari Canon*, on the other hand, is

profusely uncomplimentary to Iran and the Iranians, where the erstwhile (romantic) nationalist author of *Parvin the Sasanian Girl*, *Maziyar* and so on leaves little to the imagination about the unhappy aspects of Iranian culture and history. But the main message of that black satire is still global, universal: it condemns all religion; all politics; all existence. Hedayat laughs through this, and shouts through the other. Yet both *Peyam-e Kafka* and *Tup-e Morvari* – which are some of his best literature, and his literature on life, and on his own life – reflect and expose the same anger, the same despair, the same hatred.<sup>15</sup>

Hedayat went to Paris in December 1950 and committed suicide four months later. He was hoping to find peace in Europe and live there for as long as he could. He had very little money and post-war Europe was expensive everywhere. His friend Shahid-Nura'i had an illness from which he never recovered; he died virtually on the same day as Hedayat. In any case, he could not get him a clerical job in his own office as Hedayat had expected. There was no question of obtaining a French work permit; he was even finding it difficult to extend his visitor's visa. He tried to go to London or Geneva where his friends Farzad and Jamalzadeh lived and worked but did not succeed. He tried but did not manage to extend his sick leave from the College of Fine Arts.

Suddenly, his brother-in-law, General Razmara, prime minister and chief of the army, was assassinated in Tehran amid popular rejoicing, confronting his family with a great catastrophe, and robbing them of any special social and psychological support they might have given him at that moment of despair. Two weeks later, on 8 April 1953, he took sleeping tablets and turned on the gas cooker in his flatlet. Contrary to lingering legends he had not gone to Paris to commit suicide. He had gone there to avoid it. In the end he found every possible door securely locked except the prospect of immediate return to his old situation in Tehran now amid the catastrophe which had befallen his family. He took his life.<sup>16</sup>

In a letter which he wrote in French to a friend in Paris four years before his final visit, he said:

The point is not for me to rebuild my life. When one has lived the life of animals which are constantly being chased, what is there to rebuild ... I have taken my decision. One must struggle in this cataract of shit until disgust with living suffocates us. In *Paradise Lost* Reverend Father Gabriel tells Adam "Despair and die", or words to that effect ... I am too disgusted with everything to make any effort; one must remain in the shit until the end.<sup>17</sup>

Ultimately, what he called "the cataract of shit" proved too unbearable for him to remain in it until the end.

Hedayat's fiction, including novels, short stories, drama and satire, written between 1930 and 1946, comprises *Parvin Dokhtar-e Sasan* (Parvin the Sasanian Girl), *Afsaneh-ye Afarinsh* (The Legend of Creation), "*Al-bi'tha(t) al-Islamiya ila'l-Bilad al-Afranjiya*" (Islamic Mission to European Cities), *Zنده beh Gur*, (Buried Alive), *Aniran* (Non-Iranian), *Maziyar*, *Seh Qatreh Khun*

(Three Drops of Blood), “*Alaviyeh Khanom*” (Mistress Alaviyeh), *Sayeh Roshan* (Chiaroscuro) *Vagh-vagh Sahab* (Mr. Bow-Vow), *Buf-e Kur* (the Blind Owl), “*Sampingé*” and “*Lunatique*” (both in French), *Sag-e Velgard* (Stray Dog), *Hajji Aqa*, *Velengari* (Mucking About), and *Tup-e Morvari* (The Morvari Canon).

His literary studies – including folklore, essays, travelogues, translations and reviews – written between 1921 and 1950, consist of *Roba'iyat-e Khayyam*, (Khayyam's Quatrains), *Ensan va Haivan* (Man and Animal), “Marg” (Death), *Favayed-e Giyah-khari* (The Benefits of Vegetarianism, 1927), “La Magie en Perse”, *Isfahan Nesf-e Jahan* (Seeing Isfahan), *Awsaneh* (folktales and popular beliefs), *Neirangestan* (also popular beliefs and rites, and superstitious practices), *Gojasteh Abalish* (Abalish the Damned), *Karnameh-ye Ardeshir-e Babakan* (The Record of Artaxerxes son of Babak), *Gozaresh-e Gaman Shekan* (Report of the Renegade), and *Zand-e Vahman Yasn* (Commentary on *Vahman Yasn*), all of them translations from the Pahlavi texts; “*Goruh-e Mahkumin*” (Kafka's “Penal Colony”, translated with Hasan Qa'emiyani), “Maskh” (Kafka's “Metamorphosis”, translated with Hasan Qa'emiyani), Jean Paul Sartre's short story “The Wall”, *Peyam-e Kafka* (The Message of Kafka), and numerous folktales, short translations and reviews posthumously gathered by Hasan Qa'emiyani in *Neveshteh-ha-ye Parakandeh-ye Sadeq Hedayat* (Sadeq Hedayat's Scattered Writings, 1955).

His published letters, which make up an important part of his literature, are numerous, and are to be found in *Sokhan*, April–May 1955, Mahmud Katira'i (ed.) *Ketab-e, Sadeq Hedyat*, Mohammad Baharlu (ed.) *Nameh-ha-ye Sadeq Hedayat*, Bijan Assadipour (ed.) *Daftar-ha-ye Honar*, vol. 6, 1996, and Nasser Pakdaman (ed.) *Hashtad o daw Nameh-ye Sadeq Hedayat beh Hasan Shahid-Nura'i*.

Commenting briefly on Hedayat's prose, in its basic elements, his prose is based on Jamalzadeh, but it has its own distinct form, and it is suitably adjusted to the content, be it psycho-fiction, satirical fiction, critical fiction, essay, criticism and translation. It is plain, easy to read and understand, shorn of literary embellishments, using common expressions where appropriate, and avoiding complex words of Arabic origin. The most developed Persian prose styles since the Second World War are syntheses (to different degrees) of contributions made by Dehkhoda, Jamalzadeh, Kasravi and Hedayat. Yet occasionally (and sometimes frequently) Hedayat slips in his grammar and use of words. This is evidently more frequent in his psycho-fictions than in other works – and most striking in *The Blind Owl* – sometimes giving the impression that, in its formal presentation, the work has been drafted hastily; the impression that he wrote many of his psycho-fictional works quickly, so to speak, to get them off his chest. In his literary devices, the lyrical forms or figures of speech, Hedayat is particularly good at the use of metaphor and imagery, which are at their best in *The Blind Owl*. But he does use other literary devices as well.<sup>18</sup>

I have classified Hedayat's fiction into four analytically distinct categories, although there is some inevitable overlapping between them: romantic nationalist fiction, critical realist stories, satire and psycho-fiction.<sup>19</sup>

First, the romantic nationalist fiction. The historical dramas *Parvin* and *Mazyar*, and the short stories “The Shadow of the Mongol” (Sayeh-ye Moghol),

and “The Last Smile” (Akharin Labkhand) – are on the whole simple in sentiment and raw in technique. They reflect sentiments arising from the Pan-Persianist ideology and cult which swept over the Iranian modernist elite after the First World War. “The Last Smile” is the most mature work of this kind. Hedayat’s explicit drama is not highly developed, and he quickly abandoned the genre along with nationalist fiction. But many of his critical realist short stories could easily be adapted for the stage with good effect.

In his contribution to this volume, Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi offers a theoretical discussion of the features and aspects of Hedayat’s nationalism and modernism within their social and historical context, in a period where the high tide of both romantic nationalism and pseudo-modernism had risen to become official state ideology, repelling intellectuals like Hedayat in its crudeness and illiberality, although they never quite gave up their nostalgia about the real and imagined glories of ancient Persia.<sup>20</sup>

Ramin Jahanbegloo argues further in his chapter that an outstanding feature of Hedayat’s modernism is his secular critique of Iranian society. He believes that Hedayat established a critical approach that was almost unique in the period between the two World Wars, and that his modern search for truth avoided any romantic glorification of leftist ideology.<sup>21</sup>

Traces of sentimentalist views of the ancient past (and denigration of the present) will be found in many of Hedayat’s other works, including his psycho-fictions. In this context, Houra Yavari’s chapter compares *The Blind Owl* with *Parvin the Sasanian Girl*, although she still views *The Blind Owl* as essentially a psycho-fiction exploring and reflecting a subjective world, rather than a nationalist fiction promoting the Pan-Persianist ideology.<sup>22</sup>

A prominent aspect of Hedayat’s modernity was his commitment to vegetarianism, his love for animals and his hatred of cruelty towards them. In his lengthy contribution to this volume, Hushang Philsooph puts forward a comprehensive study of Hedayat’s works on the subject within the context of his life and in a European as well as an Iranian setting.<sup>23</sup> The discussion is extended by Homa Katouzian’s analysis of Hedayat’s short story “Stray Dog”, where the realistic tale of cruelty to a lost pedigree dog echoes the strangled cry of an alienated human being.<sup>24</sup> Nasrin Rahimieh’s contribution, on the other hand, views Hedayat’s translations of Kafka and his essay on Kafka as “part and parcel of his continuous search for literary and cultural revivification and a transition to modernity”, such that he became the very embodiment of a culture at the crossroads between what it believed to be its own historical stagnation and a modernity that was native to Europe only.<sup>25</sup>

The second category of Hedayat’s fictions which I have suggested, his critical realist works, are numerous and often excellent, the best examples being “*Alaviyeh Khanom*” (Mistress Alaviyeh) which is a comedy in the classical sense of the term, “*Talab-e Amorzesh*” (Asking for Absolution), “*Mohallel*” (The Legalizer), and “*Mordeh-khor-ha*” (The Ghouls). To varying degrees, both satire and irony are used in the stories, though few could be accurately described as satirical fiction.

They tend to reflect aspects of the lives and traditional beliefs of the contemporary urban lower middle classes with ease and accuracy. However, contrary to views long held, they are neither “about the poor or downtrodden”, nor do they display sympathy for their types and characters. Indeed, among the author’s works, they contain the least explicit judgement. It is clear that the attitude and way of life of the types in this group of his works are alien to the author’s own class culture and social and intellectual outlook, but it is also clear that, to the people whose lives are thus fictionally dissected and exposed, life is very much worth living. Wretchedness and superstition are combined with sadness, joy, hypocrisy and, occasionally, criminal behaviour. Characters are common; situations, realistic; language, authentic. This was in the tradition set by Jamalzadeh (though he had more sympathy for his characters), enhanced by Hedayat, and passed on to Chubak and Al-e Ahmad in their earlier works.<sup>26</sup>

Coming to the third category of Hedayat’s works, Hedayat’s satirical fiction is rich and often highly effective. He was a master of wit, and wrote both verbal and dramatic satire. It takes the form of short story, novel as well as short and long anecdotes. Almost invariably, all of his satirical fiction ridicules one of the three powerful establishments (with occasional overlapping): The literary establishment; the religious establishment; and the political establishment. The author applies his knowledge of these establishments and their ways, his own negative personal judgement of them, and his remarkable wit in producing fiction, which is always funny and sometimes hilarious. They hit hard at their subjects usually with effective subtlety, though sometimes outright lampooning, denunciation and invective reveal the depth of the author’s personal involvement in his fictional satire.

The literary establishment is mocked and ridiculed, for example, in the “*Ghaziyeh-ye Ekhtelat-Numcheh*” (The Case of the Gabbing), effectively and – allowing for the inevitable elements of caricature – with reasonable accuracy. In the short story “The Patriot”, even the names of real-life models of the leading literary-political figures may be deduced both from the story and from their fictional forms. Hedayat’s satirical fiction is paralleled by some of his reviews of the literary establishment’s works – full as they are of merciless jibes – such as his reviews of *Farhang-e Farhangestan* (the Dictionary of the Literary Academy) – and of a contemporary edition of *Khamseh-ye Nezami* (Nezami’s Five Romances). The damage is at its worst when he exposes the authors’ silly mistakes.

The best example of Hedayat’s religious satire is “Islamic Mission to European Cities”, although the subject comes up often enough in his satirical as well as critical realist fiction. It is, at once, a mockery of the contemporary cultural underdevelopment of Islamic lands, and an indictment of the motives of some worldly religious types.

*Hajji Aqa* is the longest and most explicit of Hedayat’s satires on the political establishment. Superficial appearances and critical propaganda notwithstanding, it is much less a satire on the ways of the people of the bazaar and much more of a merciless attack on leading conservative politicians. Indeed, the real-life models for the Hajji of the title were supplied by two important old-school (and,

as it happens, by no means worst) politicians. Firoozeh Khazrai's chapter on *Hajji Aqa* in this volume is a close study of Hedayat's other novel, his best political satire, which has been understudied in European languages, although at the time of its publication it was hailed by Iranian critics as a great piece of literary social criticism.<sup>27</sup>

In a couple of his other political satires Hedayat uses the technique of allegory, the best example being "*Qaziyeh-ye Khar Dajjal*" (The Case of Anti-Christ's Donkey) which is a damning satirical allegory on political events in the country between 1921 and 1941. *The Morvari Canon*, his last satire, brings together all three – political, literary and religious – strands with brilliance as well as vehemence, reflecting more even than his former satires the author's intense anger and alienation.<sup>28</sup>

Hedayat would have had a lasting and prominent position in the annals of Persian literature on account of what I have mentioned so far. What has given him his unique place, nevertheless, is his psycho-fiction, of which *The Blind Owl* is the best and purest example. This work and "The Three Drops of Blood" are modernist in style, using techniques of French *symbolisme* and surrealism in literature, of surrealism in modern European art, and of expressionism in the contemporary European films, including the deliberate confusion of time and space, which had been anticipated in one or two Renaissance and post-Renaissance works such as Rabelais' *Gargantua* and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. But most of the other psycho-fictional stories – e.g. "Zنده beh Gur" (Buried Alive), "Arusak-e Posht-e Pardeh" (Puppet Behind The Curtain), "Bon-bast" (Dead End), "Tarik-khaneh" (Dark Room) and "Stray Dog" – use realistic techniques in presenting psycho-fictional stories.

The appellation "psycho-fictional", coined by this author in the mid-1970s to describe this particular genre in Hedayat's literature, does not render the same sense as is usually conveyed by the well-worn concept and category of "the psychological novel". Rather, it reflects the essentially subjective nature of the stories, which brings together the psychological, the ontological and the meta-physical in an indivisible whole.<sup>29</sup> It comes close to Jung's, rather than the Freudians', view of the relationship between psychology and literature. Jung dismisses fiction consciously based on psycho-analytical models as being somewhat artificial and uninteresting, and focuses on the unintended influence of psychology in the poetry and fiction. Some postmodernist critics, notably Jacques Lacan, have taken a similar view of the subject, though the seminal contribution of Jung has seldom been acknowledged.

It was noted that Hedayat's critical realist stories are about the lives, not the people of his own class and culture, but of those of the traditional urban lower middle classes, and they contain the least explicit judgement by their narrators and the author. On the other hand, most of his psycho-fiction is about the people of modern middle classes and contain sometimes very strong judgements about their ways, values, morals and behaviour.<sup>30</sup> In his analysis in this volume of women in Hedayat's fiction, Homa Katouzian shows how the view of women in the psycho-fictions is essentially different from the critical realist stories.<sup>31</sup>

Hedayat's psycho-fictional stories are macabre – sometimes, as in *The Blind Owl*, reflecting the primeval chaos – and, when the story ends, at least a man or a woman, or even a cat or a dog, dies, commits suicide, is killed or otherwise disappears from existence. But there is much more to them than a simple plot of abject failure. There is crushing, insufferable fear without clear reason; there is determinism of the hardest, least tractable and most fatal variety; there is sin without Sinai, guilt without transgression; there is Fall with no hope of redemption; there is punishment without crime; there is vehement condemnation of the mighty of the earth and the heavens.

Most human beings are no better than *rajjaleh* (rabble), and the very few who are better fail miserably to rise up to reach perfection or redemption. Even the man who tries to “kill” his *nafs*, to mortify his flesh, or destroy his ego, in the short story “The Man Who Killed His Ego”, ends up by killing himself; that is, not by liberating but by annihilating his soul. Women are either *lakkateh* (harlot), or they are *Fereshteh*; that is, angelic apparitions who or which wilt and disintegrate upon appearance, as in the case of “the ethereal woman” in *The Blind Owl*, and “the puppet” in “Puppet behind the Curtain”, though this is only true of women in the psycho-fictions, women of similar cultural background to the author, not those of lower classes in his critical realist stories. There is the almighty fear of “an inherited burden”. There are hints – never quite open – at incest and/or incestuous desires. There is the alienation of the man from women, whom he does not know at all and has never loved in any successful contact of the flesh; women whom the psycho-fictional anti-heroes despise for what they believe they are, and long to love and cherish for what they think they ought to be. “The rabble”, both man and woman, are filthy – treacherous, hypocritical, disloyal, superficial, profit-seeking, money-grubbing, slavish, undignified and ignorant – because they are far from perfect.<sup>32</sup>

Yet the effect is by no means entirely negative. There may not be any hope through the pages of these fascinating, absorbing and gripping stories, but there is an ideal which reconstructs itself through the destruction. Death may be offered as the answer, but it is offered in a plea for unrealized love, warmth, friendship, fellow feeling, faithfulness, honour, authenticity, integrity, decency, knowledge, art, beauty; for whatever humans have eagerly and hopefully striven for and never quite realized. The large and seemingly unbridgeable gap between Appearance and Reality, between the Real and the Reasonable, between what there is and what there ought to be, between man and God, wears out the man and leads him to death as the only honest way out. Yet it is precisely that gap which he wishes to close, and that honesty which leaves him no choice.

The plot of *The Blind Owl*, as its psycho-fictional content, is an advanced synthesis of Hedayat's earlier psycho-fictional stories, but especially “Puppet behind the Curtain” “The Three Drops of Blood”, “Buried Alive”, “The Man Who Mortified His Flesh” (or The Man Who Killed His Ego), which – once again, in parts – finds expression in later works such as “Stray Dog”, “Dark Room”, “Dead End” and “Tomorrow”, and the two short stories he wrote in French, *Lunatique* and *Sampingé*.<sup>33</sup>

The novel is in two parts. Part 1 is the “contemporary” story of the narrator and the angel, who wilts and dies upon appearance, and is cut up by the narrator and buried with the aid of the old hunchback, the narrator’s fallen self. This, in Part 2, turns out to be an idealized summary re-experience of the story of the narrator and the harlot – the angel’s fallen self – in the “ancient past”, which ends up with the narrator, disguised as the wretched old man, killing her by pushing the same kitchen knife “somewhere in her body”, either – if the copulation has been complete – in order to destroy the sacred source which he has thus violated, or else as a phallic instrument to make up for his failure. He “returns” to the “contemporary” world to find the old hunchback running away with the Ray jar – the symbol of continuity – and feeling the weight of a dead corpse on his chest. The man fails to become perfect; the woman fails to become an angel. There is no perfect love of the flesh; and there is no hope of sublime elevation.<sup>34</sup> Given both the psycho-fictional quality of the story as well as the use of modernist techniques in presenting it, it is naturally open to various readings and interpretations, as it has indeed been to a few so far, and is evident from a number of chapters in this volume. The rich imagery, other literary devices and cultural symbolisms make it possible to offer even more diverse interpretations than otherwise. But many of these tend to represent aspects of the work in its various layers, not the story as a whole.

Apart from the above brief, two equally interesting interpretations of *The Blind Owl* are offered in this volume. Houra Yavari’s interpretation, as already noted, combines an acute analysis of the psycho-fictional qualities of the novel with an account of its affinities with Hedayat’s nationalist fiction, notably *Parvin*.<sup>35</sup> Marta Simidchieva, on the other hand, ably explores through the novel “the legitimization of modern Iranian literature, which the author achieves by examining its relationship to the classical legacy”. She argues that *The Blind Owl* can also be read as a parable of cultural reform, which examines the nature of the transition from traditional to modern art.<sup>36</sup>

Much speculation has been made on the possible sources and “affinities” of *The Blind Owl*.<sup>37</sup> To search for and discover identifiable sources for works of art is an ancient occupation, and the discovery of such sources does not by itself reduce the value of a piece of work in the slightest. Some great world literature has identifiable sources and precedents, including Ferdawsi’s *Shahnameh*, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Racine’s *Le Cid* and Goethe’s *Faust*. It cannot be doubted that modern Persian fiction as such as founded by Jamazadeh and Hedayat owes a great deal to modern Western fiction, itself going back no more than three centuries, since such fiction writing did not exist in Persian before the twentieth century. Kafka, Sartre, Nerval, Poe, among others, even Buddhist traditions, have been named as sources for *The Blind Owl*. The Buddhist hypothesis does not bear examination. *The Blind Owl* was first published (in a limited edition) in 1936, before Sartre’s first work, *La Nausée*. Hedayat became aware of Kafka and his works long after that. There may be “affinities” with them as also with Nerval, Rilke, Poe and many others; there are occasionally resemblances of ideas and expression, and in the case of Rilke’s *Notebook* the resemb-

lance of a passage in *The Blind Owl* is uncanny; but none of them may be described as a source.<sup>38</sup> Following his successful monograph, Michael Beard in his contribution to this volume forcefully discusses such possible influences in *The Blind Owl* of Western traditions, while Bhabram Meghdadi presents a comparative analysis of *The Blind Owl* and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*.<sup>39</sup>

*The Blind Owl* is a modernist novel. Written in the general framework of modern Western fiction and using modernist techniques, it addresses matters which are Persian, Western as well as universal. It is a contribution to world literature based on both Persian and European cultural and literary traditions.

As a man born into an extended family of social and intellectual distinction, a modern as well as a modernist intellectual, a gifted writer steeped in the most advanced Persian as well as European culture, and with a psyche which demanded the highest standards of moral and intellectual excellence, Hedayat was bound to carry, as he did, an enormous burden which very few individuals could suffer with equanimity, especially as he bore the effects of the clash of the old and the new, and the Persian and the European, such that few Iranians have experienced. He lived an unhappy life; and died an unhappy death. It was perhaps the inevitable cost of the literature which he bequeathed to humanity.

## Notes

- 1 See Homa Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat, The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer* (London and New York, paperback edition, 2002): 49.
- 2 See Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*: 50.
- 3 Conversations with Jamalzadeh, June 1977. See further, Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*: 4.
- 4 See further for source and documentation detail, Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*: 4.
- 5 Katouzian, *Hedayat*, p. 57, quoted from the letter in full published in Mahmud Katira'i, *Ketab-e Sadeq Hedayat* (Tehran, 1970). For an extended account of Hedayat's visit to India see Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*, and "Sadeq Hedayat dar Hend" in Homa Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat va Marg-e Nevisandeh* (Tehran, 3rd impression, 2003).
- 6 See Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*: 62; Katira'i, *Ketab*: 127.
- 7 See Homa Katouzian, *Tanz va Tanzineh-ye Hedayat* (Stockholm, 2003), Introduction and ch. 8; idem. "Nameh-ha va mas'aleh-ye Hedayat", *Iran Nameh*, XIX, 4, autumn 2001: 535–549. See further, N. Pakdaman (ed.), *Sadeq Hedayat, Hashtad-o-daw Nameh beh Hasan Shahid-Nura'i* (Paris, 2000).
- 8 See the hitherto unpublished letter in Katouzian, *Tanz va Tanzineh*: 255–256.
- 9 See Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*: 219–220; the author's photocopy of the letter by courtesy of Jamalzadeh.
- 10 See Katouzian, "Nameh-ha va mas'aleh": 543; Pakdaman, *Hashtad-o-daw Nameh*: 123–125.
- 11 See Katouzian, "Nameh-ha va mas'aleh": 541; Pakdaman, *Hashtad-o-daw Nameh*: 52–53.
- 12 See Katouzian, "Nameh-ha va mas'aleh": 543; Pakdaman, *Hashtad-o-daw Nameh*: 123–125.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 See Katouzian, "Nameh-ha va mas'aleh": 545; Pakdaman, *Hashtad-o-daw Nameh*: 195, 196.
- 15 See Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*: 11 and 12; *Tanz va Tanzineh*: 7.

- 16 For a full account of Hedayat's suicide see Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*: 13; idem. "Khod-koshi-ye Sadeq Hedayat" in *Sadeq Hedayat va Marg-e Nevisandeh*,
- 17 See *Sadeq Hedayat, Hashtad-o-daw Nameh beh Hasan Shahid-Nura'i*: 21.
- 18 For an extended discussion of language and literature in *The Blind Owl*, see Homa Katouzian, *Darbarez-ye Buf-e Kur-e Hedayat*, a monograph on *The Blind Owl* (Tehran, 3rd impression, 2003): 8.
- 19 For an extended discussion of these four categories of Hedayat's fiction, see "Sadeq Hedayat va Marg-e Nevisandeh" in Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat va Marg-e Nevisandeh*.
- 20 See below, Chapter 9, Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Narrative identity in the works of Hedayat and his contemporaries".
- 21 See below, Chapter 11, Ramin Jahanbegloo, "Hedayat and the experience of modernity".
- 22 See below, Chapter 4, Houra Yavari, "*The Blind Owl*: Present in the past or the story of a dream".
- 23 See below, Chapter 12, Hushang Philsooph, "Hedayat, vegetarianism and modernity".
- 24 See below, Chapter 13, Homa Katouzian, "Man and animal in Hedayat's 'Stray Dog'".
- 25 See below, Chapter 10, Nasrin Rahimieh, "Hedayat's translations of Kafka and the logic of Iranian modernity".
- 26 See *ibid.* and Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*.
- 27 See below, Chapter 8, Firoozeh Khazrai, "Satire in *Hajji Aqa*".
- 28 See *ibid.* and Katouzian, "Sadeq Hedayat va Marg-e Nevisandeh", and *Tanz va Tanzineh*.
- 29 I introduced the term and the category first in "Sadeq Hedayat's 'The Man Who Killed His Passionate Self'", *Iranian Studies*, summer 1977.
- 30 See "Ravan-dastan-ha-ye Sadeq Hedayat" in Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat va Marg-e Nevisandeh*, and below, Chapter 7, Homa Karouzian, "Women in Hedayat's fiction".
- 31 See Katouzian, "Women in Hedayat's fiction".
- 32 See n. 23 above and Katouzian *Darbarez-ye Buf-e Kur-e Hedayat*.
- 33 See *ibid.*; Katouzian, "Ravan-dastan-ha-ye Sadeq Hedayat" and *Sadeq Hedayat*.
- 34 See n. 25 above, but especially *Darbarez-ye Buf-e Kur-e Hedayat*: 5.
- 35 See Yavari, "Present in the past or the story of a dream".
- 36 See below, Chapter 3, Marta Simidchieva, "Sadeq Hedayat and the classics: the case of *The Blind Owl*".
- 37 See e.g. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, "Hedayat-e Buf-e Kur", *Elm o Zendegi*, January 1952; Hassan Kamshad, *Modern Persian Prose Literature* (Cambridge, 1966); Manutchehr Mohandessi, "Hedayat and Rilke", *Comparative Literature*, vol. 23, 1971; Michael Beard, *Hedayat's Blind Owl as a Western Novel* (Princeton, NJ: 1990); Michael Hillmann (ed.), *Hedayat's "The Blind Owl", Forty Years After* (Austin, TX, 1978).
- 38 For an extended discussion of the above points see Katouzian, *Darbarez-ye Buf-e Kur-e Hedayat*: 6 and 7.
- 39 See below, Chapter 5, Michael Beard, "Influence as debt: *The Blind Owl* in the literary marketplace"; Chapter 6, Bahram Meghdadi, "*The Blind Owl* and *The Sound and the Fury*".

## 2 Sadeq Hedayat's centenary

### Report of events in Tehran, and personal recollections

*Jahangir Hedayat*

This chapter is in two parts: first I shall present a brief report of events organized in Tehran on the occasion of the centenary of the birth of Sadeq Hedayat, and following that I shall cite some of my personal reminiscences of Hedayat, as a nephew who was particularly close to him.

#### **Events and activities**

It is probably the first time in the history of Persian literature that commemorative ceremonies are held in various parts of the world for a contemporary writer. Apart from events in Iran, almost simultaneously, commemorative meetings are being held at Texas and Portland Universities in the USA, a solemn gathering at his tomb in Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris, and now this international conference at the University of Oxford.

Hedayat might take pride in the fact that the various memorial gatherings and ceremonies held in Iran were exclusively civil, not official, events, organized and supported as they were by writers, poets, intellectuals, university students, publishers and ordinary people. It may even be said that, apart from the fact that there was no official event, not even by any university authority, to mark Hedayat's centenary, there were signs on one or two occasions of official disapproval of the civil events, it being reflected in certain restrictive measures taken to inhibit their taking place. But perhaps Hedayat would have been happy for all this, because he always shunned officialdom, and was closer to his reading public than to any political or literary establishment.

To mention the events chronologically, first there was an exhibition of Hedayat's photos at Seyhun Gallery, which attracted much public attention. In addition, a conference was held at the University of Water and Power Industry, where, in addition to a number of papers delivered by scholars and academics, films about Hedayat were shown and excerpts from his writings were read aloud, followed by discussion. It was the first event of its kind at Water and Power University within the past thirty years.

Following that, the Hedayat Heritage Society created a special site on Sadeq Hedayat at [sokhan.com](http://sokhan.com). This included a short biography, a bibliography of his writings, and the text of most of his stories. In addition, a contest had been

launched for the best short story written specifically to mark Hedayat's centenary. The stories sent by the participants in the contest were reviewed and assessed by a panel of professional assessors, in time for 17 February 2003, the centenary day of Hedayat's birth, of which more below. The winners were awarded a statuette of the writer or a commendation tablet, depending on the merit of their work.

Another event was a gathering at Tehran Hall of Culture where talks were delivered, animation shows were displayed, and a panel of experts answered questions from the audience. The Iranian Writers Association organized a meeting of its own in commemoration of the author's birth and appreciation of his contribution to modern Persian literature. They did not manage to obtain assistance from the civic authorities for organizing this event, no civic cultural centre being willing to provide the venue, perhaps because the Tehran Hall of Culture had been shut down after the aforementioned meeting was held there. The programme was eventually held at Sami Art Gallery in Sa'adat-abad. Although space was limited and facilities not quite adequate, the meeting was attended by a large number of enthusiasts, many of whom had to stand outside in the Gallery courtyard. The proceedings included a dramatic show and talks given by literary critics, followed by general discussion. There were also readings of excerpts from *The Blind Owl*.

The series of meetings and events in Tehran reached its climax at the ceremonial gathering on 17 February to celebrate Hedayat's birthday. Arasbaran Cultural Centre (in Tehran) had been approached to provide the venue and they had agreed. They had even taken steps to provide posters, leaflets and bookstalls. Later it turned out that they wished to interfere seriously with the programme, changing its title, reducing its time, and allowing some of the time to speakers provided by themselves. This was unacceptable. We decided to withdraw our offer to hold the commemorative meeting there or at any other civic centre belonging to Tehran City Council. Fortunately, the House of Iranian Artists, an independent cultural centre, offered its facilities for the event. The meeting was addressed by a number of speakers and an animation show was screened. A tape of the voice of the late Mas'ud Farzad, poet and Hedayat's intimate friend, speaking about him, was played, and the celebrations ended with the award of prizes to the winners of the short story contest mentioned above.

Shortly afterwards I gave a talk at a meeting held at Shahid Rajaei University at the invitation of its organizers. Following that, I also received an invitation from the students of Khajeh Nasir Tusi University to talk on a similar occasion there, but at the last moment those in charge raised objections to the programme and cancelled the meeting.

So much for meetings and events. The centenary celebrations also included literary activities regarding Hedayat's life and works. In particular, the album of his postcards to his family and relatives when he was a student in Paris was published under the title *Ta Marz-ha-ye Enzeva (Up to the Reaches of Isolation)*. Another first-time publication, an album of his paintings and drawings entitled *Ahu-ye Tanha (The Lonely Gazelle)*, though printed, was banned from distribution on

account of official objections to one or two of his cartoon drawings. The memoirs of his eldest brother, Issa Hedayat, of the time they spent together in Paris while both of them were students in France were also published for the first time, under the title *36 Ruz ba Sadeq Hedayat* (*36 Days with Sadeq Hedayat*).

At the same time, Hedayat's youthful essay "Ensan va Heyvan" was for the first time published in a separate edition. The short story "The Three Drops of Blood" was published in a volume together with various reviews and commentaries which had been written on it since its publication. Likewise, Hedayat's edition of Khayyam's poetry together with his critical introduction to the quatrains was published in a new edition.

Finally, steps were taken to recover Hedayat's parental house where he lived and worked, and to turn it into public property. This involved the cooperation of Iran Cultural Heritage Organization which is an official body. The property is now in the possession of a hospital. At the time public attention was turned to the matter, it was housing a nursery for the children of the hospital staff. Critical comments by press and public led to the removal of the nursery. Instead, it was turned into the hospital library, but it is still not open to the public at large who may wish to see the house in which the author lived. Efforts continue to regain the property for the public.

### **Personal and family remembrances**

I will now try to relate some memories and remembrances as a child and a young man, when I was in regular contact with Sadeq Hedayat. His parental house – my grandparents' family – was first in Kushk Street. We then moved to Roosevelt (now Mofatteh) Street, and, finally, from there to Sorayya (now Somayyeh) Street. In the Kushk Street house I was still a child, a primary schoolboy. I remember Hedayat being shut in his room most of the time, busily reading and writing. A favourite pastime at his breaks was to play with the pet cat at home. He was very fond of cats, and this is reflected in some of his stories and letters. He would come out of his room and call me – "Jahan", as they called me for Jahangir – and ask me to fetch the cat. He would then spend some time, occasionally even as long as an hour, playing with it. Perhaps I should mention that my grandfather's home had quite a large garden, where, apart from the cat, they kept a dog and a number of chickens. I was quite familiar with these animals and could easily find them.

Hedayat had a delicate constitution and would easily catch cold when the weather began to turn cool. In the cold season he would often wake up in the mornings with a temperature and a sore throat. My grandmother was very caring. As soon as Sadeq Khan felt unwell, she would either send for Dr Taqi Razavi – Hedayat's old and intimate friend from his schooldays both in Tehran and Paris – or Dr Manuchehr Hedayat, her own cousin. But there were occasions when, not being in the mood to go to work, he would ask his doctor to write a certificate excusing him from going out, and he would then send it to his

employers as the reason for his absence. Recently I had the opportunity of reading Hedayat's personal file in Bank Melli (then both a commercial bank and the central bank of Iran) where Hedayat worked for some time. It contains a number of such doctors' certificates, some of which were no doubt due to physical illness, and others because of not being in the right mood for going into the office.

In the period when my grandparents' house was in Roosevelt Street, I remember especially my grandmother's concern that the Nawruz celebrations were strictly observed. An important part of that were the formal, even at times solemn, occasions on which relatives and friends would come to visit my grandparents for New Year greetings. Like the other grown-ups in the family, Hedayat had to sit in the reception room, formally dressed, and entertain the guests. Clearly he was far from happy playing this role; he did it nevertheless out of respect for his mother. But he would try and keep it brief and avoid the formal conversations. I remember once when a female visitor who was a distant relative tried to draw him out by asking, "How did you ever manage to write such marvellous, wondrous stories?" Hedayat was not in the mood; besides he was seldom happy talking about his work with others. So, with the sardonic undertone which he spoke in such situations, he replied: "It's very simple Madame; I used a paper and pen." But the woman would not be discouraged: "Naturally, you did; but I wish to know how you manage to write such interesting stuff." Hedayat decided to put an end to the conversation. "Well, you see Madame," he said, "it just happens that I have diarrhoea of the pen. As soon as I put it on paper it gets going."

Another funny and memorable episode I remember from our time in Roosevelt Street was one summer night when Hedayat came home. When the weather was hot we used to sleep in the garden, every bed being protected by a mosquito net which stood on a wooden frame. Hedayat usually came home later than the others, sometimes when they were sound asleep. But he was very mindful of other people's welfare, and so he would take care to avoid any disturbance when other members of the family were asleep. I happened to be awake at the time and watched him get ready very quietly and go to bed. But he was sleepless and was tossing and turning. In the end he got up and tried to turn off the little light which burned in the garden all through the night, but the key was inside the building and, hard as he tried, he could not find it. In the end, he came back to his bed, took out one of the sticks of its mosquito net, broke the bulb with it and then quietly went to bed.

I was a teenager when we moved to the Sorayya Street house. We had a big dog and I was very good friends with it. But it was not very friendly towards strangers and could easily frighten them. This was in the late 1940s when Hedayat was a celebrity and regularly received visitors who admired his work. They included women who might be particularly frightened by the dog. Thus, before the guest arrived at the appointed time, Hedayat would shout my name and ask me to watch the dog. Again, once the guest was ready to leave, he would shout and bid me to keep the dog under control.

Once, in a family gathering at our house, when I entered the guestroom I went and sat next to Hedayat. I was then a university student. He realized that I wanted a chat, looked me up and down and said, "What are you doing with yourself these days, innocent babe?" (That's the term with which he habitually addressed people of my age). I told him I was at university. "Oh so you too are looking for knowledge stuff, are you? What's it you are reading?" I said I was reading English literature. "I see," he said, "So we'll soon have a Shakespeare in the family." "What do you want to become?" he then asked. "I want to become a writer", I replied. "*Mordeh-shur*," ["to the undertaker"] he said, which was his own peculiar way of expressing disapproval, "are you mad? In this country a writer loses both this and the other world. All they do to a writer is to sit on him. You'd either have to pawn your pen to the state or be sat on." He went on: "Finish your studies, get your degree and find a good job. And if you tried your hand at writing as a hobby, it'd be OK. But don't mess about with writing as a career." At this point my father arrived and the conversation was cut off.

The last time I saw him he was going to say goodbye to his brother-in-law General Abdollah Hedayat. He was about to go to Paris. I said goodbye to him, never suspecting that I would not see him again.

### 3 Sadeq Hedayat and the classics

#### The case of *The Blind Owl*<sup>1</sup>

*Marta Simidchieva*

Sadeq Hedayat's novel *The Blind Owl* (published 1936 in Bombay) is a modernist work, closely aligned with European avant garde literature of the early twentieth century. Hence its Western features – and the author's indebtedness to Western influences – have long been at the center of the critical discourse about the novel. This tendency in the scholarship on Hedayat is still productive today, but it is most readily observed in literary analyses from the period between World War II and the heyday of the Islamic revolution in Iran – roughly from the mid-1940s to the end of the 1980s. This time frame is by no means definitive or clear-cut, but neither is it arbitrary. Published abroad in a very limited edition, and expressly marked “not for sale in Iran,” *The Blind Owl* became available domestically in 1941 to 1942, after the abdication of Reza Shah Pahlavi, when Hedayat serialized it in the journal *Iran*. Its impact in Iran, as Hassan Kamshad notes, “was instantaneous and forceful; and the controversy that ensued was not confined to literary circles; it embraced almost the entire reading public.”<sup>2</sup> One of the early critical references, which linked implicitly Hedayat's novel with French existentialism and the “decadent and defeatist ways of thinking” of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, came from the keynote speech of Ehsan Tabari at the First Congress of Iranian Writers in 1946.<sup>3</sup> The succeeding decades, defined by the Western orientation of the Pahlavi regime under Mohammad-Reza Shah, brought mixed reactions to Hedayat's masterpiece, determined by critics' personal views regarding the role of art in society, and the preferred paths to modernization. The turbulent end of the 1970s – the decade of the Islamic revolution – ushered in a new dominant ideology in Iran, a declared orientation of “neither East nor West,” and a new set of cultural priorities and taboos. *The Blind Owl* disappeared from library stacks and bookstore shelves, and public debates about the book came to a standstill. Yet – in a tacit recognition of the novel's place in modern Iranian literature, or perhaps as a cogent sign of changing times after the death of Ayatollah Khomeyni – it was published again in Tehran by Nashr-e Simorgh in 1993, albeit in a censored version.<sup>4</sup>

In the West, *The Blind Owl* holds pride of place as the most critically acclaimed and analyzed title of modern Iranian literature. The general tendencies in the critical discourse on *The Blind Owl* can be gleaned from a limited – yet important – sampling of sources readily available to an English-speaking

audience. Thus a number of articles on the Western affinities of *The Blind Owl* are to be found in Michael Hillmann's collection *Hedayat's The Blind Owl Forty Years After*,<sup>5</sup> where the contributions of Manoutchehr Mohandessi, Janette S. Johnson, Bahram Meghdadi and Leo Hamalian, Carter Bryant, and Leonardo P. Alishan, explore, respectively, Hedayat's debt to Rilke, his novel's similarities to works of Nerval, Kafka, Poe and the Surrealists; to Dante's *Divine Comedy* refracted through the prism of Freudian psychoanalysis; or its function as a Jungian analysis of the Iranian collective subconscious. The search for the Western roots of the novel, and its significance as a "commentary on its Western predecessors,"<sup>6</sup> is at the core of Michael Beard's seminal monograph *Hedayat's Blind Owl as a Western Novel* – a comprehensive study of the process of genre transference in the realm of modern prose literature.

Alternatively, some researchers have also looked eastwards – to India – for other sources of inspiration behind this enigmatic novel. Mindful of Hedayat's interest in the Indo-Iranian origins of Persian civilization, of his vegetarianism and of the fact that *The Blind Owl* was completed and published in India, authors such as Al-e Ahmad and Kamshad note possible Hindu-Buddhist influences on Hedayat.<sup>7</sup> This line of investigation is central to the articles of Richard A. Williams and of David C. Champagne from Michael Hillmann's 1978 collection, and especially to Iraj Bashiri's monograph on the fiction of Sadeq Hedayat.<sup>8</sup>

Generally, until the 1980s, the links of *The Blind Owl* to the Persian cultural context were seldom addressed. Some early Iranian commentators such as Parviz Natel Khanlari or Jalal Al-e Ahmad do imply or mention in passing the affinity of the novel to Persian mysticism or gnosticism.<sup>9</sup> Most authors, however, when addressing the issue, place emphasis on Khayyamian and folkloric echoes in the novel, apparently taking into account areas which Hedayat has explored in his non-fiction. Notable in this respect are the articles by Leonard Bogle and Mohammad R. Ghanoonparvar, as well as Michael Beard's monograph.<sup>10</sup> References to the features which define *The Blind Owl* as an Iranian novel have occasionally appeared also in an implicit response to charges that Hedayat's masterpiece is an epigonic slip into "decadent" Western fads, and a literary work incompatible with Iranian culture. An early attempt to deflect such accusations is observed in Daniil S. Komissarov's monograph on Sadeq Hedayat's life and works, published in 1967.<sup>11</sup> Writing from within the framework of Marxist scholarship, Komissarov maintains that the novel's ambiguity and pessimism (seen as objectionable by proponents of a uniformly life-affirming stance in literature) are not a blind adoption of decadent Western aesthetics, but a stratagem allowing the author to criticize Iranian reality.<sup>12</sup> He also seeks classical antecedents for Hedayat's elliptical style in the encoded social dissent of Hafez, Ibn Sina, Omar Khayyam and Bidel.<sup>13</sup> Undoubtedly, Komissarov's well-calibrated analysis – and his prominence as a scholar – prepared the way for the one and only publication of *The Blind Owl* in the Soviet Union in 1969, shortly after the end of the Khrushchev era.<sup>14</sup>

Given the incidental or limited nature of researchers' attention to possible

Persian literary referents of Hedayat's novel, one could conclude that scholarly interest in *The Blind Owl*'s relationship to its native cultural context started gathering momentum more recently – since the late 1980s. Apparently, the issue of *The Blind Owl*'s “Iranianness” gained urgency following the Iranian revolution of 1979 – perhaps in response to charges that modernist tendencies are a sign of “Westoxication,” and a manifest loss of cultural authenticity. Significantly, the critics who sought to establish the links of Hedayat's novel to the cultural heritage of Persia came from among the expatriate Iranian scholars living in the West, at a time when in Iran itself the book was regarded with disfavor. Mohammad R. Ghanoonparvar was among the first to mention the similarity of the narrator's love for the ethereal girl in Part I of the novel to that of the Persian classical lover.<sup>15</sup> Nasrin Rahimieh highlighted the fact that Hedayat drew new material not only from Western sources, but also from Zoroastrian ones, as well as from Iranian folklore. She pointed out that the novel reflects the author's longing for new art forms.<sup>16</sup> Homa Katouzian shows that important themes and characters in the novel were foreshadowed in Hedayat's earlier writing, thus negating the view that *The Blind Owl* is an imitation of contemporaneous Western modernist works such as Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*, published in 1938.<sup>17</sup> Yusef Ishaqpur mentions the mystical affinities of the novel.<sup>18</sup> Azar Nafisi suggests that *The Blind Owl* is shaped by the contradictions between old Persian and modern Western art, rather than by the influence of specific Western writers.<sup>19</sup> Houra Yavari draws parallels between Hedayat's novel and Nezami's *Haft peykar*.<sup>20</sup>

My own interest in the place of *The Blind Owl* within Persian tradition dates from 1986, when Bulgarian publishers still needed convincing arguments that a planned collection of Hedayat's representative works would be incomplete without his dark, surrealist masterpiece.<sup>21</sup> My research soon transcended its initial limited objective. In several papers, published or presented subsequently, I have discussed parallelisms between *The Blind Owl* and Fakhr al-Din Gorgani's court romance *Vis va Ramin*, as well as thematic affinities with Manuchehri's “wine myths.”<sup>22</sup>

Pre-modern Persian literature offers a promising venue for students of *The Blind Owl*, since echoes from the Persian classics and the Iranian literary debates of the early twentieth century are no less audible in Hedayat's masterpiece than references to modern European and American writings. If we fail to heed them, we are bound to miss one of the central passions of the novel – the legitimization of modern Iranian literature, which the author achieves by examining its relationship to the classical legacy. *The Blind Owl* is not only a love story: it may also be read as a parable of cultural reform, which examines the nature of the transition from traditional to modern art. Several reformist allegories and literary manifestos were published by prominent Iranian writers and poets at the end of the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century, supplementing the debates between modernists and traditionalists on the pages of literary periodicals.<sup>23</sup> Such publications formed a well-attested cultural trend in Persian letters at the time. A summary of the novel's contents, privileging the

points, which allow for its allegorical interpretation, will outline the parable more clearly.

*The Blind Owl* is a first-person narrative in two parts, whereby the narrator appears in two guises, and in two different settings.

In Part I the narrator presents himself as a painter of papier-mâché pen cases, who lives amidst ruins, beyond the city limits and the concerns of everyday life. His artwork is confined to a single scene: an old man sitting under a cypress tree, biting his index finger in a gesture of amazement; a young woman standing across a stream and holding out to him a flower of morning glory. However, on Sizardah-be-dar, the thirteenth day of the Iranian New Year, his life is changed dramatically by the visit of a strange old man in Indian attire, who might be his mysterious, long-lost uncle. To treat the guest, the artist goes into his closet to get a bottle of wine left to him by his parents. As he reaches up for the inherited wine, he glimpses through a hole in the wall the living prototype of the scene he has always painted. Entranced by the ethereal beauty of the girl in his vision, the painter gives up on his stilted art, and starts searching for her. One night, upon returning from his quest, he finds her on his own doorstep. As he lets her into the house, the ethereal girl goes straight to his room and lies on his bed, as if surrendering herself to him. The artist attempts to restore her strength with a sip of his inherited wine, but she turns into a corpse, utterly cold and long dead. He then tries to revive her with the heat of his own body. When that too fails, he endeavours to preserve her features in a portrait. He spends the whole night trying to paint her, but without much success, for he cannot recall her most essential feature – her magical glance. Suddenly, life seems to return to the decaying corpse: the ethereal girl opens her eyes for an instant, just long enough for the artist to capture their expression. Once that is accomplished, the artist does not need the decomposing body any more. He prepares the corpse for burial by cutting it up and packing it in a suitcase. An old grave-digger offers to help and takes the artist and his suitcase to a secluded site in the vicinity of the shrine of Shah ‘Abd al-‘Azim. While digging the grave, the old man unearths an ancient clay pot from the city of Ray. Later he would give it to the painter, wrapped in a dirty kerchief. At home the artist would discover that his portrait of the ethereal girl is an exact replica of the painting on the pot. Contemplating his aesthetic kinship with the ancient painter, he sits by his charcoal burner and drifts into an opium dream.

The narrator awakes in Part II, covered in blood and fearing imminent arrest. He contemplates suicide with a cup of the poisoned wine left to him by his Indian mother, but feels a compulsion to explore his misfortunes in writing. He lives in the midst of a bustling city, yet in complete isolation from the people around him. He presents himself as an ailing young man, married to a faithless wife who denies him all conjugal intimacy. Presumably “the harlot,” as he calls her, has many lovers. Among them is a repulsive old street vendor – an erstwhile potter – who always sits in front of their house. Among the dingy wares on the peddler’s spread there is a pot covered with a dirty kerchief, and a knife. The vendor would offer the pot to the narrator free of charge, and the young man

would rush away, throwing a few coins on the spread. A few pages before, the narrator mentions breaking a pot inadvertently during a night full of nightmares and lust for his wife's body. The knife eventually ends up in his room. One night, sick and maddened with desire, the narrator disguises himself as the old peddler, and for the first time gains admittance to his wife's room and into her bed. In the heat of passion he inadvertently sticks the knife into her body. Terrified by her cries, he runs back to his room, and discovers that he has turned into the old man. His bloody hand is clutching the eye of his wife.

In the Epilogue the narrator is back by the charcoal burner, while the old man scuttles away, carrying the ancient clay pot under his arm.

The peculiar bipartite structure of *The Blind Owl* is the subject of much speculation among Hedayat scholars and literary critics. Some – such as Iraj Bashiri and Hassan Kamshad – see a relative lack of cohesion between the two parts; or suggest that a reversal of the order in which they appear might aid the reader's understanding of the novel.<sup>24</sup> Others – like Leonardo Alishan and Homa Katouzian – argue convincingly for the unity and integrity of the text, and consider the structural peculiarities of *The Blind Owl* key to its correct understanding.<sup>25</sup> For Alishan, Part I and Part II represent the dream world and the real world of the narrator. The character “lives in [the] dream world” of Part I, shaped and controlled by his consciousness, and “dreams of the real world,” where he has committed a terrible crime, seared in his subconscious.<sup>26</sup> Katouzian sees Part I as representing the narrator's life in the present, somewhere in “the decaying early twentieth century Tehran,” while Part II takes place “in thriving Ray of a golden past,” during a previous existence of the protagonist, several centuries earlier.<sup>27</sup> Katouzian pays close attention to the overall composition of the novel, and is the first scholar to point out the important role of the structural linkages between the two parts, which direct the flow of the narrative, and preserve the formal unity of the story. (In Katouzian's interpretation, these linkages account for the narrator's travel through time. Especially noteworthy is the first link – the opium dream, which connects Part I and Part II of the novel – and which represents the narrator's return from the present, back to a previous existence in the ancient city of Ray.)<sup>28</sup>

The analyses of Alishan and Katouzian are highlighted here as representative of two broad trends in the interpretation of the novel's composition. The first trend draws on the precepts of psychoanalysis, and – generally speaking – sees the two parts as depictions of a dream world and the real world. (In one notable variant, proposed by Beard, a “fantasied distortion” of reality in Part I gives way to a “growing materialization of the repressed memory of [a] murder” in Part II.)<sup>29</sup> The second trend foregrounds the compositional blueprint of the novel in Persian history rather than in psychoanalysis, and interprets the two parts in terms of past and present existences (or – alternatively – experiences) of the narrator. Both trends rest on solid internal evidence, and – in my view – are complementary rather than mutually exclusive: The built-in ambiguity of Hedayat's narrative allows for either set of readings. Moreover, what we know of Hedayat's intellectual pursuits and commitments lends credence to both. Thus

Hedayat's interest in Freudian and Jungian psychology is well attested.<sup>30</sup> So is his preoccupation – as a writer and researcher – with Persia's history, with its place in world civilization, and with what he perceived to be the yawning gap between its glorious past and subsequent decline.

I will not dwell on these two major lines of interpretation, since they have been cogently and convincingly developed in previous research. Instead, I offer a third type of reading – one anchored in aesthetics – which supplements the other two interpretations. The internal evidence, which warrants this direction, is the centrality of art (painting and writing) to the protagonist's universe. It also takes into account Hedayat's personal commitment to cultural and literary reform in Iran, and the scattered evidence in earlier research, that certain aspects of traditional Persian literature played a role in the making of this modernist novel.

Central to my argument is the contention that *The Blind Owl* can be read as a cultural allegory, where Part I and Part II convey and juxtapose the basic principles of traditional and modern literary representation. Thus the narrator of Part I is an artist, whose urge to paint is motivated by platonic love. The narrator of Part II is de facto a "writer," whose urge to put pen to paper is motivated by frustrated carnal desire. The two parts of the exposition may be seen as two alternative visions of the creative impulse – classical inspiration and Freudian sublimation. These are two parallel universes, each shaped by the interpretive sensibility of its narrative voice. In Part I the narrator takes his cue from the lyrical persona of classical Sufi poetry: he is the lover, pining for a mystical beloved, with whom union in the flesh is beyond contemplation. The protagonist of Part II resembles the modernist writer: an "unreliable narrator," whose perception of events cannot be trusted, he is acutely aware of his suppressed sexuality, of the malaise plaguing his psyche, and of his parents' poisonous legacy of sexual transgressions.

Three main characters – a young man, an old man, and a young woman – appear in both parts of the novel. In the allegorical reading of the work, each represents two versions of a single literary personification.

The female character plays the role of the muse, the fountainhead of artistic inspiration. As the virginal ethereal girl of Part I, she seems to embody the conventional metaphor "the maiden of speech" (*dushizeh-ye kalam*, or *kalam-e bekr*), which conveys poetic originality in classical Persian literature.<sup>31</sup> In Part I we see her in two hypostases. The first one – the female apparition, whom the artist glimpses through the vent-hole of his closet – is an archetypal figure. Flitting, elusive, and impalpable, she personifies the Iranian cultural identity. This primordial image is so potent that it informs even the crude and mindless handiwork of a pen-case painter. The second hypostasis – the black-clad woman whom the painter encounters on his doorstep – is an embodiment of the classical ideal. She has a tangible, corporeal presence in the world of the artist, just as the masterpieces of medieval Persian literature and art exist in the modern day and age. Her death, dismemberment, and burial represent the demise of the classical conventions and the destruction of the traditional form.

Significantly, the story does not end with the death of the ethereal girl. In Part II the female character appears again as a “hundred percent woman/*zan-e tamam ‘ayar*” (BO p. 115/BK p. 153).<sup>32</sup> She is a sexual being of flesh and blood, the object of a writer’s suppressed desire, and thus a muse of a different cast. In the parable of cultural reform, this earthy reincarnation of the chaste, ethereal girl, represents the dramatic transformation of the Persian literary tradition, its transition to a new aesthetic mode.

The character of the old man stands for the custodian of the traditional form, symbolized by the clay pot. Thus he could be identified with the literary traditionalist. His *raison d’être* is to hand down the legacy of the past to the next generation. Hence, in both parts of the novel, he offers the clay pot to the young man free of charge. In Part I the old man “unearths” the ancient clay pot from Ray, bringing a forgotten legacy out of oblivion. In Part II he presumably produced the pot himself – in his youth, when he was a potter rather than a peddler. In both cases the pot is wrapped in the old man’s dirty handkerchief, which obscures its pristine, original form. That kerchief might be an allusion to the stylistic redundancies and artificiality which – in the eyes of the modernists – have corrupted the “inimitable simplicity” (*sahl va momtane’*) of the true classics. The old man’s two hypostases appear to be shaped by the modernist rhetorics, characteristic of the literary debates in the 1920s to 1930s. In Part I he seems like an incarnation of a quip in one of Hedayat’s letters, calling traditionalist literati “grave-diggers.”<sup>33</sup> It is the old man who digs the grave of the classical ideal – literally, but perhaps also metaphorically. Yet it falls to the young artist to destroy – and then to bury – the decaying corpse. As for the old man’s second hypostasis – one might assume a tendency among Iranian modernists to dismiss traditionalist authors as “peddlers” of obsolete literary wares, and to be censorious toward court poets, who earned their livelihood through panegyrics to undeserving tyrants.<sup>34</sup>

The young man – the narrator of the story – is cast as the innovator, the inspired artist, the lone pathbreaker, who shuns the established norms and destroys the traditional form. The destruction may happen either deliberately, as the dismemberment of the corpse in Part I (BO pp. 28–29/BK pp. 43–44), or spontaneously, as the breaking of the jug in Part II (BO pp. 83–84/BK pp. 112–113). The young man, however, is not only an agent of destruction: he is also committed to perpetuating the legacy of the past. Thus the painter in Part I feels a “compulsive desire” to “record on paper” the eyes of the ethereal girl, which have “closed forever” (BO p. 24/BK p. 37). He intends to “keep the picture” always by his side, so that he can refer to it whenever he feels impelled to do so (*ibid.*). Similarly, the writer in Part II, who feels that he is “the result of a long succession of past generations, which have bequeathed their experience” to him, considers himself “the custodian of that heritage/*negahban-e in bar-e mawrusi,*” duty-bound to preserve it (BO pp. 118–119/BK pp. 156–157).

How are these two contradictory traits reconciled? The answer would give us a clue to the relationship of modern literature to the classics, as envisaged in Hedayat’s parable on literary reform. The key to it is hidden in Part I, and more

specifically in the artist's treatment of the dead ethereal girl, the embodiment of the defunct classical ideal. His first impulse is to revive the ethereal girl. Failing that, he endeavours to preserve her features in a portrait. Finally, having captured her "essence," he destroys and buries the decaying form.

How does the artist paint the portrait? How does the innovator go about preserving the features of his cultural legacy? The painter in Part I adopts the highly subjective manner of modern art, where painting the effect of the object on the observer is more important than painting the object itself.<sup>35</sup> His model is no more than a starting point for him. The artist does not aim to present a photographic likeness of the ethereal girl, but to convey the impression her features leave on his own mind. He achieves that through the selection and depiction of details, which are significant to him personally. As the painter says:

My intention was to portray ... this form which was doomed slowly and gradually to suffer decomposition and disintegration, and which now lay still, a fixed expression upon its face. I felt I must record on paper its essential lines. I would select those lines of which I had myself experienced the power. ... I had now to bring my own mind into play, to give concrete form to an image which, emanating from her face, had so impressed itself upon my thoughts. I would glance once at her face and shut my eyes. Then I would set down on paper the lines which I had selected for my purpose.

(*BO* pp. 24–25/*BK* pp. 38–39)

This new, unorthodox method produces a painting, which is a faithful depiction of the ethereal girl, for it captures her departed spirit. Surprisingly – or perhaps not – her portrait is identical to the painting on an ancient clay pot from Ray, to the point that "there [is] not an atom of difference between the two" (*BO* p. 41/*BK* p. 57). Although executed in different media (one is painted on paper, the other on clay), they seem to be the work of a single artist.

This peculiar twist in the story has two implications. First, it conveys a profound sense of continuity within the Persian cultural tradition. Second, it establishes the equal status of modern art vis-à-vis the classics. The likeness between the two pictures implies that the adoption of modern techniques and aesthetics does not necessarily constitute a break with the legacy of the past. The essential features of a culture are to be found in its distinctive themes, motifs, symbols, and allusions. The perpetuation of these features once bridged the chasm between the pre-Islamic and the classical art of Persia. The same approach – in an inspired, non-conventional interpretation – will bridge the gap between traditional and modern art and literature. And if the modern artist is capable of conveying the cultural archetypes as effectively as did the ancients, modern art is indeed the legitimate successor to classical art.

Let us see now how Hedayat may have put the method of recasting the classics, described above, into practice. I have argued elsewhere that *The Blind Owl* juxtaposes the methods of the classical poet to those of the modernist writer.<sup>36</sup> In that sense, Hedayat's novel may be seen as a modernistic *nazire* or "literary

response” to the love poetry of the classical period. The term “literary response” is used here very loosely, suggesting that Hedayat may have appropriated, and creatively transformed, key components of the Persian classical legacy – themes, allusions, symbols. In this chapter I take this assertion a step further, suggesting that he may have singled out, and integrated into his narrative, elements of specific classical works.

The classical example, discussed here, comes from an unlikely source – the *divan* of Manuchehri Damghani, the eleventh-century poet whose poems celebrating Nawruz and Mehregan have found, in my view, particular resonance with the author of *The Blind Owl*. Given the scorn of modernists for medieval court poetry, it may seem improbable that Iran’s foremost reformer would emulate a Ghaznavid panegyrist. Yet, apart from some striking thematic parallelisms between segments of the novel and a cluster of narrative poems from Manuchehri’s *divan*, there is circumstantial evidence that Manuchehri might have been within Hedayat’s field of vision in the early 1930s, prior to the publication of *The Blind Owl* in 1936. Thus, in 1934 the French scholar of Persian literature Henri Massé published an article on the poetry of Manuchehri.<sup>37</sup> Hedayat may have taken note of it, since in the late 1920s and early 1930s the two authors were in personal contact: Massé acknowledged Hedayat’s assistance with his studies on Persian folklore, which were published as a monograph in 1938.<sup>38</sup> In addition, Hedayat – who paid close attention to the European reception of Persian authors – is likely to have been aware of the fact that Manuchehri was the only Ghaznavid poet whose *divan* was studied, translated, and published in its entirety by the French orientalist Albert de Biberstein-Kazimirski.<sup>39</sup> In Iran itself, Manuchehri was one of the classical authors widely emulated by the poets of the Return Movement,<sup>40</sup> and this may have been an additional factor in recommending his works to Hedayat’s attention.

It should also be noted, that Hedayat and Manuchehri have some remarkable characteristics in common. Both authors are acknowledged innovators in the realm of style and form: Hedayat made the novella and avant-garde “psycho-fiction” (Katouzian’s term) a Persian phenomenon, while Manuchehri introduced the *mosammat* into classical Persian literature.<sup>41</sup> Both authors have been cited (or derided) as conduits of “alien” influences in their native culture: Hedayat – for emulating Western aesthetic trends, Manuchehri – for his “imitations of the Arabs.”<sup>42</sup> Yet the two share an intense interest in pre-Islamic Persia and an urge to preserve its legacy: Hedayat translated Pahlavi texts and wrote fiction on pre-Islamic themes. Manuchehri’s narrative poems, dedicated to the celebrations of Mehregan and Nawruz, bear the imprint of ancient Iranian myths, and serve as a tangible link between classical Persian literature and Iranian antiquity.<sup>43</sup> Thus, in the eyes of a contemporary writer, Manuchehri’s narrative poems may be seen as counterparts to the “ancient clay pot from Ray” in the realm of literature.<sup>44</sup> And perhaps Manuchehri himself is, in a sense, Hedayat’s “ancient partner in sorrow/*hamedard-e qadimi*,” who has undergone the doubts, yearnings, and tribulations of a similar artistic quest – i.e. “the same spiritual experiences/*hamin ‘avalem . . . tay [kardeh ast]*” (BO p. 42/BK p. 60).<sup>45</sup>

Let us concentrate now on the thematic parallelisms, found in *The Blind Owl* and *mosammad* 8/65 of Manuchehri. Such shared features fuel my argument, that one of the prime motivations behind Hedayat's experimental novel is the author's desire to perpetuate the Persian cultural heritage by "recasting" it (Karimi-Hakkak's term) in a contemporary mold.<sup>46</sup>

*Mosammad* 8/65 starts with the distich, "*Bustanbana hal o khabar-e bostan chist/ v' andarin bostan chandin tarab-e mastan chist?*" (O gardener, what is the state of the garden, and in this garden, what is this great merriment among the drunken [companions]?) The opening stanza posits a series of questions to the gardener about the state of the garden, where intoxicated revelers are celebrating Urmazd, the first day of the month, and in this case the month which begins the Iranian New Year.

Structurally, the *mosammad* starts ordinarily enough, with the customary *vasf* – a string of poetic descriptions of various spring flowers and birds found in a garden setting (stanzas 1–9). A transition line (*gorizgah*) in stanza 9 introduces a narrative segment (stanzas 9–13), which expounds the tragic love story of the garden and the spring cloud. Stanza 13 contains the transition line to the eulogy of Soltan Mas'ud (421–440 AH/1030–1041 CE), the Ghaznavid patron of Manuchehri.

The love story in the narrative segment (st. 9–13) is the main object of interest for this study. A person acquainted with the highlights of avant-garde literature from the 1920s (the time of Hedayat's sojourn in Europe) would be startled by a sense of uncanny familiarity when reading this somber celebration of spring: nine centuries before T.S. Eliot, Manuchehri seems to be foreshadowing the opening lines of "The Waste Land": "April is the cruelest month, breeding/lilacs out of the dead land, mixing/Memory and desire, stirring/Dull roots with spring rain."<sup>47</sup>

However, before focusing on the analysis of this segment, let us consider the features which might have recommended *mosammad* 8/65 to Hedayat's attention (see the translation of the descriptive and narrative sections at the end of this chapter). First and foremost among the notable traits of this *mosammad* is the abundance of pre-Islamic and Zoroastrian allusions, and the general Irano-centric focus of the entire poem. Its first stanza is dedicated to Urmazd – a holy day of the Zoroastrian calendar, which is also the Zoroastrian name for the planet Jupiter, the name of the first day of each month in the Zoroastrian year, and of its guardian angel.<sup>48</sup> This opening seems to set the stage for further Zoroastrian references. The songbirds of the night are called "*zandvafan-e behi*" – "Zoroastrian hymn singers," who sing "the Zand from memory."<sup>49</sup> Taking over from them at dawn, the nightingales (*bolbolan*) chant the "*zir-e Vesta*" – the commentary to the Avesta.<sup>50</sup> The garden is alive with ancient musical tunes: the turtle-doves (*qomrian*) sing "*Rah-e Gol*" and "*Nush Labina*"; the wood-pidgeons (*solsolan*) – "*Bagh-e Siyavushan*" and "*Sarv-e Setah*," and the lark (*khol*) is playing the lute (*tanbureh*). According to the encyclopedic dictionary of Dehkhoda (s.vv.), the latter two of the melodies mentioned here are among the thirty tunes attributed to Barbad, the famous singer at the court of the Sasanian king Khosrow Parviz (591–628 CE).

Further, Persian topographic names of historic significance are employed as adjectives and qualifiers in the description of flowers and birds. Thus the francolin (*dorraḡ*) challenges his rivals with Daylami battle-cries (*ghav*). The anemone (*laleh-ye No'man*) is red like the East (Khorasan) at dawn, with smudges of Tabari ink at the bottom of its cup.<sup>51</sup> (Coincidentally or not, this strategy of grounding the literary work in the Iranian landscape is also employed by Hedayat, who evokes the city of Ray – ancient Ragha, as well as the shrine of Shah ‘Abd al-‘Azim not far from it. The two topographic references in *The Blind Owl* add a rich symbolic undertow to the allegory.)<sup>52</sup>

Pre-Islamic allusions aside, the key significance of this particular poem for the parable of literary reform lies in Manuchehri’s explicit association of the garden with literary activity. This link is conventional; it is not of Manuchehri’s invention, yet the abundance of allusions to reading and writing in the descriptive section of this poem is striking. Thus the songbirds are readers of the Avesta and of its commentary (*zandvaḡ*; st. 3), the nightingale is a “teller of many tales” (*bolbol-e por-dastan*; st. 1). The partridge (*kabk*) is yet another busy avian reader, compared to a madrasa student (*taleb-e ‘elm*; st. 6), who stays up all night reading his books. Several birds have markings of writing on their plumage. The francolin has the letter “vav” written on the tip of each of his feathers (st. 4), and both wings of the partridge are blackened with a pen (*qalam*; st. 6). The “little hoopoe” (*hod-hodak*; st. 7) is compared to a messenger (*peyk-e barid*), who carries a letter tucked into his headgear. Finally, the anemone is a crimson inkwell (*davat*) “without a lid or a painting on it” – a crimson inkwell, on the bottom of which the fingers of a sleep-deprived secretary (*dabir*), who has stayed up all night (*shabgir*), have left black smudges (st. 8). Thus allusions to reading or writing are present in six of the nine descriptive stanzas of the *nasib*, reinforcing the classic association between poetry and the garden setting. In classical literature, this convention informs not only poetry as practice, but also poetic theory. It is not by chance that Rashid al-Din Vatvat’s famous treatise on figures of speech and rhetorical devices bears the title *Hada’iq al-Sihr fi Daḡai’q al-Shi’r* (twelfth century CE; *Gardens of Magic in the Intricacies of Poetry*).<sup>53</sup> Thus, by integrating elements of this poem into his own novel, Hedayat would be tapping into a rich vein of subliminal literary (and erotic) associations, augmenting his literary allegory.<sup>54</sup>

While certain parallels may be drawn between the descriptive segment of *mosammat* 8 and Hedayat’s novel, it is difficult to single out transference of specific details.<sup>55</sup> Instead, there appears to be an occasional confluence of creative ideas, such as a resort to topographical references mentioned above, or the close association of birds with reading and writing, typical both of *mosammat* 8/65 and *The Blind Owl*.<sup>56</sup>

More convincing evidence of intertextuality may be found, in my view, in the narrative segment of Manuchehri’s poem (stanzas 9–13). Its story-line runs as follows:

The cloud is a traveler on a quest (*takapuy*), coming from the north – from the direction marked on the horizon by the North Star (*Joddah*).<sup>57</sup> He stops

at the edge of the garden (*lab-e bagh*), gazing at her attire of mourning (*salab-e bagh*: st. 10). The cloud is the lover (*'asheq*) and the garden – his beloved (*ma'shuqeh*), although theirs seems to be a one-sided relationship: The garden lays fast asleep (*khofteh*), oblivious to the presence of her lover, while he, feeling forsaken and insane with grief (*mahjur o mosab*), starts crying. His tears may have awakened his *par amour* (*dustegan*), since she puts out her hand and tears her veil (*neqab*; st. 11). Yet in the very next stanza the garden appears to be still asleep. One may even assume that she is dead, for the cloud acts like a bereaved lover: He cries, raves and rails, claws at his breast, tearing it asunder and exposing the fire consuming his heart (a metaphor for the thunderbolt). From his eyes, in lieu of tears, flows the water of life (*ab-e hayvan*; i.e. the spring rain), but instead of reviving his beloved, it causes grass to sprout out of her breast and eyes (*dideh o del*; st. 12). This tempestuous mourning ritual goes on for two to three months – i.e. for the duration of the spring season – until the cloud is entirely spent. His tears have not brought his beloved back to life. Even the sun cannot revive her: it only causes her body – or her form (*kalbod*) – to decay (*tabah [shodan]*: st. 13). The final stanza of the segment sums up the story: The lover's manifest grief did not move his beloved. She never opened her eyes or her heart to him. His laments and their long separation did not make her body crave his caresses: She never looked at, or spoke to, or slept with the hapless lover. The stanza finishes with a wish that the poet's patron would never encounter a mate (*jof*) as heartless and lacking in a sense of duty and honour (*sangdel, bi haq o bi hormat*) as the beloved of the cloud (st. 13).

This story-line, in the particular interpretation offered here, runs parallel to the developments of the plot in Part I of *The Blind Owl*, from the point where the distraught painter starts his quest for the ethereal girl, to the point where he contemplates her disintegrating corpse with the realization that it cannot be revived. Here, briefly, are the points of similarity between the two texts: Both male protagonists encounter their beloved after a long quest (*takapu Manuchehri*, p. 188, st. 9, l. 2347; *porseh zadan BK*, p. 26). In both narratives the females wear clothes in funereal colours, thus setting a somber tone to the lovers' tryst and foreshadowing its tragic end: the ethereal girl is "clad in black" (*heykal-e shiyahpush*; *BO* p. 16/*BK* p. 28). The colour of the garden's attire is not explicitly stated, but she is said to be wearing garments of mourning (*salab*), presumably conveying the dark hues of the earth before greenery starts to sprout.

The females are assigned passive roles: both are shown reclining, asleep, seemingly oblivious to the presence or the entreaties of their lovers (*Manuchehri*, pp. 189–190, st. 10, 12, 13; *BO* pp. 18–28/*BK* pp. 29–43).<sup>58</sup>

The lovers' attempt to revive the beloved has gruesome results. The liquid each administers to give her strength brings out instead visible signs of her body's decay. Thus, the cloud sheds over the garden his tears, which are "the water of life," and as a result grass sprouts from her eyes and breast (*Manuchehri*, p. 189; st. 11, l. 2353). The painter pours between the lips of the

ethereal girl a glass of his inherited wine (*BO* p. 20/*BK* p. 32), and her warm body turns into a corpse, as cold as if it has been dead for several days (*BO* p. 21/*BK* pp. 33–34). In both cases, heat speeds up the disintegration. Thus the body of the garden is further ruined by the heat of the sun (*beshodash kalbod az tabesh-e khorshid tabah*: Manuchehri, p. 189, st. 12, l. 2356). The painter tries to “warm [the ethereal girl] with the heat of [his] own body” (*BO* p. 21/*BK* p. 34), but soon he detects “the corpse smell, the smell of a corpse in process of decomposition” (*BO* p. 27/*BK* p. 41).

Perhaps the most significant evidence, that the similarities in the two episodes are not entirely fortuitous, is a puzzling development found in both plots – the beloved’s brief awakening. In Manuchehri’s poem it occurs in stanza 10, ll. 3349–3350, when the tears of the lover first start to fall, seemingly awakening his beloved. The puzzling part is that in these two lines the beloved is shown waking up, tearing her veil and coming out from behind the curtain, while in the stanza that immediately follows she is still fast asleep. The mystery deepens as at the end of the episode Manuchehri reiterates that the garden never once opened her eyes (*del o dideh nashekoft*), despite her lover’s laments (Manuchehri, p. 190. ll. 2357–2358). Mehdi Baghi, one of my two consultants, who helped me unravel some of the ambiguities of Manuchehri’s poem, offered a solution to this contradiction: he suggested that in stanza 10 the cloud might be interacting with two different *paramours*. His *ma’ shuqeh*, the garden, may still be lying asleep, while his tears might have awakened another beauty (*dustagan*) – the tulip, whose goblet-shaped bloom evokes a hidden reference to *dustagani* – a cup of wine, drunk to the health of the beloved. (The tearing of the veil corresponds to the blooming of the bud, which breaks through its green cover.)

This explanation seems plausible, but it is not easily discernible. Stanza 10 leaves the casual reader with the impression that the garden has been awakened briefly by her lover’s tears, only to fall asleep again – without rhyme, reason, or consequences for the story-line. (This is also the interpretation of Biberstein-Kazimiski in his French translation of Manuchehri’s *divan*.) In that regard Hedayat’s narrative is much more consistent and compliant with the internal logic of the plot: the ethereal girl is resurrected briefly, so that the painter can see her eyes again. He has spent the whole night trying to paint her portrait and failing to capture the essence of her expression (*BO* p. 26/*BK* p. 40). Her revival is shown to be unnatural by the ghastly crimson flush of her cheeks and the feverish brilliance of her eyes. It is also ephemeral – the corpse would close her eyes as soon as she has looked fixedly and directly at the painter, seemingly conscious of his presence for the first time ever. This brief exchange of glances allows the painter to remember the expression of her eyes and to record it on paper, thereby creating his only masterpiece. Thus the inexplicable “reawakening” of the beloved in Hedayat’s novel becomes one of the key developments of the story-line, and the turning point of the entire plot action in Part I of the novel. Within the parable on cultural reform, the brief revival of the classical ideal brings to mind the period of the literary Return. This movement brought

back into the limelight the classical masterpieces which its proponents emulated. Thus it set the stage for the meeting of the classical past and modernity.

Hedayat seems to have improved on yet another inconsistency of Manuchehri's narrative – his final judgement on the cloud's beloved as a heartless (lit. "stone-hearted"), undutiful and disreputable mate, who never responds to the desires of her lover. This uncharitable assessment seems hardly appropriate, since just one stanza before, the garden is described as a disintegrating corpse. Mindful of narrative logic, Hedayat does not level such recriminations at the ethereal girl in Part I, despite her aloofness. Instead, the reproaches of this last stanza are at the formative core of another character – the harlot – as perceived by the narrator of Part II: he presents her as a heartless woman, who used her seductive powers to trick him into marrying her, and then mocked his need for intimacy. She is also portrayed as a disreputable wife who ignores her marital duties to her husband, but lavishes her sexual favors on the rabble whom he despises.

This brief comparison between Manuchehri's poem and Hedayat's novel demonstrates the way in which a classical work may be appropriated in a modern narrative: it can supply a segment of a plot-line which is integrated into the larger scheme of the receiving work after being subjected to the narrative logic of the host work. It can yield conventional symbols, allusions and metaphors, some of which acquire flesh and blood and take on a life of their own. It can offer fresh ideas – such as the grounding of a plot in a specific cultural context through the use of culturally significant topographic and historical markers. With its long literary tradition and an established corpus of widely known masterpieces, which provide common cultural ground for generations of Persian speakers, classical Persian literature is a treasure-trove which no innovative Iranian writer can afford to ignore.

If we choose to accept the possibility that Hedayat may have recast Manuchehri's *mosammad* in his own novel, a question still remains: has he resorted to the classical legacy intentionally, or is this a case of his cultural background seeping through? Given the narrative clues in the novel, I am inclined to argue that the hypothetical emulation of Manuchehri's poems (this one, as well as his wine myths) is a conscious creative decision. Hedayat himself is obviously aware that artists' cultural heritage finds its way into their work through both channels. Yet the criterion which distinguishes the true artist from the artisan – at least in Part I of the novel – is the artist's conscious resort to the legacy of the past and his ability to reinterpret it creatively, thus bringing out the features most relevant for his day and age. The same awareness of the unbroken ties that bind a contemporary artist with generations past is demonstrated by the "unreliable narrator" from Part II of the novel (arguably, the modernist writer's "alter ego"), as he contemplates his own face in the mirror of the narrative. The grimaces, which he observes and may reproduce at will, can be interpreted in psychoanalytical terms, but they do have a socio-cultural dimension as well. (We know the symbolic significance of the face in this parable, having witnessed the efforts of the artist in Part I to paint the portrait of his muse.) The

narrator's words, in my view, express succinctly the relationship between the modernist writer and the Persian legacy in all its forms:

My face had a natural talent for comical and horrible expressions. I felt that they enabled me to see with my own eyes all the weird shapes, all the comical, horrible, unbelievable images which lurked in the recesses of my mind. . . . All of these grimacing faces existed inside me and formed part of me. . . . Were not the substance and the expressions of my face the result of a mysterious sequence of impulsions, of my ancestor's temptations, lusts and despairs? And I who was the custodian of that heritage, did I not, through some mad, ludicrous feeling, consider it my duty, whether I liked it or not, to preserve this stock of facial expressions? Probably my face would be released from this responsibility and would assume its own natural expression only at the moment of my death. . . . But even then would not the expressions which had been incised on my face by a sardonic resolve leave their traces behind, too deeply engraved to be effaced?

(BO pp. 118–119)

## Appendix<sup>59</sup>

*Divan-e Manuchehri* (ed. Mohammad Dabirsiyaqi); *mosammat* 8/poem 65 in praise of the first day of spring, dedicated to Sultan Mas'ud of Ghazna

- 1 O gardener, what is the state of the garden,/and in this garden, what's with this great merriment among the drunken [companions]?/The rose is showing the nipple of her breast, what's with this breast? And what's with these songs to the rose from the nightingale, the singer of many tales (*bolbol-e por-dastan*)?<sup>60</sup>//The gate to the cypress garden (*sarvestan*) is open, what's happening in the cypress garden?<sup>61</sup>//It's Urmazd, the blessed beginning of the year and of the month.
- 2 Yet again the tresses of the violet were ruffled,/the yellow mouth of the marigold was filled with ambergris.//A silver well ([dimple] *simin chahi*) was dug into the chin of the jasmine./The head of the languorous narcissus was bound with gold leaf.//The cypress was dressed in a green coat/and a crown of gold was placed on the head of the fresh narcissus.///
- 3 The pomegranate trees were dressed in Byzantine brocade (*sondos-e Rumi*),/azure fuzz (*kharman-e mina*) was scattered over the pussy-willows.//The Zoroastrian hymn singers (*zandvafan-e behi*) sang the Zand from memory,/at dawn the nightingales thrilled out the commentary of the Avesta [at dawn the nightingales thrilled out the *Zir o Seta*;<sup>62</sup> at dawn the nightingales plucked the strings *zir* and *seta*]/The turtle-doves took up *Rah-e Gol* and *Nush Labina*,/the wood-pigeons – *Bagh-e Siyavushan* and *Sarv-e Setah*.<sup>63</sup>
- 4 The francolin (*dorraji*) [challenges] his enemies with battle cries (*ghav[gaw]*), like a Deylami,/each of his feathers has the letter “vav” drawn in musk on its tip.//The turtle-dove (*varshan*) laments over every footpath

(*rahrav*); the nightingale says [over and over] from afar “Woe is me” [Dehkhoda: the nightingale says from afar “Nothing matters to me”; *ND* and *BK*: The nightingale sings to me softly from afar: (*bolbol az dur guyad bar man bejawi/be jawi*).]//<sup>64</sup> You would say that the lark (*khol*) plays the lute (*tanbureh*), and the *laskav*[*laskaw*]/flies from one tree to another sighing: “Ah.”

- 5 The cuckoo (*fakhteh*) rises up ruckus (*mashqalehi*) from the break of dawn/as if he has complaints against an unkind lover//You would say that every distraught lover (*har velehi*) has made a round noose [for trapping birds] (*gerd talehi*) [MB and Dehkhoda: You would say that [the cuckoo] has walked fast [*hervelehi*] around a trap [*gerd talehi*]]/and that the musk-colored noose (*moshkin talehi*) has ended up around his [own] throat.<sup>65</sup> //MB: Every waterfowl (*chakavak*) has a curl (*kolehi*) on its head,/and the crow (*zagh*) has sought refuge in some [distant] corner of the garden.//
- 6 The partridge (*kabk*) is like a student (*taleb-e 'elm*) and there is no doubt about that:/he studies till a third of the night has passed.//His musk-colored turban is tied beneath his throat (*taht al-hanak*)/and he has made goat-leather (*laka*) booties for his little feet.//This student has the learned man's [brown] vest on him,/his two wings (*tiriz*) are touched up with a pen, and colored black.//
- 7 *ND*: The little hoopoe (*hodhodak*) is a messenger (*peyk-e barid*), who weaves (*tanad*) [his way] among the clouds when he puts on a patched-up messenger's dress (*baridaneh moraqqa*).//He sticks the letter on his head, straight as an arrow:/Sometimes he unfolds the letter, sometimes he folds it up.//When he alights on the ground he digs the earth with his beak,/as if, struck by fear, he is trying to hide the letter by the road-side.//
- 8 Among the trefoils (*samanzar*) the anemone (*laleh-ye No'man*) is [red with] embarrassment (*shenar*)/like a crimson inkwell, [or] like the Khorasani [sky at sunrise] (*chun davati bosadin ast Khorasanivar*).//That crimson inkwell has neither lid nor painting [on it]/but fresh [marks of] Tabari ink (*medad-e Tabari*) have been made on its bottom//like [the marks that] the ten fingers of a scribe would make on the crimson inkwell, at dawn, in the spring, after a sleepless night.<sup>66</sup>
- 9 The aromatic wind gives to the narcissus the good news/that “The red rose has come out from behind the curtain [i.e. it has blossomed, and hence it has torn its veil, or the curtain that keeps it hidden],/and vows to meet you in the garden.”/Overjoyed by that vow, the narcissus bows deeply (*sojdeh konad*).//The cloud (*sahab*) arrives from the [direction of the] North Star [HK: Joddah:],<sup>67</sup> searching [for his beloved] (*be takapui*)/[he stops] at the edge of the garden (*lab-e bagh*), and looks at her garment of mourning (*salab-e bagh*).<sup>68</sup>
- 10 The garden was the beloved (*ma'shuqeh*) and the cloud was her lover ('*asheq*),/the beloved (*ma'shuqeh*) lay asleep, and the lover felt forsaken and bereaved (*mahjur o mosab*).//The lover had come from exile (*ghorbat*) with eyes full of tears/he woke up his paramour (*dustagan*) with the

- [tear-]drops falling from his eyelashes.//The paramour reached out with her hand and tore the veil (*dustegan dast bar avard o bedarid neqab*)/and came out from behind the curtain with a face like the moon (*az pas-e pardeh borun amad ba ruy-e chu mah*).//<sup>69</sup>
- 11 The lover looked at his beloved (*ma'shuqeh*) from afar/he cried out [in lamentation], so that all who had ears heard his cry.//His heart was aflame [with grief], he tore at his breast [heart] (*del*)/so that his idol would see his hidden fire with her own eyes.//The water of life (*ab-e heyvan*) started running and dripping from his eyes/until grass sprouted from the breast [heart] (*del*) and the eyes (*dideh*) of the beloved (*ma'shuq*).//<sup>70</sup>
- 12 In such a manner he railed (*taft*) at her bedside for two or three months/Every now and then tearing asunder his breast [heart] (*del*).//The lover looked [at his beloved] from afar, and ran, and hurried (*bedavid o beshetaft*)/until what was left of his heart and eye[sight] was consumed with grief for her (*ta del o dideh-ye baqish az u garm/gorm biyafi*)//Although (*garcheh*) the sun came up and shone (*betaft*) on the beloved (*dust*)/her body (*kalbod*) started decomposing [was laid waste] (*beshodash ... tabah*) from the heat of the sun.//<sup>71</sup>
- 13 The lover mourned so much without hiding [his grief]/but that never made his beloved open her heart and eyes [to him] (*hich ma'shuqeh-ye u ra del o dideh nashekof*)//She didn't spare an hour to sit, and rest, and sleep with him (*sa'ati ba u naneshast o nayasud o nakhof*)/her body did not grow covetous [for his caresses] from his laments and [their] separation (*nashodash kalbod az zari o az ferqat zofi*).//May Shah Mas'ud [never] encounter or meet/such a hard-hearted, ungrateful and disreputable mate (*inchonin sangdeli, bi haq o bi hormat jof*).

## Notes

- 1 This chapter pursues further an idea about a close relationship between *The Blind Owl* and the narrative poetry of Manuchehri, introduced in my article "Rituals of renewal: Hedayat's *The Blind Owl* and the wine myths of Manuchehri," in *La letteratura persiana contemporanea tra tradizione e modernita*. Ed. Natalia L. Tornesello. Rome: Istituto per l'Oriente "C. A. Nallino" (*Oriente moderno* XXII [LXXXIII]/1, 2003, pp. 219–241). It is part of a larger project on *The Blind Owl* and Persian tradition, initiated at the 1993 annual meeting of the Middle East Literatures Seminar in St Louis, Missouri (see "The Nightingale and the Blind Owl: Sadiq Hidayat and the classical Persian tradition", in *Edebiyat* X, 1994, pp. 247–277). This project evolved through the encouragement of scholars associated with the Seminar, particularly Julie Meisami, Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, William Hanaway, Michael Beard, Jerome Clinton, and Walter Andrews. My further research was made possible by the continuous academic patronage of the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations at the University of Toronto; and – since 1999 – by the crucial support of the Division of Humanities, York University, Toronto. Sincere thanks to the organizers of the Hedayat Conference at St Antony's College, Oxford University, for providing a forum and an incentive for new scholarship on Hedayat, and to Homa Katouzian who suggested the title of this chapter, thus determining its focus. He also offered valuable insights and clarifications in the process of editing.

- 2 See Hassan Kamshad, *Modern Persian Prose Literature*, Cambridge, 1966, p. 175.
- 3 Homa Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer* (2nd edn), London and New York, 2002, pp. 167–172.
- 4 See Naser Pakdaman, “Buf-e kur be revayat-e Hezbollah”, *Cheshmandaz* 12 (autumn 1372/1993), pp. 1–20.
- 5 Michael Hillmann (ed.), *Hedayat’s The Blind Owl Forty Years After*, Austin, TX, 1978.
- 6 Michael Beard, *Hedayat’s Blind Owl as a Western Novel*, Princeton, NJ, 1990, p. 4.
- 7 See, e.g. Kamshad 1966, pp. 172–174.
- 8 Iraj Bashiri, *The Fiction of Sadeq Hedayat*, Lexington, KY, 1984.
- 9 See, e.g. Khanlari’s speech at the First Congress of Iranian Writers of 1946 quoted in Katouzian (2002, p. 168), or Al-e Ahmad’s article “*Hedayat va Buf-e kur*” quoted in Kamshad (1966, p. 172).
- 10 See Hillmann 1978; Beard 1990, pp. 73–77.
- 11 Daniil S. Komissarov, *Sadek Khedayat: Zhizn’ i tvorchestvo* [Sadeq Hedayat: Life and works], Moscow, 1967.
- 12 Komissarov, 1967, pp. 46–47.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 47–48.
- 14 Sadek Hedayat, *Izbrannye proizvedeniya* [Selected works], translated into Russian by I.K. Benediktov, A.E. Bertel’s, D.S. Komissarov, A.Z. Rozenfel’d, and A.R. Samedov, Introduction by D.S. Komissarov and A.Z. Rozenfel’d, Moscow, 1969. *The Blind Owl* in this selection was translated by Andrei E. Bertel’s and Anna Z. Rozenfel’d. Unlike some of Hedayat’s short stories, the novel was not included in any of the other three selections of Hedayat’s works, published in the Soviet Union in 1957, 1960, and 1985.
- 15 Mohammad R. Ghanoonparvar, *Prophets of Doom: Literature as a Socio-political Phenomenon in Modern Iran*. Lanham, MD, 1984, p. 6.
- 16 Nasrin Rahimieh, “A systemic approach to modern Persian prose fiction”, *World Literature Today* LXIII, 1 [1989], pp. 15–19.
- 17 Homa Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer*, London and New York, 1991.
- 18 Yusef Ishaqpur, “At the tomb of Sadeq Hedayat/Bar mazar-e Sadeq-e Hedayat,” *Iran Nameh* X, 3 [1992], pp. 419–472.
- 19 Azar Nafisi, “The dilemma of The Blind Owl/Mo’zal-e Buf-e Kur”, *Iran Nameh* X, 3 [1992], pp. 583–596.
- 20 Houra Yavari, *Ravankavi va adabiyat: Daw matn, Daw ensan, Daw jahan: Az Bahram Gur ta ravi-ye Buf-e kur*, Tehran, 1995.
- 21 See Marta Simidchieva, “Sova v stranata na slaveite: Sadeq Hedayat i myastoto mu v persiyskata literatura” [An owl in the land of the nightingales: Sadeq Hedayat and his place in Persian literature] in S. Hedayat. *Svetlina i syanka: izbrani proizvedeniya* [Chiaroscuro: Selected works], translated into Bulgarian by L. Yaneva, ed. M. Simidchieva, Sofia, 2001, pp. 3–14. This manuscript was initially commissioned in 1985 by another publisher.
- 22 See Marta Simidchieva, “The river that runs through it: a Persian paradigm of frustrated desire”, *Edebiyat* VI, 1995, pp. 203–222, and also the relevant entries in n. 1 above.
- 23 See, e.g. the allegorical readings of Mirza Malkom Khan’s “Sayyahi guyad/A traveller relates” and Nima Yushij’s “Manali”, presented respectively in Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, *Recasting Persian Poetry: Scenarios of Poetic Modernity in Iran*, Salt Lake City, UT, 1995, pp. 44–59, and Kamran Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature*. Syracuse, NY, 2000, pp. 27–35. See also Sayyed Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh’s literary manifesto published as an introduction to *Yeki bud va yeki nabud* (9th edn), Tehran: Kanun-e ma’refat, n.d., pp. alef–mim.

- 24 See Bashiri, *The Fiction of Sadeq Hedayat*, p. 163; Kamshad, *Modern Persian Prose Literature*, p. 176.
- 25 See Leonardo P. Alishan, “The *menage a trois* of *The Blind Owl*” in Hillmann, *Hedayat’s The Blind Owl Forty Years After*, p. 168; and Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Literature of an Iranian Writer*, p. 113.
- 26 Alishan, p. 169.
- 27 Katouzian, p. 120 and p. 116 respectively. For an overall thematic breakdown of the novel see pp. 114–116.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 114.
- 29 Quoted in Beard, p. 81 and p. 89.
- 30 On Hedayat’s penchant for embodying psychoanalytical principles in his works see, e.g. Mohammad Ebrahim Shari’atmadari, *Sadeq-e Hedayat va ravankavi-ye asarash*, np. Piruz, nd; Beard, *Hedayat’s The Blind Owl as a Western Novel*, pp. 77–81. For a Jungian analysis of some aspects of the novel see Sirius Shamisa, *Dastan-e yek ruh*, Tehran, 1371 H. Sh./1992.
- 31 On the centrality of the metaphor “the maiden of speech” in the Persian poetic tradition see Karimi-Hakkak (1995, p. 51). The author notes in particular the objection of the social and literary reformer Mirza Malkam Khan (1833–1908) to such “classical modes of [conceptualizing]” the creative imagination like “the high-soaring falcon of the poetic temper” (*shahbaz-e bolandparvaz-e tab’*) and “the maiden of speech” (*dushizeh-ye kalam*).
- 32 The citations and in-text references to Hedayat’s novel come from the following editions: *The Blind Owl*, trans. D.P. Costello, London, 1957 (hereafter *BO*); and *Buf-e kur* (12th edn), Tehran, 1968 (hereafter *BK*).
- 33 Quoted in Katouzian (1991, p. 54).
- 34 That assumption was confirmed in a personal communication by Homa Katouzian, whose monograph, *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Literature of an Iranian Writer*, offers one of the most discerning and multifaceted analyses of the intellectual climate in Hedayat’s day and age.
- 35 See “Impressionism” in C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature* (4th edn), Indianapolis, 1972, p. 227.
- 36 See Simidchieva, “The Nightingale and the Blind Owl”, pp. 250–251, and “Rituals of renewal”, pp. 220–221.
- 37 Henri Massé, “Manoutchehri, poète persan du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle”, *Annales de l’IEO* [Institut d’Etudes Orientales, Algeris Université], I (1934–1935), pp. 213–232.
- 38 See Henri Massé, *Croyances et coutumes persanes suivies de contes et chansons populaires*, trans. Charles Messner as *Persian Beliefs and Customs*, New Haven, 1954, pp. 1–3.
- 39 Albert de Biberstein-Kazimirski (ed. and trans.), *Menoutchehri: Poète persan du 11<sup>ème</sup> siècle de notre ère (du 5<sup>ème</sup> de l’hégire): Texte, traduction, notes et Introduction historique*, Paris, 1886. The isolated character of this orientalist study of a Ghaznavid panegyrist is mentioned in Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, ed. K. Jahn, Dordrecht, 1968, p. 177.
- 40 See Karimi-Hakkak 1995, p. 29.
- 41 See Jerome Clinton, *The Divan of Manuchihri Damghani: A Critical Study*, Minneapolis, 1972, p. 151, and Zabih-Allah Safa, *Tarikh-e adabiyat dar Iran I*, Tehran, 1351 Sh./1972, p. 587. Manuchehri’s *divan* contains eleven *mosammats* of varying length. Each stanza (*band*) consists of three distiches (*beyts*), where all hemistiches (*mesra’*) in a stanza rhyme among themselves, except for the last: e.g. aa;aa;ab//cc;cc;cd.
- 42 The preoccupation with Manuchehri’s emulation of Arabic poets, and the lack of scholarly attention to his Persian themes, is noted and criticized by Clinton (1972, pp. 150–151). This oversight is found in both Western and Persian scholarship. For example, Rypka (1968, pp. 176–177) describes Manuchehri as “a connoisseur and

- admirer of pre-Islamic Bedouin poetry” who “emulates its descriptions of desert places” and “represents the conservative ancient Arabic school.” Although Rypka notes the popularity of Manuchehri’s *mosammats*, and the fact that he was “the first to employ” this form, there is not a word on the pre-Islamic Persian themes of most of these poems. A similar slant is observed in Safa, where the scholar states: “Another point, that must be mentioned about Manuchehri, is the influence on him of Arab poets. . . . Also his use of Arabic words often exceeds the necessary bounds for the Persian speakers of his time. . . . This poet does not know limits in that respect” (1972, pp. 586–587).
- 43 The mythological underpinnings of Manuchehri’s wine poetry are mentioned in Alessandro Bausani and Antonio Pagliaro, *Storia della letteratura persiana*, Milan, 1960, p. 331. The subject is highlighted by Clinton (1972, pp. 118, 153), and discussed at length in William Hanaway, “Blood and wine: sacrifice and celebration in Manuchihri’s wine poetry”, *Iran*, 26 (1988), pp. 69–80.
- 44 The city of Ray is yet another peculiar link between the world of *The Blind Owl* and that of Manuchehri Damghani. In Hedayat’s novel, Rey is the place of origin of the clay pot in Part I – the glazed clay pot, which convinces the despondent artist that “an ancient partner in sorrow” has suffered trials and tribulations like his own. Coincidentally – or perhaps not! – Rey is also the launching pad for Manuchehri’s career as a Ghaznavid panegyrist. Manuchehri was summoned to the Ghaznavid court while in the service of the Ghaznavid governor of Rey Taher Dabir (see Clinton 1972, pp. 25–27; Safa 1972, pp. 582–583). As the poet boasts in *qasida* 34, addressed to a jealous foe: “The king of Iran brought me from Rey on the back of an elephant/While he never spared you a thought for several years”/*Khvast az Rey khosrow-e Iran mara bar seft-e pil [posht-e pil]/khod ze to hargez nayandishid dar chandin senin*” (See Clinton 1972, pp. 26–27; Safa 1972, p. 584; Manuchehri Damghani, *Divan-e ostad-e Manuchehri Damghani: ba havashi o ta’liqat o tarajem-e ahval o fahares o loghat-nameh o moqabeleh-ye beyn-e noskkeh-ye khatti va chapi*, ed. Mohammad Dabir-siyaqi (2nd edn), Tehran, 1338 Sh./1959, p. 81: 1132).
- 45 As Homa Katouzian notes, this realization of the artist occurs in Part I, situated in the present, and anticipates the narrator in Part 2, the “ancient” episode.
- 46 The Persian text of the *mosammad* is taken from *Divan-e Ostad-e Manuchehri Damghani*. For the sake of clarity and brevity, within this chapter I utilize only interpretations, which fit my reading of Hedayat’s cultural parable. Variant readings of certain lines in Manuchehri’s *mosammad* are given in the translation of the poem which follows in the appendix.
- 47 T.S. Eliot (1888–1965): Opening lines from “The Burial of the Dead”, Part I of T.S. Eliot’s modernist poem “The Waste Land”, first published in 1922. (See Frank Kermode and John Hollander, *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature* II, New York, London, Toronto, 1973, p. 1984.)
- 48 S.v. in Francis J. Steingass, *Comprehensive Persian–English Dictionary* (4th edn), London, 1957; Ali Akbar Dehkhoda, *Loghat-nameh-ye ‘Ali Akbar Dehkhoda*, 14 vols, Tehran: Mo’asseseh-ye entesharat o chap-e Daneshgah-e Tehran, 1373 H. Sh./1993.
- 49 Hossein’ali Mallah notes that the hymns sung by *zandvafs* (or *zandbafs*) come from the *Yasna* – a liturgical compendium and one of the most ancient parts of the *Avesta*, which contains the *Gathas* – sacred hymns attributed to Zaratustra himself (see *Manuchehri Damghani va musiqi*, Tehran, 1984, pp. 181–182).
- 50 See Mallah 1984, pp. 182–188. This phrase may also be read as *zir o seta*, referring to ancient Persian tunes (see note 62).
- 51 Deylam and Tabarestan are among the relatively isolated regions of Persia, which succumbed to the Arab invaders about seventy years later than the rest of Persia. In the ninth century CE Deylam became a stronghold of Zaydi Shias, and the place of origin of the Buwayhid amirs, who eventually took control of Baghdad and were

- proclaimed *amir al-umara* of the Abbasid caliphs. Khorasan was the cradle of the Persian literary revival.
- 52 The city of Ray, which features in some historical fiction of Hedayat's such as *Parvin, dokhtar-e Sasani* and *Sayeh-ye Moghol*, was a settlement of ancient Media, mentioned in the Bisotun rock inscription of Darius the Great (522–486 BCE). Among the many sites in its vicinity are the shrine of Bibi Shahrbanu, the daughter of the last Sasanian king Yazdegerd (632–651 CE), who presumably married imam Hosyen, thus linking together Persian and Shia legitimism. The Shah 'Abd al-'Azim complex itself has yet another significance for modern Iranian history: Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (1264–1313 AH/1848–1896 CE), the last absolutist monarch of Persia, was assassinated and buried there. Some of the reforms introduced by him prepared the ground for the emergence of the Constitutional Movement in Iran. (See s.v. in Mohammad Mo'in, *Farhang-e farsi: motavasset*, 6 vols (7th edn), Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1364 Sh./1985.) I would like to thank Homa Katouzian, who brought to my attention the fact that Shah 'Abd al-'Azim defines the time as "present" in Part 1, and Ray, as "past" in Part 2, both of them being on the same site.
  - 53 See Natal'ya Yu. Chalisova, "Rashid ad-Din Vatvat e ego traktat 'Sady volshebstva v ton'kostyakh poezii'" (Rashid ad-Din Vatvat and his treatise 'Gardens of magic in the intricacies of poetry'), in Rashid ad-Din Vatvat, *Sady volshebstva v ton'kostyakh poezii: Hada'iq as-sihr fi daqa'iq ash-shi'r* (Gardens of magic in the intricacies of poetry: Hada'iq al-sihr fi daqa'iq al-si'r), N. Chalisova (trans. and com.), Moscow, 1985, pp. 56–69. The allegorical link between the garden setting and Persian poetics ('*ilm al-badi'*) is made explicit in Natal'ya I. Prigarina's article "'Sady persidskoy poetiki'" [The gardens of Persian poetics], in *Estetika bytiya i estetika teksta v kul'turakh srednevekovogo Vostoka* [The aesthetics of existence and the aesthetics of text in the medieval cultures of the Middle East], ed. Vladimir I. Braginskiy (Moscow, 1995), pp. 202–241. Prigarina advances an intriguing hypothesis regarding the aesthetic and philosophical principles behind the classification of poetical figures in Vatvat's treatise, by drawing analogies between the ordering of the different types of poetical devices in *Hada'iq al-Sh'ir*, and the architectonics of the formal Persian garden.
  - 54 Another reason for "appropriating" *mosammat 8/65* might be the evident esteem it enjoyed in the eyes of other prominent reformers, such as Ali Akbar Dehkhoda (1879–1986), who shared Hedayat's passion for Persian folklore. *Mosammat 8/65* is quoted in the *Loghat-name* with astonishing frequency, suggesting that Dehkhoda considered it to be either an epitome of poetic style, or a linguistic gold-mine. Practically every entry I consulted while working on the translation of the poem had among its poetic illustrations the distich from Manuchehri's *mosammat 8/65*, where the problematic word occurred.
  - 55 One exception might be Manuchehri's description of the anemone – the crimson inkwell "without a lid or a painting on it," which may have left a mark on the particulars of the pen case segment in the novel. Both Mo'in and Dehkhoda list pen case (*qalamdan*) as a synonym for inkwell (*davat*) – perhaps because in medieval times many pen cases had an inkwell attached at one end. See Gholamhossein Yusofi, "Calligraphy", in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* IV, London and New York, 1990, p. 704.
  - 56 Manuchehri is famous for the prominent place he gives to birds in his poetry, while Hedayat has elevated one bird – the owl – to a place of honor in the title of his novel, although it is mentioned only twice in the text, invariably in the context of reading and writing. Thus the narrator of Part II (the "writer" of the allegory), and his only "reader" – the shadow he casts on the wall while writing – are both compared to owls (*BO* p. 127/*BK* pp. 168–169).
  - 57 I am grateful to Homa Katouzian for pointing out Manuchehri's unconventional use of the word Joddah/Joday with the meaning of North Star.
  - 58 In reality, the ethereal girl comes to the doorstep of the painter herself, and precedes

him into his room, but she never speaks and has come to him “like a sleepwalker”/lit. “involuntarily, unconsciously – *bedun-e eradeh*” (BO p. 18/BK p. 29). Moreover, as the painter follows her to his room and turns to light the lamp, he loses sight of the ethereal girl, and then finds her stretched out on his bed. In other words, the starting point of this episode is practically the same as that of the narrative section in Manuchehri’s *mosammad*: both male protagonists contemplate an immobile, passive, reclining woman.

- 59 The translation of the poem was accomplished with the kind assistance of Nasser Danesh (ND) and Mehdi Baghi (MB) from the Department of Near and Middle East Civilizations at the University of Toronto. Sincere appreciation to Mohsen Ashtiani from the Center for Iranian Studies, Columbia University, for suggesting additional sources of information, which helped with the interpretation of Manuchehri’s references to music and to calligraphy. The present English version of the text was also compared with the French translation of A. Biberstein-Kazimirski (BK). Special thanks to my editor Homa Katouzian (HK), whose expert intervention led to the resolution of outstanding textual problems. Any mistakes in the final version of the text offered here are my own, for I have selected and utilized those variant readings which can be closely aligned with my reading of Hedayat’s cultural parable. Interpretations of words and phrases, based on the consultants’ suggestions, are indicated with their initials within the text of the poem. Other variant readings and clarifications of the text are given in the footnotes, and marked in a similar manner.
- 60 *Dastaan*: seen as a short version of *daastaan*, has two meanings: (1) a story, a tale; (2) a song, a melody (see Dehkhoda, s.v.). This duality of meaning allows Manuchehri to play off literary allusions against musical ones, as is seen in several instances in this poem.
- 61 *Sarvestan* is also the name of an ancient Persian melody – the fifteenth of the thirty melodies attributed to the legendary musician Barbad, whose patron was the Sasanian king Khosrow Parviz, who reigned from 591 CE to 628 CE (Mallah, *Manuchehri Damghani va musiqi*, Tehran, 1363 Sh./1984, 202).
- 62 *Zandvaf* is a metaphor for sweet singing night birds, and *behi* means Zoroastrian (Dehkhoda, s.v.). *Sata* is a Zoroastrian term denoting the commentary on the Zand and Pazand (Dehkhoda); therefore the combination *zir o sata* may denote the commentary on the exegesis of the Avesta. Mallah vocalizes this phrase as “*zir Vesta*” and interprets it as “*Zand Avesta*” – the Pahlavi commentary to the Zoroastrian scriptures (pp. 182–188). This interpretation gives a logical sequence to the metaphorical liturgy of the birds: first, the night birds sing the hymns, then at dawn the nightingales follow with their commentary. The phrase can also be read as *Zir o Seta*, denoting two musical notes, or modes. The semantic ambiguity allows one phrase to participate in two contexts – the musical and the literary one. Dehkhoda notes that in Manuchehri this expression appears in three forms: *zirseta*; *zir seh ta*; *zir o seta*. He mentions that in all three cases it pertains to music, but it is not clear from the context whether it is the name of a tune, or a musical instrument. *Zir* and *seta* separately are both names of tunes (Dehkhoda). Mallah, on the other hand, lists them as two of the three strings (*reshte*) of the musical instrument *barbat* or ‘*ud*’ (1984, p. 183). Initially it had only two strings – *zir o bam*, with the third – *seta* – added later, and eventually a fourth. Hence *zir o seta jonbondan* may be interpreted also as “plucking the *zir* and *seta*.” In the medieval theory of music each of the four strings corresponded to a specific humor: The *zir* was deemed compatible with bile, the *seta* – with phlegm (Mallah 1984, pp. 183–184). The alternation of the two apparently affected the mood of the audience. Nasser Danesh suggests that the use of the verb *jonbondan* with the phrase *zir o seta* refers to the trembling of the throat of the bird while singing, or to the undulations of the melody.
- 63 All four phrases are names of musical strains. *Bagh-e Siyavushan* and *Sarv-e Setah* in particular are associated with the name of Barbad (Dehkhoda). According to Mallah,

- gol* is the Persian designation of four Arabic styles of music, known among the Persians as *golzaar–golmaz(d)aar–golrokh – goldast* (1984, pp. 238–239).
- 64 ND and BK: “The nightingale sings to me softly from afar.” Both apparently read the letter grouping *bjvi* as *be jowi* – i.e. “a barley grain; a very small amount.” I read it as *javi* meaning “grief; the torment of love; the pain of someone who cannot express his suffering” (Dehkhoda).
- 65 ND: “You would say that every distraught lover has been trapped in a cage and is turning round and round in it, with a musk-colored noose around its neck.” BK assumes that the subject of this beyt is still the cuckoo, which is circling around in a trap, and that the black trap has fallen around its neck. The noose around the neck is a reference to the black stripe that circles the throat of some birds.
- 66 BK: “In the season of spring, at dawn, one sees in that coral inkwell the two fingers of the scribe,” where the two fingers are a metaphor for the pistils of the tulip. BK’s Persian text reads: “*chun do angosht-e dabiraneh konad fasl-e bahar/be davat-e bosadin andar shabgir pegah.*” Dabirsiaqi’s text, which I use, reads: “*Dar bonash tazeh medad-e tabari bordeh be kar/Chun dah angosht-e dabiri ke konad fasl-e bahar/be davat-e bosadin andar, shabgir, pegah.*” The traces of Tabari ink in my interpretation are the black smudges at the bottom of the tulip bloom.
- 67 According to Homa Katouzian, the word *jddh*, routinely interpreted as Jeddah (a city in Saudi Arabia), is likely to be Joddah (or Joday) – the North Star. Katouzian notes that the Arabic diminutive of this word is ‘Jodday’, and it has been used by Manuchehri in a qasida line, referring unequivocally to the star: *Hami bargasht gerd-e qotb Jodday/Cho gerd-e babzan morgh-e mosamman* (The North Star turned around the [North] Pole/Just like [= in the same direction as] the roasting chicken turns around the skewer). Indeed, the north is a more likely point of origin for a rain cloud than the dry expanses of Saudi Arabia.
- 68 Biberstein-Kazimirski interprets *salab-e bagh* as “the jewelry” or the “costume” (*parureh*) of the garden, thus implying that the cloud is looking at the flowers, or simply at her dress. *Salab* means also dress of mourning, which, in my view, implies that the cloud is looking at the black barren earth, not yet covered with vegetation. Homa Katouzian confirms the latter interpretation, adding that it alludes to the state of the garden at the end of winter.
- 69 In my reading of the poem, the waking up of the beloved, to which stanza 11 alludes, contradicts the statement in stanza 13 that the garden never opened her eyes, and never paid any attention to the entreaties of her lover. This contradiction can be resolved if one accepts Baghi’s proposition that there are two objects of the cloud’s affection in this stanza. While the beloved (*ma ‘shuqeh*) from the first line is the slumbering garden (i.e. the barren earth at the end of winter), the paramour (*dustagan*) mentioned in the second line might be reference to a newly opened tulip, peeking from its green bud like a beautiful woman who is tearing her veil, or emerging from behind a curtain. Why a tulip? Because – on account of its colour and shape – this flower fits both meanings of the word *dustegan*, listed by Steingass and Dehkhoda (s.vv.), namely: (1) lover, mistress; and (2) a cup or a glass of wine, offered to the beloved by the one who loves him or her. Other readings (Danesh, Katouzian) see in this poem only one beloved – the garden – awakened from its slumber by the tears of the cloud. In Biberstein-Kazimirski’s translation, the cloud as the lover is the only character exercising agency in this episode. He washes away with his tears the sleep from the eyelashes of his beloved, then he raises her hand (?) and tears her veil.
- 70 This stanza refers to the spring storm, accompanied by thunder (the cry of the cloud), lightning (the rendering of his breast, which shows the fire hidden inside), and rain (his tears, likened to the water of life, because the spring rain revives the earth and brings forth new vegetation). Katouzian notes, that *ab-e hayat* normally refers to the spring of life located in *zolamat* (a mysterious land in the north, engulfed by eternal darkness). Eskandar looked for this source and found it, but could not benefit from it

(see, e.g. Nezami's *Eskandar Nameh*). This is an apt clarification, for – in the context of Manuchehri's *mosammat* – the fresh verdure of spring may be equated to the green dress of the prophet Khezr, who encountered Eskandar on his quest. Khezr himself – who has drunk from the water of life – has been granted immortality. In my reading of this stanza, the garden remains asleep or dead during the lamentations of the cloud, who keeps hoping that she will wake up to see his anguish. Ironically, despite being “the water of life,” his tears cannot revive his beloved, but cause her dead body to “push up the daisies” in a very literal sense. Such a macabre view of spring is hardly ever encountered in classical Persian literature, but it features prominently in T.S. Eliot's avant-garde poem “The Waste Land.” In independent alternative readings of Manuchehri's poem, Biberstein Kazimirski, Naser Danesh, and Homa Katouzian assume that the beloved was actually awakened, and observed her lover's manifestation of grief. Kazimirski's translation does not mention – or account for – the grass sprouting from the eyes and breast of the beloved. Katouzian considers this detail to be important, since it refers precisely to the coming to life of nature, or the garden, in the spring.

- 71 The translation of this stanza is problematic also. In my interpretation, the cloud keeps vigil by the bedside of the garden for the duration of the spring, crying until he is completely spent and empty of rain. His behavior – crying, tearing at his breast, and so on – is that of a bereaved lover mourning over the dead body of his beloved. Even the rays of the summer sun cannot revive the garden: its heat causes her mortal husk – or form (*kalbod*) – to deteriorate further (*tabah [shodan]*). In Biberstein-Kazimirski's translation, the cloud quits the bedside of his beloved after two or three months, and this breaks “that heart” (supposedly the heart of his mistress?). The lover sees her anguish from afar and hurries back, but finds out that the eyes and heart of his beloved are warmed up (?) again: the sun has descended from its heights, shining hard on his mistress, and her body wastes away under its rays. In Danesh's interpretation the grass, which spikes through the heart and eyes of the beloved, brings further anguish to her lover the cloud. He can only watch helplessly from afar (i.e. from up high in the sky) the damage which the grass is doing to whatever is left of the eyes and heart of his mistress. In Katouzian's overall interpretation, the cloud brings the garden to life, but by the end of the spring the Persian sun has dried it out. One hard-to-decipher phrase, used by Manuchehri, is *grm yaftan*, where *grm* could be read as *garm* (“to grow warm, to fly in a passion”) or *gorm*, meaning “grief, sorrow” (Mo'in), and also a “rainbow” (Steingass).

## 4 *The Blind Owl*

### Present in the past or the story of a dream

*Houra Yavari*

Sadeq Hedayat and his generation of intellectuals lived in an age marked by fundamental changes in almost all aspects of life. The Constitutional Revolution (1906–1911), the rise to power of Reza Shah (r.1925–1941), and the ensuing industrialization, modernization, and Westernization of Iran were among some of the major currents that propelled Iran's social, political, and cultural spheres away from its past at a speed unprecedented in the preceding centuries of the country's history. In the wake of this break from the past, many in Hedayat's generation of intellectuals developed a critical approach toward the history and culture into which they were born, forcing upon themselves the task of reinvestigating the very foundations upon which their identity and self-conception traditionally rested.<sup>1</sup> Their initial encounter with modernity – one of the earliest such encounters outside Western Europe – launched them on a cataract of conceptual oppositions: East vs. West; old vs. new; regressive vs. progressive; traditional vs. modern. Far from seeing these concepts as continuous rather than distinct, dialectically related rather than diametrically opposed, these turn-of-the-century Iranian thinkers internalized the incongruity between their inherited local realities and the appropriated Western models as a structural deficiency. Traces of such a problematic and conflicted encounter between inherited history and infiltrated culture are widely visible in the literary production of this period; one marked by a novel awareness of its own present-ness and singularity. Past and present, culture and history, inherited ideals and adopted values merged in the narratives of the period, all refunctionalized to serve an anxiety-driven quest for the reconstruction of a newly fragmented collective identity caught in a search for a meaningful reply to the question: “Who am I?” or rather “Who are we?” In Foucauldian terminology, the period pronounced for the Iranian intellectual of Hedayat's time a “discursive present-ness: a present-ness which [he] interrogates as an event, an event whose meaning, value and philosophical singularity [he] is required to state, and in which [he] is to elicit at once [his] own *raison d'être* and the foundation of what [he] has to say.”<sup>2</sup>

In the face of this crisis of self-identification, many of Hedayat's contemporaries turned to Iran's distant past to appease their sense of fragmentation through its perceived innate cohesiveness. The emergence and development of a nostalgic image of an idealized pre-Islamic Persia was a part of that identity construc-

tion. Although the manifold images and fantasies of pre-Islamic Persia have haunted the Iranian psyche to various degrees at different points in the country's history,<sup>3</sup> these archaistic revivals of Iran's past in the years immediately preceding and following the Constitutional Revolution assumed a role radically different from before. This time, the pre-Islamic past was no longer meditated on in a quietist manner for the individual in search of solace and fortitude in the face of a more degraded world; nor was it used as a model for personal *'ebrat* [a lesson by example]. Rather, Persia's glorified past – the illusory nature of which was to be revealed only later – had instead colonized the present of the period, and subsequently developed a quasi-religious status; one that carried with it the promise of redemption. The engagement of the intellectual elites of the period in a discourse of origins and centers was in line with the mostly philologically based orientalist enterprises of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the words of Sir William Jones (1746–1794), the English philologist and student of ancient India particularly known for his proposition of the existence of a relationship among Indo-European languages,

Iran or Persia in its largest sense, was the true center of languages, and of arts; which, instead of traveling westward only, as it has been fancifully supposed, or eastward, as might with equal reason have been asserted, were expanded in all directions to all the regions of the world, in which the Hindu race had settled under various denominations.<sup>4</sup>

This notion of ancient Persia as “the true center of languages and arts” gradually developed into a privileged topos in the Persian imaginary, a shimmering fantasy in the far horizon. Pre-Islamic Persia, with its arsenal of languages closely related to Sanskrit and a long lineage of self-confident rulers administering vast stretches of land, was accorded a privileged status, its history the most heroic, its religion the noblest and oldest of all.

An extremely millenary history, that was marked perhaps more than any other by profound, radical, and often dramatic ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious medleys, and that had witnessed the coming and going of a succession of hegemonies of Greeks, Arabs, Mongols, Turks, etc. was reconstructed along the lines of a prevailing “Aryan” continuity.<sup>5</sup>

An imaginary perception, or rather, an aestheticized pre-Islamic myth, was thus discursively achieved. The intellectuals of the period turned to this myth to produce a literature that allowed its readers to participate in the shared narrative of a glorified and unifying past. One of the prominent achievements of this discourse was the insertion of the story of ancient Persia in the master narrative of Western nations, which enabled the period's elites to think of themselves as blessed with a unique pre-Islamic tradition shared with the West. Like all similar tales, it made use of rhetorical tropes and was determined by principles of exclusion. The pre-Islamic history of Persia, at the expense of its Islamic history, thus

shaped out as the period's idealized "other": a glorified and seductive heterotopia in a virtual past that stood in opposition to a fragmented present. And the perpetuation of its mythologized "truth" became an integral part of the era's collective search for self-identification and identity reconstruction. Persian history in Hedayat's time appeared like a bygone beauty composed of two elements: an alluringly beautiful past and a present in an urgent need of radical re-invention. Hedayat and his contemporaries found themselves trapped between a past that they yearned to recapture and a present that they wished to change. Nostalgia pervaded the period's literature, both poetry and prose.<sup>6</sup>

It is, therefore, more than mere coincidence that the very early works of modern Persian fiction were historical novels and dramas written by intellectuals and political activists. Many of these intellectuals had spent a part of their life abroad. Contrasting the dire conditions of Persia with the relative freedom and rule of law that they witnessed abroad, their primary aim was not to produce fiction but rather to introduce change and to modernize their homeland. Curiously enough, the very first historical novelists of the period had excluded contemporary history from the literary scene. With few exceptions, history – as treated by the first generation of fiction writers – was the history of pre-Islamic Iran.<sup>7</sup>

The romantic nationalism of these novels, expressed in the glorification of pre-Islamic Persia and denunciation of the Arab invasion, was in conformity with cultural currents, both national and international, that ultimately became the central thrust of Pahlavi state propaganda, and later surfaced in the works of writers seldom associated with conservatism, such as Hedayat and 'Alavi.<sup>8</sup>

On the whole, early Persian historical novels conveyed a curious blend of nostalgia and factual information about the past glories of Persia, gleaned from historical chronicles and orientalist studies. They already boasted a wide readership before Hedayat penned his nationalistic dramas.

The obsessive engagement of Hedayat in nationalistic sentiments is elaborated upon by many critics, scholars, and reviewers,<sup>9</sup> to the extent that it does not seem to be a matter of dispute to argue that Sadeq Hedayat, like many of his contemporaries, was captivated by the desire to step into the realm of "how the past really was" and how the present could be remodeled by decoding the mysteries that the passage of time had produced, and resurrecting the lost elements of knowledge about that distant but "real" past. "His attraction to the study of Middle Persian Zoroastrian literature was no doubt motivated by a belief in ancient Persian virtues and a desire to catch glimpses of a past unsullied by the corruptions and debasement of alien influences."<sup>10</sup> However, the endurance of Hedayat's adherence to this outlook, the extent of his participation in the discourse, the degree to which his later writings, worldview, and eventually his life were influenced by this anachronistic pursuit to retrieve information about the past and to discover the constituents of his selfhood still remain open questions.

### Hedayat and the *real* face of the *idealized* past

Homa Katouzian categorizes Hedayat's works of fiction into four analytically distinct groups, with some inevitable overlapping: romantic nationalist;<sup>11</sup> critical realist; satire; and psycho-fiction.<sup>12</sup> Hedayat's romantic nationalist writings, as Katouzian contends, "are on the whole simple in sentiment and unsophisticated in technique, and reflect sentiments arising from nationalist ideology and cult which swept over the Persian modernist elite after World War I."<sup>13</sup> On the trajectory of Hedayat's intellectual pursuit, Katouzian argues that Hedayat "quickly abandoned the genre along with nationalist fiction."<sup>14</sup> It is the premise of this study to argue that Hedayat not only abandoned nationalist fiction as a literary genre, but found it increasingly difficult to draw upon the segmented temporal episodes of a distant past in the constitution of a viable modern identity, and soon joined the ranks of the very first few of his contemporaries to cast off romantic nationalist sentiments along with any redemptive possibility such sentiments promised. Furthermore, Hedayat is distinguished from most of his contemporaries due to his ability to place himself at the *center* of this historical scrutiny, and to integrate the account of his private destiny with the collectively shared narrative of history. Hedayat's *The Blind Owl*, as noted by many critics, is a masterful rendition of a personal story smoothly blended into the collective narrative of history that, to borrow a phrase from Nabokov, mirrors the evolving function of a grand novel.

The affinities between Sadeq Hedayat's *The Blind Owl* and his other psycho-fictions have been extensively explored in recent studies.<sup>15</sup> His nationalistic dramas, with their characteristic abundance of pre-Islamic motifs and symbolism, however, do not display, readily, connection to his psycho-fictions. Mashallah Ajoudani, in his recent account of Hedayat's nationalistic sentiments, has argued that Hedayat reappropriates many of the images that initially appear in his earlier dramas within a new system of signification in *Buf-e kur*.<sup>16</sup> The result of burdening these images with a different set of historical connotations is a fundamental shift on the level of the respective chronotopes<sup>17</sup> of Hedayat's writings, and a highly revealing change in the spatio-temporal functions of his literary imagination. Where the imaginal system of Hedayat's historical writings displays a persistent nostalgic representation of a glorified and romanticized past in a present that looks toward that lost glory for self-definition, the seemingly identical imaginal system in *Buf-e Kur* is redrawn to portray instead a vast, intractable, and timeless desert of memory wherein the narrator's obsessive engagement with history and memory delivers a radically altered concept of history and selfhood; one in which the once romanticized past loses its veneer of glory and the present becomes an enclosure haunted by an old odds-and-ends man whose response to the same idealized dreamscape of history is endlessly reiterated in his owl-like "grating, gooseflesh-raising peal of laughter."

The specific critical task of highlighting the transformation of Hedayat's notions of history and selfhood may come more easily into focus if we reconsider the potential thematic and formal similarities between *Parvin Dokhtar-e*

*Sasan*, his most acclaimed historical drama, and *Buf-e kur*, arguably his best psycho-fiction, in a comparative reading that places the first at the beginning and the second at the end of the author's circuitous journey to and from a glorified past.

*Parvin dokhtar-e Sasan* is a semi-bilingual text that, as evidenced by its footnotes,<sup>18</sup> partakes of the academic orientalist discourse. It is written in the days when the *idealized* past appeared *real* and is strongly colored by nationalistic sentiments. One of the manifest characteristics of this combined idealization and nationalism is the binary opposition upon which the construction of the "self" is based in the drama: in contrast to the Persians, the Arabs are judged as physically and culturally deficient and misshapen in all regards, their manners by no means favorable to literature and the arts, their invasion of the Persian homeland a catastrophic testimony to their brutality and savagery. Hedayat's oppositional treatment of the Persians and the Arabs in the drama subsequently offers not just a mode of description but also a system of evaluation whereby the former civilization is used as a standard against which the invading other is measured and ultimately debased:

His pride in the Persian past and his belief in a glorious ancient Iran can be seen in *Parvin*, daughter of *Sasan*, a drama of mawkish sentimentality, which has as its theme the defeat of the Persians at the hands of the invading Arab armies in the seventh century, and the atrocities suffered by noble, cultivated Persians.<sup>19</sup>

The drama unfolds in a clearly defined *mise-en-place* (i.e. Ray) at a specific period in time (i.e. year 22 of the Hijra, when Persia's war with the Arabs is in full swing), and proceeds from there in a linear progression. Of the three main characters in the drama, *Parvin*, the eponymous character, kills herself with a sword she steals from the Arab commander who has fallen in love with her. In her desperate struggle to escape him, she knocks over a glazed vase displayed on a table in the commander's splendidly ornamented room, shattering it into pieces. Her father, *Chehreh-Pardaz*, chooses to die rather than to see his homeland, "this earthly paradise turn into a dreadful graveyard" (p. 32). *Parviz*, *Parvin's* fiancé, loses his life along the banks of the *Suren River* in battle with the invading Arabs (p. 49). The end of the drama marks the end of the golden age of Persian history. Central to the purpose of the study is Hedayat's portrayal of *Chehreh-Pardaz* (a name that literally translates into "portraitist"). A nobleman and an artist, *Chehreh-Pardaz* has two defining characteristics that he shares with the artist/narrator of the first part of *The Blind Owl*. One, he lives in an isolated house in Ray (p. 15). Two, he likes to draw only one face, which is that of his daughter (p. 16): a tall, slender girl of twenty, wearing a long silk dress loosely pleated at the bottom, with her hair long and her face as pale as the moon (pp. 9–10). The imaginal and thematic connections between *Parvin dokhtar-e Sasan* and *Buf-e kur* do not end here, however. Later in the drama we read that *Parviz* carries with him into battle the very last drawing of *Chehreh-*

Pardaz, his masterly depiction of his daughter (p. 25), and the drawing is buried by his side on the banks of the Suren River. Curiously enough, when the grave-digger of *The Blind Owl* unearths the ancient glazed vase at the banks of the Suren River and gives it to the artist/narrator of the first part of the novel, he discovers on it a picture, an exact replica of his own depiction of the ethereal girl. This connection is arguably strengthened by the ominous cry of an owl, which fills the garden while Parviz and Parvin exchange rings and hold each other for the last time (p. 27). In the third act of *Parvin dokhtar-e Sasan*, the Arab *Tarjoman* (interpreter), who has learnt Pahlavi to interrogate the Persian captives, tells Parvin about the very last moments of Parviz's life and the fate of Chehreh-Pardaz's last drawing.

The night before last night our army attacked your army along the Suren River. The Persians fought courageously and were all killed. I had learnt Persian. It was a cold and depressing moonlit night. Somebody pulled the bottom of my 'aba. I turned and saw a youth with disheveled hair, his left shoulder bleeding. He lifted his head painfully. I asked him in Pahlavi "Who are you?" He responded in a very broken voice, "Swear to your faith listen to me." **In his left hand he had held a piece of paper, something drawn on it.** He lifted his right hand and told me "Take this ring, and if you pass Ragha one day give it to my fiancée in the painter's house."

(p. 52)<sup>20</sup>

### ***Buf-e Kur*, the revised version of *Parvin Dokhtar-e Sasan***

*Parvin dokhtar-e Sasan*, published in 1930, and *The Blind Owl*, handwritten in Bombay in 1936, are separated by several critical years in Hedayat's life and Iran's contemporary history,<sup>21</sup> a period during which the illusory nature of a collectively held dream – the dream of salvaging a viable identity amidst historical ruins – had gradually surfaced. Ray, the Suren River, and the ancient glazed vase of *Parvin dokhtar-e Sasan* are recurring literary images and metaphors in *The Blind Owl*. Their journey from a nationalistic historical drama to *The Blind Owl*, a wasteland thoroughly devoid of any hope for renewal and redemption, wraps the two novels into one history. Replicating the history of Persia itself, the history that emerges out of the juxtaposition of these two works is composed of two zones and two spheres. Ray, the splendid ancient city of a distant past in *Parvin dokhtar-e Sasan*,<sup>22</sup> was left in ruins following the Arab conquest of the seventh century,<sup>23</sup> and was better remembered for its graveyards in Hedayat's era. The same disparity exists in the case of the Suren with respect to the spatio-temporal context of the two writings. A major river in ancient Ray and named in honor of a noble aristocratic family in the Parthian and Sasanian periods, the Suren was but a shallow stream known as Cheshmeh 'Ali<sup>24</sup> by the time Hedayat was writing *The Blind Owl*. The glazed vase also reflects the split in the fictions' respective chronotopes. When unearthed by the grave-digger, or rather, the artist/narrator of *The Blind Owl*, the glazed vase that once sat on a table in a

splendidly ornamented room in ancient Persia is now splintered by historical blows and covered by the dust of centuries. Rather than celebrating past glories, these literary images recount, instead, the sorrowful tale of an old nation trapped in the dead-ends of history with no hope for redemption. Examined side by side within the context of each writing's respective chronotope, Ray, the River Suren, and the glazed vase hence emerge as symptoms of a shattered idealization in *Buf-e kur* and symbols of a failed journey into the past in search of self-definition. Perhaps no other city would have offered a more rewarding landscape for a novel such as *The Blind Owl*, which encompasses Iran's pre-Islamic and Islamic history. Absent, unsurprisingly, in *Parvin dokhtar-e Sasan* and of key significance in *The Blind Owl*, is a square in Ray called Mohammadiyeh,<sup>25</sup> in which the old odds-and-ends man, a prototype of the inhabitants of the city, is hanged.

In my sleep I dreamed. A tall gallows tree had been erected there and the body of the old odds-and-ends man whom I used to see from my window was hanging from its arms. My mother-in law ... was dragging me by the arms through the crowd ... and shouting: "String this one [up], too."

(p. 80)

It is significant to note that, according to a variety of contemporary sources, such a square did exist in Hedayat's time in the south of Tehran, not too far from Ray. The association between Ray, Mohammadiyeh, and the scene of execution in the narrator's dream is reinforced with the historicity of this square, known as Meydan-e E'dam [Execution Square] in Hedayat's time.

Meydan-e Paqapoq, which was named Meydan-e E'dam, and later Meydan-e Mohammadiyeh, was an unbound square in a remote area cut off from the city. Those on death row were beheaded there. During the reign of Reza Shah "beheading" was banned and Meydan-e Tupkhaneh (later Sepah) was used for the purpose.<sup>26</sup>

In the light of the present reading, it is perhaps not too far-fetched to see the old odds-and-ends man, who unearths the cracked glazed vase, not only as a prototype of the city's inhabitants but further, and more poignantly, as the embodiment of the failed quest of Hedayat's contemporaries who, old odds-and-ends men themselves, were desperately rummaging through the ruins of time with the hope of recapturing a glory that ultimately proved to be nothing more than a figment of their collective and individual imagination. The hanging of the old odds-and-ends man lends to be read in this context as an ominous symbol of the impossibility and futility of the search he represents.

Equally significant factors emerge in the light of some structural disparities between the two novels. In contrast to the linear timeline in *Parvin dokhtar-e Sasan's* plot, for instance, *The Blind Owl* is organized instead on a series of parallel structures and repetitions, which divide the novel into two time zones: the present in the first part and the past in the second. The narrator in the first part is

the reclusive inhabitant of a nameless town that resembles a graveyard. In the second part, the account of his chronologically reverse journey to discover the past, he lives in “the ruined city of Ray”: Chehreh-Pardaz’s earthly paradise, for which he chose to die rather than to see it turned into a graveyard. In contrast to the clearly defined boundaries of “I” and “Other” and the well-composed characters in *Parvin dokhtar-e Sasan*, *The Blind Owl* presents its readers with the interchangeability and delimited boundaries of the fictive characters in both of its parts.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, not only do the characters have names in *Parvin dokhtar-e Sasan*, but they are also secure in the warm cradle of a glorious, heroic, and *real* past. In *The Blind Owl*, on the other hand, the fictive characters are denied personal names and distinct histories, more visibly in the first part. Rather than being identified by name, *Buf-e kur*’s characters are described by an adjective or an attribute that both defines and obscures their individuality at the same time. Observably, in this peculiar process of identification/obscuration all the characters (demonized or idealized, feminine or masculine, old or young) share common features, and ultimately emerge as identical versions of a single *self*: the narrator himself or rather the old odds-and-ends man whose face the narrator sees in the mirror as his own, gray-haired, with rotten teeth and no lashes, crumbled and hunchbacked (p. 127). In the light of the disparity between Hedayat’s respective portrayal of his characters in *Parvin dokhtar-e Sasan* and *The Blind Owl*, it now becomes possible to see how the multiple splits of this complexly intertwined and entangled collective self in *Buf-e kur* all serve as variant reflections of the one invariant image they ultimately portray: that of the contemporary Persian self as reflected in the mirror of history.

Another disparity between the works at hand is the prominence of the number “two” in *The Blind Owl*, which conceptually stands in opposition to the unity and homogeneity that mark the narrative structure of Hedayat’s earlier drama. “Twos” appear virtually everywhere in *Buf-e kur*: two parts, two brothers of confused identities, two women, two flies, two coins, two months.<sup>28</sup> In contrast to *Parvin dokhtar-e Sasan*, a historical drama based on distinction and privilege, these “twos” in *The Blind Owl* only speak of similarity and sameness. The split-in-two structure of the novel offers its sole protagonist an ideal setting to undertake excursions to other epochs of history to unveil the mysteries of a distraught present. In *The Blind Owl*, reality and dream mirror each other in numerous scenes, images, and events. The employment of the technique loads the reality of the *present* world with dreamlike qualities, whereas the dreamy landscape of the *past* maintains a foothold in real life. The characters that people the first half of the novel are depicted as unreal, distant, ethereal, and live in total isolation from the world around them. With no history and no tale to tell, they remain *unknown* throughout the first part of the novel. The very same characters, however, are synonymously depicted in the second half, but are real, close, humane and shape out to be more or less *known*, denizens of a definable setting – the ancient city of Ray. Even the river that runs through the two parts of the novel and, arguably, the two halves of our history,<sup>29</sup> is only a “river” in the first part, while it is called Suren in the second.

The structure of *The Blind Owl*, split as it is into *unknown* and *known* zones, its fragmented narrator, and its many allusions to Iran's pre-Islamic and Islamic past, gain additional significance within the broader argument of reading the novel as a historicized tale of a collectively bound self who is "the result of a mysterious sequence of impulsions, of [his] ancestor's temptations, lusts and despairs, the custodian of [their] heritage"; a self who knows that "only at the moment of death would [his] face be released from this responsibility" (pp. 114–115). There is a passage in the novel – already a native passage in Persian literature – in which the narrator of *The Blind Owl* talks about the faces that exist inside him.

They were all familiar to me within me. All these grimacing faces existed inside me and formed part of me: horrible, criminal, ludicrous masks, which changed at a single movement of my fingertip. The old Koran-reader, the butcher, my wife – I saw them all within me – they were reflected in me as in a mirror, the forms of all of them existed within me.

(p. 114)

The achievement of such an insight into the sources of identity, the recognition of grimacing faces and "horrible, criminal, ludicrous masks" as different layers of one's personality signifies the realization of a broadened notion of selfhood that pledges a dissoluble intercourse with society and history. This extended consciousness, in the words of Carl Gustav Jung, is the culmination of a multi-phased psychic process through which the boundaries between "I" and "other," self and society, the individual and the world turn to lose significance.<sup>30</sup> *The Blind Owl* – in which not only the time frame and the enunciating literary "I" breaks into pieces, but also the structure of the text embraces fragmentation – denotes the correspondence of textual and psychic structures and the textualization of the mind, a centrally held concept in contemporary psychoanalytic literary criticism. Emphasis on the linguistic nature of mental processes in psychoanalytical literary theories has, on the one hand, discredited the identification of pathological traits in either the composition of fictive characters or the personality of the novelist himself, and on the other, transformed the traditional structure of rival claims to authority and priority between literature and psychoanalysis as two disciplines and two modes of knowledge.<sup>31</sup> In *The Blind Owl*, arguably for the first time in the history of modern Persian literature, we see the unconscious sphere of the psyche as being *structurally* produced in a literary text. Hedayat embraces fragmentation, self-division, and self-alienation in *The Blind Owl*, all of which are characteristic experiences of his age, pushes them to a new extreme in Persian culture, and turns the account of his self-encounter into a mirror in which the split-in-two Iranian self of the period looks and recognizes himself. Hedayat's ability to gaze in the face of the past – be it the personal or collective – and strip it of all its disguises brought him to enact the tragic vision of the individual as centrally significant and ultimately meaningless, one which he shared with his epoch and which in its turn left indelible marks on the evolu-

tion of modern Persian literature. In his glimpse into the chaos of his self, Hedayat undergoes rare psychological experiences that load *The Blind Owl* with moments of epiphany and instances of illuminated internal explosions, through which the narrator visualizes the vast panorama of confused features and images of his collective and personal past beneath which his body and soul crumble. He recognizes that the *past* is not any better. It is, indeed, inhabited by the same people, tormented by the same problems. Everything in the *past* resembles and mirrors the *present*. He even sees “with [his] own eyes the imprint of the old man’s dirty yellow, decayed teeth, between which he used to recite the Arabic verses of the Koran” (p. 107) on the face of his wife – the *real* version of the *idealized* ethereal girl, the very same girl who he was once certain that “if she were to pluck an ordinary flower of morning glory with her long fine fingers they would wither like the petals of a flower” (p. 13). He recognizes, at the highest cost, the face of Parvin, the Sasanian girl, in the arms of the Arab commander in the final scene of the nation’s historical drama, the same girl who he once thought had killed herself to escape the enemy. Exhausted by the burden of a betrayed historical dream, he portrays the *real* face of his collective self as an ill, pale, broken, and alienated youth in the days of Iran’s glorified *past*, the mirror image of the Persian self today, who is old, deformed, and white-haired.

Anyone who saw me yesterday saw a wasted, sickly young man. Today he would see a bent old man with white hair, burnt-out eyes and harelips. I am afraid to look out of the window of my room or to look at myself in the mirror.

(p. 47)

If we take Suren as a river that runs through Hedayat’s past and present, and the two halves of Persian history, we may not be too far from visualizing what he saw on both banks of the river; we may move closer to the roots of the “sores which slowly eroded” his mind, “in solitude like a kind of canker” (p. 1); we may realize why he did not dare to look at himself in the mirror; and we may understand the significance of the owl’s blindness and the still lingering question behind Hedayat’s choice of title for the novel. The face reflected in the mirror, the prototype resident of the city of Ray, on both banks of the Suren, the heir to a plethora of ancient splendors that he once wished to preserve, is the old odds-and-ends-man who gazes “mockingly at us . . .” and bursts “into a hollow, grating, gooseflesh-raising peal of laughter” (p. 61) at our historical dreams.

A little further away under an archway a strange old man is sitting with an assortment of wares spread out in front of him on a canvas sheet. They include a sickle, two horse-shoes, assorted colored beads, a long-bladed knife, a rat-trap, a rusty pair of tongs, parts of a writing set, a gap-toothed comb, a spade, and a glazed jar over which he had thrown a dirty handkerchief.

(p. 53)

The old odds-and-ends-man, Hedayat's metaphor for the contemporary Persian self, his depiction of the collectively held dream of a period in visible form, has nothing in his hands to face the world but a dirty old mat spread in front of him. The objects on his mat, which all have "some curious affinity" with his life (p. 54), are all broken and worthless. Of these, the cracked antique jar is arguably the most intriguing image in *The Blind Owl*, which Hedayat reappropriates from *Parvin dokhtar-e Sasan*. Unearthed by the grave-digger, given away by the hearse-driver, and eventually taken by the old odds-and-ends-man in *The Blind Owl*, the cracked jar is the very same vase that was shattered in the third act of *Parvin dokhtar-e Sasan* and later buried on the banks of the Suren River along with Parviz's slain body, the fallen hero who embraced death with much passion to save his homeland. Reappropriated from the pages of a historical drama set in pre-Islamic Persia and used as one of the more prominent leit-motivs in *The Blind Owl*, the cracked jar emerges in the juxtaposition of these two writings as Hedayat's distilled – and arguably most powerful – metaphor for our ancient heritage claimed by all the characters in the novel, as well as all of his contemporaries, himself included. In the light of this reading of the cracked jar, the artist/narrator's murder and dismemberment of the ethereal girl, whose big eyes are engraved on the antique jar and the artist/narrator's paintings, emerges as an eerie re-enactment of Parvin's last moments of life during her encounter with the Arab commander in the final scene of *Dokhtar-e Sasan*. In the context of this particular refunctionalization of the cracked jar and further in the light of the suicide/murder of Parvin/the ethereal girl, *The Blind Owl*, published only a few years before the Allied occupation of Iran, the subsequent exile of Reza Shah (r.1925–1941), and the symbolic end of a romantically nationalist phase in contemporary Persian history, may thus be read not only as Hedayat's elegiac meditation on the glorified pre-Islamic past of Persia, but further as his rather jarring statement on the absurdity of its retrieval – a message reinforced by the hanging of the old odds-and-ends man.

Trapped in the blind alley of his collective identity, the narrator draws the oil lamp toward him and decides to "vent onto paper the horrors of his life" (p. 45). A "will or a testament" (p. 47), the narrative of his self-encounter turns out to be the revised version of his nationalistic drama, this time his uniquely beautiful elegy on a nation's collectively held dream. Punished like Oedipus<sup>32</sup> – the first detective in the Western tradition who gazed back into the past to decipher the mysteries of the present at the cost of blindness – Hedayat is the artist whose desire to see the past cost him his desire to see the future, and eventually his desire to live. Obsessed to see and to know, he knows; and unfortunately knows too well. It is as if he saw so much that he could never see again.

Hedayat paid a high price for his longing to know himself and to know us. But he ultimately became one of the literary liberators, "one of those exceptions," in the words of Maurice Blanchot, "from whom as from Proust, Joyce and Kafka" the new novelists have derived techniques, strategies, the authorization to know the tradition and depart from it, and above all, a capacity for introspection, an ability to make oneself the object of one's thought, which has

brought the internal terrain of selfhood in our culture to the forefront and subjected it to scrutiny.<sup>33</sup>

With Hedayat we learn analytically how to analyze ourselves, how to reveal our disturbing otherness to ourselves, and how to analyze the “other” by analyzing ourselves. We learn that the “enemy” who was once thought to be without lives within. Hedayat’s notion of selfhood and history turns *The Blind Owl* into a theater of sameness and shared destinies. If *The Blind Owl* moves us, there must be something that makes a voice within us ready to recognize the compelling force of the narrator’s destiny. His destiny moves us because it might have been, or perhaps is, our own.

## Notes

- 1 Dariush Ashouri, *Ma va moderniyat* (Tehran, 1997); Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse, 1996); Juan R. I. Cole, “Marking Boundaries, Marking Time: The Iranian Past and the Construction of the Self by Qajar Thinkers,” *Iranian Studies*, 29/1–2 (1996): 35–55; Ali Gheisari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century* (Austin, TX, 1997); Dariush Shayegan, *Cultural Schizophrenia: Islamic Societies Confronting the West*, trans. John Howe (Syracuse, 1997); and Sadeq Zibakalam, *Ma cheguneh ma shodim* (Tehran, 1376/1998).
- 2 Michel Foucault, “Kant on Enlightenment and Revolution,” trans. C. Gordon, *Economy and Society*, 15.1 (1986): 89.
- 3 See Gherardo Gnoli, *The Idea of Iran: An Essay on Its Origins* (Rome, 1989), pp. 178–179.
- 4 William Jones, “The Sixth Anniversary Discourse, on the Persians, Delivered 19th. of February 1789,” *Works of Sir William Jones*, 3:135.
- 5 Gnoli, *The Idea of Iran*, pp. ix–x.
- 6 In this vein, and as Meskub argues, there is little to differentiate Sardar Sepah from his more learned and erudite contemporaries, notables such as Moshir al-Dowleh Pirnia and the more scholarly oriented Ibrahim Purdavud. In what was clearly a non-orchestrated effort, all of them turned to the nation’s pre-Islamic past. In 1925, when the Iranian Parliament passed the National Identification Bill, by which all Persian citizens were required to choose a surname, Reza Shah settled on *Pahlavi* as his surname of choice. In 1926, Moshir al-Dawleh wrote his seminal work entitled *Ancient Iran*, followed in 1927 by his *Stories of Ancient Iran*. In those same years, Purdavud embarked on the translation of religious texts from ancient Iran. Expatriate Iranian intellectuals called their newspapers and journals *Kaveh*, and *Iranshahr*. It was in those same years that Sadeq Hedayat wrote his introduction to a selection of Khayyam’s quatrains, called it the *Lyrics of Khayyam*, lamented the bygone glory, and undertook the study and translation of Pahlavi texts. Even a scholar such as ‘Allameh Mohammad Qazvini, with his command of Arabic and Islamic culture, did not prove to be an exception. See Shahrokh Meskub, *Dastan-e adabiyat va sargozasht-e ejtema’*, 1300–1315 (Tehran, 1994), pp. 5–31. See also, Mashallah Ajudani, *Mashruteh-ye Irani ya pish zamineh-ye velayat-e faqih* (London, 1997).
- 7 Examples include Sheikh Musa Nasri’s (1882–?) *‘Eshq o saltanat ya fotehat-e Kurosh-e kabir* (*Love and Governance, or the Victories of Cyrus the Great*), based directly on sections from Herodotus, French publications on the Achaemenids and the Avesta, and Alexandre Dumas’ *Les Trois Mousquetaires*; Hasan Badi’s (1872–1937) *Dastan-e bastan ya sargozasht-e Kurosh* (*An Ancient Story, or the Life of Cyrus*, published in 1920), focused on the episode of Bijan and Manijeh from the *Shahnama*,

- with citations from Herodotus and European scholarship; Abdol Hoseyn San'ati-zadeh's (1895–1973) *Damgostaran ya enteghamkhahan-e Mazdak* (*The Ensnarers, or The Avengers of Mazdak*) and *Shah-e Iran o banu-ye Arman* (*The Persian King and the Armenian Lady*), published in 1927 by Zabih Behruz (1889–1971), who was famous for his satirical and facetious works and for his eccentric views on language and history. An important exception is *Dastan-e Yusef Shah ya setaregan-e faribkhordeh* (*The Tale of King Joseph, or the Duped Stars*), a satirical reconstruction of an episode from Eskandar Beg's *Tarikh-e 'Alam ara-ye 'Abbasi* (Eskander Beg Monshi (1560–1632), Tehran, 1334/1955, vol. I, pp. 473–477), by Fath 'Ali Akhundzadeh, referred to as the first example of Persian fiction proper by many critics; see Fereydu Adamiyat, *Andisheh-ha-ye Mirza Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh* (Tehran, 1970) and Hasan Abedini, *Sad sal dastan nevisi dar Iran*, 3 vols (Tehran, 1366–1377/1987–1997). Abedini's work, with special emphasis on major political events and cultural issues, provides a convenient survey of the historical development of fiction writing in Persia. It also offers a wealth of information on the major novels and short stories and their authors. In addition, Yahya Aryanpur, *Az Saba ta Nima*, 3 vols (Tehran, 1371/1992), provides a succinct history of modern Persian literature during the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, combining judicious accounts of the writers of the period, their works, newspapers, and so on, with abundant quotations and illustrations. The third volume, *Az Nima ta ruzegar-e ma*, was published posthumously (Tehran, 1995), pp. 333–421, and idem, *Zendegi va athar-e Hedayat* (Tehran, 2001). See also Houra Yavari, "Fiction: Modern," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 9: 580–603. Mohammad Gholam in his *Roman-e tarikhi: seyr o naqd o tahlil-e romanha-ye Farsi 1284–1332* (*The Historical Novel: Development, Critique and Analysis of Persian Novels, 1904–1954*), an elaboration on the socio-political factors that contributed to the genesis of the Persian novel, in general, and the historical novel, in particular, suggests that the failed Constitutional Revolution confronted Iranians with a historical dilemma: "What had happened to the social, political, and cultural glories of the past?" (see pp. 98–105).
- 8 Shahrokh Meskub, *Dastan-e adabiyat*, pp. 13–25.
  - 9 Mashallah Ajoudani, "Hedayat va nasiyonalizm," *Iran-Nameh*, 10/3 (1993): 473–504, and also "Melliyyat-gerayi dar *Buf-e Kur*," in *Daftar-e kanoon-e nevisandegan dar tab'id, 16th., vijeh-nameh-ye Sadeq Hedayat* (2003): 81–105. Michael Hillmann, "Iranian Nationalism and Modernist Persian Literature," *Essays on Nationalism and Asian Literatures, Literature East and West*, 23 (1987): 69–89. See also Ehsan Yarshater's introduction to *Sadeq Hedayat: An Anthology*, Modern Persian Literature Series, no. 2, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Colorado, 1979), pp. vii–xiv.
  - 10 *Sadeq Hedayat: An Anthology*, p. viii.
  - 11 Hedayat's nationalistic dramas include *Parvin dokhtar-e Sasan* (Parvin the Sasanian Girl, 1930; "Saya-ye Moghol" ("Shadow of the Mongol," in *Aniran* with the collaboration of Alavi and Partow (Tehran, 1930); "*Akherin labkhand*" ("The Last Smile," in *Sayeh-rowshan* (Chiaroscuro, Tehran, 1933)); and *Maziyar* (with Minovi, Tehran, 1933).
  - 12 Hedayat's psycho-fictions comprise, in a broad sense of the term, *Zendeh be-gur* ("Buried Alive," Tehran, 1930); *Seh qatreh khun* ("Three Drops of Blood," Tehran, 1933); "*Arusak-e posht-e pardeh*" ("Poppet Behind the Curtain," in *Saya-rowshan, Chiaroscuro*, Tehran, 1933); "*Bonbast*" ("Dead End," Tehran, 1942); "*Tarik-khaneh*" ("Darkroom") and "*Sag-e velgard*" ("Stray Dog," in *Sag-e velgard*, Tehran, 1942).
  - 13 Homa Katouzian, "Hedayat: Sadeq: Life and Work," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 12: 125.
  - 14 *Ibid.*
  - 15 Hedayat's *The Blind Owl* is perhaps the best-researched and closely scrutinized text of modern Persian fiction. We are provided with a variety of perspectives into the novel from different and occasionally opposing views. The interpretations range, *inter alia*, from a novel laden with psychological complexes, autobiographical nightmares,

- and incestuous and murderous desires, to a text colored by Hindu imagery and highly informed by both Persian and Western literature, on to a narrative of socio-political symbolism, or to the account of a tormented soul responding to a compelling urge of self-realization. It is interesting to note, however, that *The Blind Owl* still rewards textual and contextual interpretations, and we – readers and critics of the novel – remain more burdened with questions than relieved by answers. Besides works cited already, see: Michael Beard, “Character and Psychology in Hedayat’s *The Blind Owl*,” *Edebiyat*, 1 (1976): 207–218; idem, “The Hierarchy of the Arts in *The Blind Owl*,” *Iranian Studies*, 15 (1982): 53–67; idem, *The Blind Owl as a Western Novel* (Princeton, NJ, 1990); Michael C. Hillmann, “Hedayat’s *The Blind Owl*: An Autobiographical Nightmare,” *Iranshenasi*, 1/1 (1989): 1–21; Homa Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer* (London and New York, 2002); idem, *Sadeq Hedayat va marg-e nevisandeh* (Tehran, 1993); idem, *Buf-e kur-e Hedayat* (Tehran, 1994); Hasan Kamshad, *Modern Persian Prose Literature* (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 135–208; Marta Simidchieva, “Rituals of Renewal: Sadeq Hedayat’s *The Blind Owl* and Wine Myths of Manuchehri,” *Oriente Moderno*, XXII, 6 (2003): 220–241; Ehsan Yarshater, “Modern Literary Idioms,” in *Critical Perspectives on Modern Persian Literature*, ed. Thomas M. Ricks (Washington, DC, 1984), pp. 42–62; idem, “Sadeq Hedayat: An Appraisal,” in *Persian Literature*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Albany, 1988), pp. 318–323. All references to *The Blind Owl* are from D. P. Costello’s translation (New York, 1957).
- 16 Mashallah Ajudani, “Hedayat va nasiyonalizm”: 473–504, and also “Melliyyat-gerayi dar *Buf-e Kur*”: 81–105.
- 17 “The chronotope,” Bakhtin writes, “is where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. . . . Time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible; the chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins. . . . Thus the chronotope, functioning as the primary means for materializing time in space, emerges as a center for concretizing representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel. All the novel’s abstract elements – philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect – gravitate towards the chronotope and through it take on flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art to do its work.” *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Texas, 1981), p. 250.
- 18 Sadeq Hedayat, *Parvin dokhtar-e Sasan*.
- 19 Ehsan Yarshater, ed., *Sadeq Hedayat: An Anthology*, p. viii.
- 20 See also on *Parvin* and nationalism Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, Chapter 9, this volume.
- 21 For Hedayat’s life see Homa Katouzian, “Hedayat, Sadeq: Life and Work,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 12: 121–127 and *Sadeq Heayat, the Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer*.
- 22 For the history of ancient Ray see *Mojmal al-tavarikh*, ed. Malek-al Sho‘ara Bahar (Tehran, 1939), p. 43.
- 23 Hoseyn Kariman, *Rayy-e Bastan* (Tehran: Anjoman-e Athar-e melli, 45, 1967), vol. 1, pp. 17–83. See also Arthur Christensen, *L’Iran sous les sassanides* (Copenhagen, 1944), p. 105; Elton Daniel, “History as a Theme in Hedayat’s *The Blind Owl*,” in *Hedayat’s The Blind Owl: Forty Years After*, ed. Michael C. Hillmann (Austin, 1979), pp. 76–86; and Guy Le Strange, *Lands of the Eastern Caliphates* (Cambridge, 1905), p. 214ff.
- 24 Hoseyn Kariman, *Rayy-e Bastan*, vol. 1, pp. 135–159; Elton Daniel, “History as a Theme in Hedayat’s *The Blind Owl*”: 77.
- 25 Historians tell us that Mohammad al-Mahdi, the Abbasid caliph who was the governor of Ray for approximately two years (c.774–775 CE), built the eastern section of the city, which was later named Mohammadih in his honor (Hoseyn Kariman, *Rayy-e Bastan*, vol. 1, pp. 80–81; Abu al-‘Abbas al-Baladhuri, *Kitab futuh al-buldan*, ed.

- M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1866), p. 319). Elaborating on the historical symbolism of *The Blind Owl*, Elton Daniel argues that although “it is impossible to positively associate Mohammadiyah Square with the city of Ray; it is entirely plausible that such a place as Mohammadiyah Square could have existed at some time in Ray” (Elton Daniel, “History as a Theme in Hedayat’s *The Blind Owl*”: 77).
- 26 Ja’far Shahri, *Tarikh-e ejtema’iy-e Tehran dar qarn-e sizdahom* (Tehran, 1990), vol. I, p. 357. See also Ali Akbar Dehkoda, *Loghatnameh*, 208: 601.
  - 27 Leonardo Alishan, “The Ménage-à-trois of *The Blind Owl*,” in *The Blind Owl: Forty Years After*, pp. 168–184; Homa Katouzian, *Buf-e kur-e Hedayat*, pp. 31–39; Sirus Shamisa, *Dastan-e yek ruh* (Tehran, 1992), pp. 35–37; Houra Yavari, *Ravankavi va adabiyat: Dow matn, dow ensan, dow jahan* (Tehran, 1995).
  - 28 Michael C. Hillmann, “Hedayat’s Fiction: Themes, Plots and Techniques,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 12: 130; Mohammad San’ati, *Sadeq Hedayat va hasas az marg* (Tehran, 2001), pp. 269–288.
  - 29 Nader Naderpur, “Iraniyan: yekkeh savaran-e dowsanegi,” *Iran-Nameh*, 12/3 (1994): 439–473; Marta Simidchieva, “The River That Runs Through It: A Persian Paradigm of Frustrated Desire,” *Edebiyat*, 6 (1995): 203–222.
  - 30 Carl Gustav Jung, “A Study in the Process of Individuation,” *Collected Works of Carl Gustav Jung* (Princeton, NJ, 1989), vol. 1, pp. 290–354; and “Conscious, Unconscious and Individuation,” *Collected Works*, 9:1: 275–289.
  - 31 See Shoshana Felmann, “To Open the Question,” in *Literature and Psychoanalysis, The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, ed. Shoshana Felmann (New Haven, CT, 1982), pp. 5–11. Peter Brooks argues that “the structure of literature is in some sense the structure of mind – not a specific mind, but what the translators of the standard edition of Freud’s works call ‘the mental apparatus’ (*psychischer*, or *seelischer Apparat*), a term which designates the economic and dynamic organization of the psyche, to a process of structuration. After all, it was Freud himself who readily admitted that the poets and philosophers had anticipated all he had to say.” See Peter Brooks, *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling* (Oxford, 1994), p. 24.
  - 32 Bahram Meghdadi and Leo Hamalian, “Oedipus and *The Blind Owl*,” in *The Blind Owl, Forty Years After*, pp. 142–152; Jalal Sattari, *Baztab-e ostureh dar Buf-e kur: Odip ya madineh jan* (Tehran, 1998), pp. 49–77.
  - 33 It is interesting to note that history for Persian novelists since Hedayat and especially after the 1953 coup is either an allegorized immediate history, as in Simin Daneshvar’s (1920–) *Suvashun* (Tehran, 1969) where only a solitary allusion to Tuesday, October 31, 2006, Iran’s pre-Islamic past is made in the context of martyrdom exemplified in the legend of Siyavash, or a sorrowful tale of decadent kingship, as in Houshang Golshiri’s (1937–2000) *Shazdeh Ehtejab* (1968). The Qajar era appears as a leitmotiv in many novels of the period, as in Amir Hasan Chehelan’s (b. 1956) *Talar-e a’ineh (The Hall of Mirrors)*, 1991), Reza Jula’i’s (b. 1950) *Shab-e zolmani-e yalda wa hadis-e dordkeshan (The Longest Night of the Year and the Tale of the Tippler)*, 1990), and *Khaneh-ye Edrisiha (The House of the Edrisis)*, 1992) by Ghazaleh ‘Alizada (1948–1995).

The post-revolutionary novels and short stories, different in many ways, are strikingly similar in their conscious treatment of history as a literary theme, and are too far from any idealized allusion or reference to the splendors of the pre-Islamic past. Ja’far Modarres Sadeqi (1954–) is among the very few writers in this period who in his *Nakoja-abad (Utopia)*, Tehran, 1990) has re-examined the deep layers of the nation’s collective unconscious, envisaged in pre-Islamic archetypes and symbols, and – similar to Hedayat in *The Blind Owl* – has inferred conclusions that are drastically different from those reached by the first generation of historical novelists. Reference should also be made to Javad Mojabi’s (1938–) *Mummification*, in which the coffin of a glorified ancient king passes through history, complicit in the unending sufferings of the people.

## 5 Influence as debt

### *The Blind Owl* in the literary marketplace

*Michael Beard*

I took out from the tin box the portrait I had painted of her the night before and compared the two. There was not an atom of difference between my picture and that on the jar. The one might have been the reflection of the other in a mirror. . . . Perhaps the soul of the vase-painter had taken possession of me when I made my portrait and my hand had followed his guidance [*Shayad ruh-e naqqash-e kuzeh dar mawqe'-e keshidan dar man holul kardeh bud va dast-e man beh ekhtyar-e u dar amadeh bud*].

(*Buf-e Kur* 58/*The Blind Owl* 39)<sup>1</sup>

It is built into the teaching of literature that when we begin reading we see each book as a monad, a universe in itself. It was an item of faith in New Criticism, which shaped my education, that each book really is a monad, and it is a compelling idea. The fundamental appeal of fiction is that it wraps around us and temporarily replaces our outside world. Criticism cannot remain in there, however, and the moment we begin to think in comparative terms criticism becomes uncomfortable. Once the walls of the fiction become transparent the rules we follow as readers become less obvious. Hearing phrases from Holinshed's *Chronicles* in lines of Shakespeare, or hearing paraphrases of Virgil in the verses of *The Divine Comedy* never seems a cause for anxiety, since Shakespeare and Dante are perceived to occupy secure niches at the center of tradition, but there are cases where looking past the walls is a source of pain. When we hear Gabriel Garcia Marquez in the interstices of a novel by Parsipur or Poe in Hedayat we may feel that those whispers question the coherence and identity of the influenced writer.

*The Blind Owl*, which is my subject in this chapter, has been for me both self-contained and transparent. In 1968 when I first read it, in Costello's translation, it struck me with the force of a difficult classic, something sealed and fixed, a part of history. It was only gradually that I came to feel the text as something handmade, something that might not have happened, the work of a human being whose experiences, and above all whose bicultural identity and whose reading were visible and relevant. Since what brings us together here is a celebration of his life, it seems appropriate to remember the realm of the improvisational and

tenuous, the human. We all have our own reasons for remembering him; his forthright secular sensibility has taken on added resonance today when religious discourse dominates political life in both the USA and Iran. His willingness to open up the canvas of fiction to scenes which threaten decorum and his openness to international influences in his writing could tempt us to remake him in our own image. We are limited in our perception of him by our historical distance, over 100 years from his birth, over fifty from his death, and we need to acknowledge that our fascination with him can never be completely disinterested.

In one sense *The Blind Owl* has unusually opaque walls. Its events are colored so plainly by the narrator's perception, personalized so completely that we pass beyond them to the writer's society only at our peril. A lot of my own research has been an attempt to pass those walls by retracing Hedayat's reading, to ask who his predecessors were, what the book is made of. Individually, we hear the influence of particular voices; collectively, we locate him in a tradition. Either category of voices can be a source of conflict. Perhaps of pain.

The reason I consider this important is that we still use the word "influences" – we hardly have an alternative – but I think there have been changes in pedagogy and in criticism over the last generation that have eroded its precision and made it harder and harder to use without explanation. At one time it was possible to say, as Wellek and Warren's 1942 handbook on comparative literature of an earlier generation maintained, that "The most obvious relationships between works of art – sources and influences – have been treated most frequently and constitute a staple of traditional scholarship."<sup>2</sup> Wellek and Warren's study (I began to say "influential" study) had a title that in retrospect sounds naive: *Theory of Literature*. As theory it was rudimentary. Its users characteristically employed what now seem simple frameworks. They were writing in an earlier age, when whole reputations could be launched by doctoral theses and books which simply identified the writers our subject had read: Chaucer and the French tradition or the Victorian dimensions of *Finnegans Wake*. It seemed a magical way for a researcher to personalize the subject of inquiry, to place one writer in a community of writers.

The period of innocence did not last. Eventually the concept of influence became complicated by the critical traditions we associate with Bakhtin and with structuralism, where the intertextual play of citation is a constant undercutting of the very notion of the individual writer's identity. And, oddly, it is just at the point where the concept of influence was undergoing that complication, when literature began to be seen as a tissue of citations and pastiche, and "intertextuality" began to replace the term "influence," a very powerful retrograde statement captured the critical foreground, Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York, 1973). Bloom theorized the intertextual process in oddly naive terms. Bloom's version of it, regressive, profoundly against the grain, personalized the process. He made influence a literary star system in which the only participants are celebrities competing across generations. Nevertheless, *The Anxiety of Influence* is a powerful statement, and influential no matter how we define influence, since it provides the terms that we all still use whether we

intend to or not. For Bloom the fundamental relations between writers and their predecessors are intersubjective, personal, combative. The very act of creation is to challenge a predecessor whose work solved similar problems. It is a profound oversimplification, but as Paul de Man observed in a famous review of the book, it may express a psychological truth with its own emotional validity.<sup>3</sup> Bloom's abandonment of claims to accuracy and precision allows him to trace a family romance which operates like litmus paper, to exaggerate affective elements which might otherwise be invisible. Beyond this, the greatest contribution of *The Anxiety of Influence* may be to act as a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* of influence, to restrict the definition so radically that there is no room left for dispassionate or neutral research. What may have happened in the thirty years since Bloom's book appeared is that he has in fact co-opted the word, which from now on has the imprint of his theorization on it. I believe this is called "branding." It is a brilliant rhetorical move, which may ultimately just take the word out of circulation. This may not be such a bad thing.

A recent article in *Edebiyât* by Mehdi Khorrami opens a discussion of the narrative style of Shahryar Mandanipur with a comment that could be read as a personal warning to this lecture. It is specifically a rejection of received ideas about influence:

Most studies of the history of Persian prose fiction begin with the apparently accepted myth that the Iranian novel and short story were imported to Iran from the West. Yahya Ariyanpur in *Az Saba ta Nima* goes so far as to say that "Iranian novelists were tempted to write novels only because they had read and enjoyed foreign novels."<sup>4</sup>

Ariyanpur's account of cause and effect is neither very long nor very complicated: it suggests simply that the novel is a European form exported to Iran. The Persian text may show more clearly than the translation what caught Khorrami's eye. That phrase in *Az Saba ta Nima* – "tanha az tariq-e khandan va lezzat bordan az roman-ha-ye khareji" – puts an emphasis on *tanha* which the "only because" of the translation does not quite catch.<sup>5</sup> That word *tanha* creates the atmosphere of dependence on Western culture which is our subject.

Khorrami's argument marks a subtle and persuasive attempt to substitute an alternative way to read the relation between a work of fiction and its predecessors. He opens with a series of questions which make it clear that he is not making a simple appeal to nationalist identity:

What do we mean when we say we have taken the short story and the novel from the West? What are the components of literary forms of the short story and the novel, and which of them was taken from the West? What are the formal components of literary traditions in France which, according to the previously mentioned writers and scholars, have been considered the major exporting end of the Western literary tradition? Indeed, the lack of such debates has not only misplaced the literary frames of reference for modern

Persian fiction but has also led to a chronic misunderstanding of the relationship between Persian fiction and its western counterparts.

(Khorrami, p. 12)

It is my intention to agree with Khorrami's argument, but I can feel already that in the process of agreeing with it, from my point of view, my emphasis is likely to change it.

For one thing, we need to acknowledge that Sadeq Hedayat was profoundly informed about European literature. Indeed, among the pleasures of Mostafa Farzaneh's memoir of his friendship with Hedayat<sup>6</sup> are the occasions where Hedayat recommends books to him; reading them is like having a conversation across time about his tastes, having the conversation we will in fact never have. Even if Farzaneh's memory is imperfect (and often he recounts a conversation so diligently that the reader suspects artful reconstructions rather than memories), Hedayat's taste and experience as Farzaneh presents them are consistent with the evidence of his writing, though it is a surprise how well informed he was. His detailed opinions of anglophone contemporaries – Hemingway, Faulkner, Joyce and Virginia Woolf, even Henry Miller – seem convincing. Hedayat speaks of Russian writers, not just Gogol, whom we would expect, but also Nikolai Leskov. One wants to know a lot more about the teacher at the high school St Louis who recommended a series of French writers to him, including Baudelaire and, less obviously, Gobineau (Farzaneh, vol. 1, p. 149). Poe and E.T.A. Hoffman are both included in that memory of an early reading list. It is as if we cannot name a potential influence without discovering that Hedayat read that writer. But again, which ones shall we call influences?

A second provision to add is that we can provide a partial answer to Khorrami's question about the components of European narrative. I would list as European innovations the emphasis on visual detail and the definition of character as a product of social conditions, traditions which we often trace from in Balzac as developments of nineteenth-century Europe. Hedayat's short stories adapt devices in which point of view is focalized around a protagonist's observations which I would also consider characteristic of European narrative. Traces of passages from European writers whom he admired (notably Thomas Mann in the short stories) are visible throughout his writing;<sup>7</sup> *The Blind Owl* is particularly rich in them. It is clear that Khorrami's argument does not set out to deny the existence of Western models.

The question is how we understand the process of influence. If we say that a writer chooses models wisely, we seem to praise him; if we say that a writer is "influenced" by the same models, we seem to be questioning the independence, originality, validity, and authority of the work. And yet it is the same process. The etymology is part of the problem; the term "influence" comes to us from astrology, where the stars influence us, with a physical image in its etymology of a fluid that flows in from one body to another. The Persian term, from Arabic *nufūdh*, conveys a comparable master/slave implication with a different image. Arabic dictionaries lists the root meaning of the verb *nafadha* as piercing, penet-

rating, and the verbal noun *nufūdh* as penetration, permeation, prestige, authority. What is missing from all our discussions of influence is a perhaps willful refusal to acknowledge that “influence” is a figure of speech. We simply don’t have an accurate terminology or even a neutral one to describe what happens in the privacy of the writer’s study between the book of a predecessor and the evolving manuscript. The starting point may be to correct the misperception that “to be influenced,” a passive verb, is a passive act as well. (Paul de Man’s suggestion “that the term ‘influence’ is itself a metaphor that dramatizes a linguistic structure into a diachronic narrative” [*Blindness and Insight*, p. 276] might be the first step in a redefinition that strips influence of its emotive associations.)

Hedayat’s masterpiece *The Blind Owl*, our real subject today, has passed through numerous stages of critical analysis, from a mysterious, controversial and dangerous new phenomenon in its early days to an accepted, intimidating new experiment, the object of cult admiration, in the decade following his death, to a venerable classic, and then after 1979 back to a threat. At each point I think the question of its influences, the vexed question of what the book is made of, is an issue. *The Blind Owl* can serve as a test case to examine more closely what literary influence might be. My project is to isolate three intertextual categories usually classified as influence by discussing the relation between Hedayat and three predecessors – Rilke, Poe, and Otto Rank. The three relationships are sufficiently different that I think they can help us reframe our definitions.

The first example is the most straightforward. A series of three extended passages from Rilke’s *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910), which Hedayat probably knew from the Maurice Betz translation, demonstrate beyond doubt that he read Rilke and considered him to be important. Those passages have troubled commentators because the borrowing, adaptation, appropriation, citation – we can’t help but search for an appropriate word – is in barely assimilated lumps of text. We need only read a single pair side by side. Hedayat’s speaker looks at the nail in his wall – a stable point in his perception – and says:

Just below the nail there is a patch where the plaster has swelled and fallen away, and from the patch one can detect the odours from the things and the people which have been in the room in the past. No draught or breeze has even been able to dispel these dense, clinging, stagnant odours: the smell of sweat, the smell of by-gone illnesses, the smell of people’s mouths, the smell of feet, the acrid smell of urine, the smell of rancid oil, the smell of decayed straw matting, the smell of burnt omelettes, the smell of fried onions, the smell of medicines, the smell of mallow, the smell of dirty napkins, the smell which you find in the rooms of boys lately arrived at puberty, the vapours which have seeped in from the street and the smells of the dead and dying.

(BK 50–51/BO 50–51)

The counterpart passage in Rilke’s notebooks is from a scene where Brigge is watching a house being demolished:

And from these walls once blue and green and yellow, which were framed by the fracture-marks of the demolished partitions, the breath of these lives stood out – the clammy, sluggish, musty breath, which no wind had yet scattered. There stood the mid-days and the sicknesses and the exhaled breath and the smoke of years, and the sweat that breaks out under armpits and makes clothes heave, and the stale breath of mouths, and the fusel odor of sweltering feet. There stood the tang of urine and the burn of soot and the grey reek of potatoes, and the heavy, smooth stench of ageing grease. The sweet lingering smell of neglected infants was there, and the sultriness out of the beds of nubile youths. To these was added much that had come from below, from the abyss of the street [*du gouffre de la rue*].<sup>8</sup>

(Norton trans. 47–48/Betz trans. 47)

To pass from the recognition that Hedayat has indeed read Rilke, the material proof of sheer similarity, to the more complicated decision of how it might affect our understanding of *The Blind Owl*, a starting point might be that Rilke's sensibility isn't much like Hedayat's. Rilke's examination of the dark undercurrents of perception is grounded in a less fragile observer. There is an unstated premise in the *Notebooks* that the voice speaking to us is learning and growing as the examples accumulate. Rilke's description feels like an improvisation, opening with a brief statement of his expanding vision. ("That I saw. Saw."/"Voilà ce que j'ai vu. Vu." – 46/46). Hedayat's list is by comparison more leisurely and composed, more polished and static, more sure of itself and deliberate, framed in the space where the plaster has peeled away from the wall. In Betz's translation "la vie opiniâtre" of the walls is notable because what it clings to is crumbling and temporary. Rilke's focus on the fragility of the house is countered by Hedayat's on its stubborn persistence. And each of the three major citations is located in a discursive stretch of *The Blind Owl*, disconnected from the high-profile turns of plot – the leisurely description of the narrator's room in the opening of Part Two, the list of fears and the miniature philosophy that humans show multiple faces which occur in discursive passages, separate from the "action" later in the book. We seem to be dealing with a deliberate, shaped homage. (Homa Katouzian has suggested that Hedayat is likely to have mentioned his use of Rilke to Al-e Ahmad, since Al-e Ahmad mentioned the Rilkean passages in his 1953 elegiac essay on Hedayat, and this seems consistent with the idea of passages designed to pay homage to a predecessor rather than a case of being overpowered by them.<sup>9</sup>) It would seem to stretch the definition of the term "influence" to speak of Rilke as an influence.

The way in which Hedayat arranges for Edgar Allan Poe to haunt *The Blind Owl* is at once more diffuse and harder to focus on, because the borrowings are in fragments, but recognizable fragments because Poe's stories are so familiar. The passages in *The Blind Owl* which remind us of him are in the form of plot motifs and distinctive turns of phrase: the teeth which Poe's Egaeus, the narrator of "Berenice," finds in his hands after extracting them from Berenice, remind us of the eye in the narrator's hand at the conclusion of *The Blind Owl*. The narra-

tor of “The Black Cat” describes his violence against his wife in an affidavit “neither expecting nor soliciting belief”<sup>10</sup> as the narrator of *The Blind Owl* also does. At the same time, the elements in which we recognize Poe’s handprints are nearer the core of *The Blind Owl*: they show up at points which I would judge to be crucial to the plot. Often the borrowing is the turning point.

Fortunato’s laugh in “The Cask of Amontillado” which he is sealed up in the underground chamber is “a low laugh that erected the hairs upon my head” (Poe, vol. 3, 1263, in Baudelaire’s French version, “un rire étouffé qui me fit dresser des cheveux sur la tête”<sup>11</sup>). It wouldn’t be quite fair to label this a borrowing and stop. After all, it is only a single phrase, indeed a phrase which one could pick up in any number of writers unless we had been attuned to think of Poe as a tutelary spirit.<sup>12</sup> If it is a borrowing, it is an ubiquitous one, since the laugh of the old man (whether in the guise of the uncle, the grave-digger or the odds and ends man) recurs as a leitmotiv, a metonymy which sums the old-man figure up, as the eyes sum up the ethereal woman, a reminder that the old man is a source of fear.

*Anvaqt pirmard zad zir-e khandeh, khandeh-ye khoshk va zanandeh'i bud  
keh mu ra beh tan-e adam rast mikard, yek khandeh-ye sakht daw-rageh, va  
maskhareh-amiz ...*

[All at once the old man burst into laughter. It was a hollow, grating laugh, of a quality to make the hairs of one’s body stand on end; a harsh, sinister, mocking laugh.]

(BK 15–16/BO 10)

Hedayat doesn’t simply translate; his list of attributes (*khoshk* and *zanandeh*) delays the relative clause showing its effect on the listener, at the same time expanding its effect from Poe’s “my head” (Baudelaire’s less personal “la tête”) to the whole body, reiterating the word *khandeh* to show successive stages of fear invoked by the sound. Like the spiral pattern of the eyes in the famous sketch of an owl which Hedayat drew as a *cul de lampe* at the end of the handwritten version of the book in 1936, the laugh seems to surround the reader.

In the famous passage which follows the moment when the narrator has drawn the woman’s eyes, the evocation of dawn which begins “Shab pavarchin pavarchin miraft” (BK 39/BO 26–27) there is a complex series of half-hidden references to Poe too complicated to discuss in this venue.<sup>13</sup> They are in my opinion the most elaborate reference to Poe, but rather than evidence of an influence they seem to me to confirm the instincts (for once) of those critics who search for puzzles and hidden meanings in literature.

A turning point of Part One is the moment when the ethereal woman’s eyes open momentarily as the narrator sits by her corpse attempting to paint her likeness.

All at once as I looked at her a flush began to appear upon her cheeks. They gradually were suffused with a crimson colour like that of the meat that

hangs in front of butcher's shops. She returned to life. Her feverish, reproachful eyes, shining with a hectic brilliance, slowly opened and gazed fixedly at my face. It was the first time she had been conscious of my presence, the first time she had looked at me. Then the eyes closed again.

(BK 28/BO 25)

It seems to me to be hard to avoid seeing here a conscious reworking of the conclusion of Poe's "Ligeia," where the narrator sits at the deathbed of his second wife, Rowena. There is, however, a distinctly different tone:

And now slowly opened the eyes of the figure which stood before me. "Here then, at least," I shrieked aloud, 'can I never be mistaken – these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes – of my lost love – of the Lady – of the Lady Ligeia".

(Poe, vol. 2, 330)

This is a case where Hedayat's sensibility, his preference for plot types which lead in stages to a horrific epiphany, is like Poe's. The conclusion of *The Blind Owl*, with its sudden blinding realization "I had become the odds and ends man" (BK 114/BO 128), is very much in the style of Poe. Here I think we are closer to the classical definition of influence, without stretching its semantic field: we could certainly think of Hedayat learning from Poe, or we could say that Hedayat watched with fascination as Poe solved narrative problems that Hedayat was also interested in. Here the word "affinity" might work as well as influence to describe the relationship.

Our third example is the one I would like to emphasize, because it is the least visible and it penetrates most deeply into the fabric of Hedayat's imagination. Otto Rank is no longer much read, but at one time he was one of the most prominent of the members of Freud's circle, and his book *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (1909)<sup>14</sup> was a ground-breaking application of psychoanalytic methods to folklore. By now I suspect all of us are familiar with its premise (if not with the author), that in fantasy we equip ourselves as children with two sets of parents, high and low, an aristocratic fantasy pair and the humble fisher folk who adopted us, and that this pattern shapes folklore and myth in every culture. The story of the parents, in which the narrator of *The Blind Owl* imagines his father and uncle as twins traveling together as merchants in India, is the clearest variation of the pattern. Another of Rank's books, *The Double* (1914), examines the thematic development, important particularly to romance forms, which begins to dominate the literature of fantasy from the early nineteenth century in Europe, whereby a character encounters another figure with the same appearance, a second self who haunts him, as is the case with Poe's William Wilson or the odds and ends man in *The Blind Owl*. Rank summarizes the meaning of the double clearly:

The most prominent symptom of the forms which the double takes is a powerful consciousness of guilt which forces the hero no longer to accept the responsibility for certain actions of his ego, but to place it upon another

ego, a double who is ... [a] detached personification of instincts and desires which were once felt to be unacceptable, but which can be satisfied without responsibility in this indirect way.<sup>15</sup>

At the risk of a radical foreshortening of *The Blind Owl*, we can read the narrator of the story as a variant of Mehrdad in Hedayat's short story "Arusak-e posht-e pardeh," Mehrdad whose fear of adult sexuality leads to the murder of his fiancée. Similarly the speaker of *The Blind Owl* expresses a fear of becoming a father, or rather of stepping into the father's role, embodied in fear of becoming the old man. *The Blind Owl* is more subtle than my foreshortening because Hedayat has perceived something implicit in *The Double* and *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, that the two modes of generating characters use the same process. The mirroring of characters and situations which Rank's insights allow Hedayat to construct creates a very distinct esthetic universe: its appeal is not the same as that of a folk-tale, naive and spontaneous, but a cunning, hypnotic narrative machine, a simulacrum both of folkloric narrative and of dream. The mechanisms which Otto Rank makes visible in folklore and popular culture are buried so deeply, so close to the heart of Hedayat's vision, that here I think we can legitimately speak of influence here in the sense we usually mean it.

The poet and critic Robert Champigny once remarked in conversation, after reading *The Blind Owl*, that writers who had read Freud made themselves unavailable to psychoanalytic readings because it is so difficult to distinguish between "Freudian" elements arranged consciously to deepen a characterization and a case where we are in fact seeing a writer's intimate psychic identity betrayed on the page. This seems an appropriate judgment to make about Hedayat at this point. Whatever the personal affiliations and associations which may have organized his subconscious life – and we become aware of them whenever someone's life is eccentric to their culture's values – the Rankian elements of *The Blind Owl* are not good road-maps to them, simply because we can retrace Hedayat's steps in assembling them consciously, giving the story a sense of mythical or archetypal depth. Hedayat learned from Otto Rank a series of conscious devices, assembled with geometrical symmetry.

What is wrong with all the traditional definitions of influence is that they seem stuck in an economic metaphor, the metaphor of my title, that influence is like cashing a check or borrowing a book, an act which puts the borrower under an obligation. There are certainly cases in which the economic metaphor makes sense. There are derivative writers; perhaps most writers in any historical moment should be characterized as derivative and unimaginative, passive absorbers of a predecessor's vision. And influence in Bloomian terms certainly exists too. I would identify influence as he describes it as a kind of hypnotism, in which a precursor text provides models that choke out other options. When we read a writer who seems to dominate literary possibilities so thoroughly that we feel obliged to follow her or him, unable to think through other paths, we may speak of their influence. When we speak disparagingly of generic formulas as prefabricated solutions to complex literary problems, as I see it the issue is the

collective equivalent of influence. Writers who manage to break with generic patterns are of particular importance to the esthetics of modernity, and indeed I think we are touching on a mode of thought which has its political implications as well. We are living through a moment in history when moral failures among our leaders may be failures of imagination, an impoverished view of possibilities, dominated by influence of the past, in which war and peace are perceived as a stark binary opposition and the complex spectrum of alternate responses lies unnoticed.

I have not discussed at any length why the relations of influence between European and Iranian writers might be a sensitive issue, but I hope by now my suspicion will be clear, that they are sensitive only as long as we use a naive and vague definition of influence. Hedayat is by no means a derivative writer, and none of the processes of “borrowing” or “influence” in *The Blind Owl*, observed closely, compromise his stature. One reason I have resisted that subject is that I suspect it is only a specific case of a bigger issue, that literary criticism as a whole carries the possibility of demeaning its subjects. All literary analysis, unless it takes the form of simple praise, can be read as an attempt to limit the creativity of the writer. When criticism is accused of arrogance and parasitism it is usually some form of this problem – that we do, unavoidably, want to find a cause and effect for the creative process. When we are in our role as naive readers we see the personality of the individual as a sole, unaccompanied, shaping force. To study criticism is to become aware of other such limiting forces, from the political affiliations of the writer to their subconscious desires, their drug habits or the languages of their predecessors. And, like influence, the language in which we write constrains us. The meta-languages which define our generic models constrain writers too, and perhaps the most interesting phenomena in this respect are the cases where writers inherit discordant generic models and negotiate between them. This is Hedayat’s case, and it puts him in a category with a limited group of writers who find ways to speak to two cultures simultaneously such as Tagore or Chinua Achebe.

There is a related direction of study that has come to interest me more than influence, which I can describe most clearly by adducing a series of quotations. When I add the context it will be clear in what direction I think they lead my discussion. Here is the first:

I was sitting by the bedside, with my arms folded, when the woman lying there on her back quietly remarked that she would die now. She lay with her soft-profiled oval face framed by her long hair spread out upon the pillow. The depth of her white cheeks was moderately tinged with the warm hue of blood; and the lips, of course, were red. No sign whatever of a dying person. Yet, in so calm a voice, the woman had distinctly said that she was dying. I, too, felt that perhaps she might indeed die. So, bending over and looking directly into her face, I asked “Really? You’re dying?” The woman opened her eyes wide as she answered that of course she was dying. They were large moistened eyes and their centers, surrounded by long eyelashes, were an entire jet-black. Vividly, at the bottom of those jet-black pupils, an image of myself appeared.<sup>16</sup>

The author is Sôseki Natsume (1867–1916), the father of Japanese modernism, in a 1908 story entitled “Ten Dreams.” And the passage that follows will seem even more familiar to readers of Hedayat:

I went down to the garden and dug a hole with a shell, with shining mother-of-pearl. The shell was large, a glassy one with its whole edge sharp and shining. Each time I scooped the earth, the back of the shell shone brilliantly in the moonlight ... I remember, too, the smell of the damp earth. ... Then I came back with a fragment broken from a fallen star which I had picked up somewhere. I placed it lightly on the earth. That piece of star was round. ... From the effort of lifting the star and of setting it up on the earth, my chest and hands had grown a little warm.

(Sôseki, 29)

There is no reason to think that Hedayat might have been aware of him. The resemblances of style lead us in another direction. Sôseki was a writer with numerous voices, but one style he mastered in particular was the one in which he watched himself closely, so closely that the reality of outside perception is overpowered by the awareness of the processes. We watch his characters assimilate what they experience, and the process overshadows the scene observed. When, as here, his themes and tone resemble Hedayat's, the resemblance is uncanny.

The other quotation is more likely to be familiar because it has begun to find a place more often in anthologies of world literature:

Tonight there is no moon at all, I know that this bodes ill. This morning when I went out cautiously, Mr. Chao had a strange look in his eyes, as if he were afraid of me, as if he wanted to murder me. There were seven or eight others, who discussed me in a whisper. And they were afraid of my seeing them. All the people I passed were like that. The fiercest among them grinned at me; whereupon I shivered from head to foot, knowing that their preparations were complete.<sup>17</sup>

Lu Xun's “The Diary of a Madman” (*Kuáng rén rì jì*, 1918), his first short story, has become one of the acknowledged masterpieces of Chinese modernism. Like Hedayat's “Zende beh gur” twelve years later, it marks the introduction to his readers of a new style. And like a miniature of *The Blind Owl* it takes the device of the undependable narrator to a new depth, exploring the complicated space between the text and the consciousness of the person who writes it. Lu Xun's insane speaker develops an obsessive fear that this family and friends are cannibals, and he is next in line to be slaughtered and eaten. As Fredric Jameson has argued in a 1986 article,<sup>18</sup> it is as if the diarist's madness emphasized in distorted form attitudes toward food which are constitutive of Chinese culture, as if to make his madness echo down to the heart of the community. If we said roughly the same thing about the use of erotic themes in *The Blind Owl*, I think we could in part account for its power. More important still, “The Diary of a Madman” is

implicitly political in its thrust. Unlike many of the models of mad writers, the speaker of Poe's "The Telltale Heart" or Gogol's "The Diary of a Madman," the diarist sees a consistent social theme in his madness. His madness consists of that critique, and his evidence includes cases of cannibalism from the historical record and figurative phrases in common speech which are in fact in current usage. He reads them crazily, but one comes away from the story with the feeling that he has analyzed a predatory society, even if his conclusion – that they are out to eat him – is mistaken. In this respect, a passing comment in the fictional editor's introduction, explaining that the diarist is now sane and has taken a job as a government official, is as unsettling as anything we read in the diary. Reading *The Blind Owl* through the lens of Lu Xun's satire might provide an edifying comparison which helps us locate where social commentary shapes the otherwise opaque walls of *The Blind Owl*.

One reason to pursue the affinity between Hedayat and comparable writers elsewhere whose styles develop in parallel paths is that they force us to depersonalize our understanding of the forces which shape writing. If Sôseki Natsume, Lu Xun and Hedayat are unlikely to have read one another (though indeed Lu Xun may have read Sôseki), all three write as close readers of European literatures, and all three write as interpreters of them. More importantly, all three write in cultures, indeed as representatives of cultures, anxious about being perceived as peripheral. If in their marketplace of ideas themes that question the identity of the writing voice, and plots that center around the displacement of the standard erotic scenario, float to the surface, it seems to me likely that we can explain those similarities through impersonal literary fields of force.

If we have emphasized the constraining forces, the tubes and vents that shape the force of the imagination and restrict its freedom, this might as easily be used as a source of celebration. The amazing thing is that, with all the barriers critical analysis can identify, writers can still write. And if I had to cite one quality that draws me into Hedayat's writing, a quality that causes his universe to curl around me while I read, it is that every work seems a struggle, not just a struggle with received ideas, with conformity or with received opinion, but a struggle with the forms of language, a struggle that still exerts its power on us when he has been dead for fifty-two years. This is a cause for celebration.

## Notes

- 1 Sadeq Hedayat, *Buf-e kur* (Tehran, 1973), trans. D.P. Costello, *The Blind Owl* (New York, 1957).
- 2 René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York, 1942): 247.
- 3 Paul DeMan, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd edn (Minneapolis, 1983): 267–276.
- 4 Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami, "Toward a Literary Laboratory: Architectural Fluidity in Mandanipur's Short Stories," *Edebiyât* 13.1 (2003): 11–25, 11.
- 5 Yahya Âryanpur, *Az Saba ta Nima: Tarikh-e 150 sal-e adab-e Farsi*, 2 vols (Tehran, 1972), 2: 238.
- 6 M.F. Farzaneh, *Ashna'i ba Sadeq Hedayat*, 2 vols (Paris, 1988).

- 7 Thomas Mann would provide a particularly useful line of comparison. Compare, for instance, Hedayat's "Dâvud-e guzhposht" (from *Zende be gur*) with Mann's "Der kleine Herr Friedmann," the title story of Mann's first collection of short stories in 1898.
- 8 Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. M.D. Herter Norton (New York, 1949); *Les Cahiers de Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. Maurice Betz (Paris, 1966) (rpt. 1929).
- 9 Homa Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer* (New York, 1991): 139.
- 10 Edgar Allan Poe, *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Thomas Olive Mabbot (Cambridge, 1978), 3: 849.
- 11 Poe, *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires par Edgar Poe*, trans. Charles Baudelaire, ed. Jacques Crépet (Paris, 1933): 158.
- 12 It has been suggested to me that the phrase "Mu be-tan-e adam rast mishavad" is not rare in Persian speech. I am indebted to Mahmud Kianush for this observation.
- 13 I try to analyze them in detail in *Hedayat's Blind Owl as a Western Novel* (Princeton, NJ, 1990): 119–126.
- 14 Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, trans. F. Robbins and Smith Ely Jelliffe (New York, 1952).
- 15 Otto Rank, *The Double*, trans. and ed. Harry Tucker, Jr. (Chapel Hill, 1971): 76.
- 16 Sôseki Natsume, *Ten Nights of Dream, Hearing Things and the Heredity of Taste*, trans. Aiko Itô and Graeme Wilson (Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo, 1974): 27.
- 17 Lu Hsun [Lu Xun], *Selected Stories of Lu Hsun*, trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (New York, 1977): 8.
- 18 Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (fall 1986): 65–88.

## 6 *The Blind Owl and The Sound and the Fury*

*Bahram Meghdadi*

This chapter offers a comparative analysis of two famous novels written in the twentieth century; one, a Persian novel and the other, an American work of fiction, combining the suggestion of a literary analogue which may illuminate aspects of their superficial organization.

Such an approach may be justified on different grounds. For example, the structure of *The Blind Owl* bears an interesting resemblance to Dante's *Divine Comedy*; that is to say, *The Blind Owl* is Hedeyat's vision of hell, purgatory and paradise. But Hedeyat reverses the order of Dante's vision.

Another justification for thematic analogue between the two novels is based on Jung's concept of the collective unconscious. According to Jung's theory, thematic analogues are natural phenomena and demonstrate the fact that human beings in all periods of history repeated a similar theme in their works.

Approaching the subject from other angles, both Vladimir Propp and Claude Lévi-Strauss were structuralists and believed that since the human mind had a similar structure, its productions were similar and consequently this similarity caused all nations and cultures of the world to produce similar themes in their stories. In his *Morphology of the Folktale* Vladimir Propp analysed Russian folk stories, showing that many of them have similarities to Western European fairy stories.<sup>1</sup>

Lévi-Strauss tried to find a system for world literature and discovered hidden structures which caused the creation of such tales. His associations with Roman Jakobson in 1941 encouraged him to use structural linguistic rules and apply them to Russian fairy-tales, because in his opinion myth functioned like language.<sup>2</sup>

Since structural linguists study the underlying structure of language among the people of the world, Lévi-Strauss has followed the same tradition in studying the underlying structure of human language as well, because as mentioned, he has tried to discover the underlying structure of myths in order to show the thematic analogues among them.

Lévi-Strauss believes that myth has a structure like language and like language it can be reduced to the least significant unit called "mytheme". A close scrutiny of world literature demonstrates the fact that no poet or writer is original in his or her work. In T.S. Eliot's opinion, "bad poets imitate and good

poets steal". If myths have a similar structure, literatures of all nations have a similar structure too and thematic analogues can be discovered in them. It is in this regard that we shall try to show thematic similarities between Hedayat's and Faulkner's novels, since there can be no doubt that neither was aware of the work of the other when they wrote their great works.

Both *The Blind Owl* and *The Sound and the Fury* are great love stories of the twentieth century. In *The Blind Owl*, the narrator is in love with a virgin, a beautiful and unattainable woman who has a "slender, ethereal, misty form";<sup>3</sup> in *The Sound and the Fury* a brother is madly in love with his sister. In both novels we notice the protagonists trying to preserve their beloveds' innocence and purity. For instance, the protagonist of *The Blind Owl* describes how he managed to record on paper the ethereal girl's eyes which were "wet and shining like two huge black diamonds suffused with tears . . ."<sup>4</sup> and then immediately, he takes a bone-handled knife and cuts the dead body of the girl into pieces and neatly fits the trunk along with the head and limbs into the suitcase. What he desperately wants to preserve is her virgin and innocent beauty that he eternalizes through the medium of the art of painting, which may represent writing.

*The Sound and the Fury* is the story of the sufferings of a brother who watches his sister grow up, have sexual experiences and consequently lose her innocence; sufferings which eventually lead him to suicide. In order to preserve his sister's chastity, the brother whose name is "Quentin" tries to stop time by breaking his watch, but then he discovers that time in its various forms, such as "The appearance of the shadow of the sash on the curtains"<sup>5</sup> or when he enters a jeweller's shop "he finds the place full of ticking . . .",<sup>6</sup> torments him and reminds him of the passage of time which will eventually wither the multifoliate Rose of Dante.

In both stories, we observe the withering of two women: in *The Blind Owl*, the undefiled, beautiful and unattainable girl turns into a bitch, just like Caddy in *The Sound and the Fury*. In the second part of *The Blind Owl*, the image of woman is absolutely opposite the image given in the first part. In this part "woman" is no longer an untouchable being, but she has been transformed into a "harlot" who goes to bed with any man except her husband. The narrator/husband, who is an observer of such scenes, takes refuge in opium, since "the sores which slowly erode [his] mind like a kind of canker"<sup>7</sup> are gradually corroding his whole being. Quentin, in *The Sound and the Fury*, being unable to accept that his sister has lost her virginity, commits suicide by drowning.

The character of the narrator of *The Blind Owl* is comparable to that of Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury*. Both are idealists and perfectionists. They cannot accept life as it is since they find it full of imperfections. After the ethereal girl is transformed into a harlot, the narrator of *The Blind Owl* describes her thus:

She was plump and comfortable looking. She had on a cloak of Tus material. Her eyebrows were plucked and were stained with indigo. She was

wearing a beauty spot and her face was made up with rouge, ceruse and kohl. In a word she was turned out to perfection. She appeared to be well pleased with life. She was unconsciously holding the index-finger of her left hand to her lips. Was this the same graceful creature, was this the slim, ethereal girl who, in a black pleated dress, had played hide-and-seek with me on the bank of the Suran?<sup>8</sup>

Every flower withers eventually. Every young girl becomes a mother some day and turns into a plump and comfortable-looking woman, losing her childhood innocence, but the protagonist of *The Blind Owl* cannot accept such transformations in his beloved. Quentin has similar tendencies and, since he can not accept the fact that Caddy has gone to bed with a lot of men, he lies to his father about committing incest with her:

and he do you consider that courage and i yes sir dont you and he every man is the arbiter of his own virtues whether or not you consider it courageous is of more importance than the act itself than any act otherwise you could not be in earnest and i you dont believe i am serious and he i think you are too serious to give me any cause for alarm you wouldnt have felt driven to the expedient of telling me you have committed incest otherwise and i i wasnt lying i wasnt lying and he you wanted to sublimate a piece of natural human folly into a horror and then exorcise it with truth and i it was to isolate her out of the loud world.<sup>9</sup>

The above excerpt is an example of Faulkner's stream-of-consciousness technique and reflects Quentin's reminiscence of a conversation which he had with his father regarding his sister Caddy. Thus, Quentin's justification of committing incest with his sister is to isolate her from "the loud world" which is the world of *The Sound and the Fury*. Turning to *The Blind Owl*, we find a similar concept: the world of the rabble from whose company the protagonist has escaped. He has "no need to see them since any one of them is a sample of the lot. Each and every one of them consisted only of a mouth and a wad of guts hanging from it, the whole terminating in a set of genitals."<sup>10</sup> Since then, he withdrew from the company of humans, from the company of the stupid and the successful, and only wrote for his shadow.<sup>11</sup>

Faulkner in *The Sound and the Fury* describes a scene of Caddy's childhood to show her early promiscuity. This scene is reported by Caddy's idiot brother Benjy, when they were all children playing. While playing, Caddy falls into muddy water and the seat of her drawers gets dirty. "She was wet. We were playing in the branch and Caddy squatted down and got her dress wet."<sup>12</sup> As Benjy recalls this scene, suddenly he remembers Caddy climbing a pear tree with the muddy seat of her drawers in order to look through the window of a room. Inside the room was the corpse of their grandmother who had recently passed away, but the children were told there was a party being held in that room and they were not permitted to enter it. In this scene one of the black ser-

vants pushes Caddy to the first branch of the tree and all the children see the muddy seat of Caddy's drawers. If we take the tree as a symbol of the Tree of Knowledge, the muddy seat is an allusion to the Original Sin and Caddy's loss of innocence which will eventually turn her into a bitch. There is also a similarity and concordance between the dead grandmother's name "Dammudy" and "damn muddy". Turning to *The Blind Owl*, we see a similar scene:

The landscape before my eyes all at once struck me as familiar. I remembered that once in my childhood on the thirteenth day of Nouruz I had come here with my mother-in-law and the bitch. That day we ran after each other and played for hours on the far side of these same cypress trees. Then we were joined by another band of children – who they were, I can not quite remember. We played hide-and-seek together. Once when I was running after the bitch on the bank of the Suran her foot slipped and she fell into the water. The others pulled her out and took her behind the cypress tree to change her clothes. I followed them. They hung up a woman's veil as a screen in front of her but I furtively peeped from behind a tree and saw her whole body. She was smiling and biting the nail of the index-finger of her left hand. Then they wrapped her up in a white cloak and spread out her fine-textured black silk dress to dry in the sun.<sup>13</sup>

Both in *The Blind Owl* and *The Sound and the Fury*, we see two precocious girls having their clothes changed because they were "damn muddy". If the black dress they are wearing stands for evil and defilement, the white cloak, in *The Blind Owl*, with which she was wrapped up, ironically refers to the narrator's attempts to preserve his beloved's chastity. The presence of the stream both in the picture and real life serves as a cleansing agent. We also observe that innocent Benjy associates his sister's chastity with the smell of trees. This is always repeated like a refrain throughout the novel. But soon after Benjy discovers that his sister has lost her chastity, he pushes her towards the bathroom. In his idiotic mind, washing her body would also wash away the sin she has committed in her puberty:

We were in the hall. Caddy was still looking at me. Her hand was against her mouth and I saw her eyes and I cried. We went up the stairs. She stopped again, against the wall, looking at me and I cried and she went on and I came on, crying, and she shrank against the wall, looking at me she opened the door to her room, but I pulled at her dress and we went to the bathroom and she stood against the door, looking at me. Then she put her arm across her face and I pushed at her, crying.<sup>14</sup>

In both novels flowers have metaphoric significance: the morning glory in *The Blind Owl*; the honeysuckle in *The Sound and the Fury*. In the former story the narrator recurrently associates "morning glory" with the innocence and chastity of his major female protagonist. In the first part of the novel where, as

mentioned, woman is described as an undefiled, virtuous, pure and immaculate Madonna, therefore, “morning glory” is repeatedly used in this section:

On the other side of the hill was an isolated enclosure, peaceful and green. It was a place which I had never seen before and yet it looked familiar to me, as though it had always been present in some recess of my mind. The ground was covered with vines of blue, scentless morning glory. I felt that no one until that moment had ever set foot in the place.<sup>15</sup>

It seems as though the morning glory is a symbol of virginity in this novel, because whenever the narrator refers to this flower growing on the ground, he adds, “I felt that no one until that moment had ever set foot in the place”.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, when the young girl is associated with the morning glory, it would seem to mean that no one has ever touched her. After he buries the ethereal girl in the first part of the novel, the narrator says that “when the trench was filled in I trampled the earth firm, brought a number of vines of blue, scentless morning glory and set them in the ground above her grave”.<sup>17</sup> In the last part of the novel the reference to morning glory is due to the fact that the narrator is removed from the harsh world of reality and has returned to the paradise of the first part: “I had nearly reached the river Suran [when] I found the level ground was covered with vines of morning glory”.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, whenever there is an association of purity and chastity regarding the ethereal girl, in the mind of the narrator, there are plenty of citations and references to this flower and, since the first part of the novel is far removed from the harsh reality of the inferno (or in other words, life), this symbolism is recurrently used there. On the contrary, in *The Sound and the Fury*, the honeysuckle replaces the morning glory, but the nature of these two flowers is entirely opposite and different from each other. The honeysuckle does not represent chastity and purity in *The Sound and the Fury*, but its intoxicating, aromatic, ambrosial fragrance which has a phallic effect represents Caddy’s puberty and alludes to her gaining sexual experiences. Quentin frequently associates Caddy’s sexual growth and puberty and her precociousness with the aroma of the honeysuckle. In Faulkner’s novel this flower also represents death, because Caddy, through her growth and sexual activities, gradually dies in the mind of Quentin. In other words, it is her innocence that dies or goes through a series of deteriorations in Quentin’s mind. And the death of Caddy’s innocence leads to Quentin’s death by drowning:

One minute she was standing there the next he was yelling and pulling at her dress they went into the hall and up the stairs yelling and shoving at her up the stairs to the bathroom door and stopped her back against the door and her arm across her face yelling and trying to shove her into the bathroom when she came in to supper T. P. was feeding him he started again just whimpering at first until she touched him then he yelled. She stood there her eyes like cornered rats. Then I was running in the grey darkness it smelled

of rain and all flower scents the damp warm air released and crickets sawing away in the grass pacing me with a small traveling island of silence Fancy watched me across the fence blotchy like a quilt on a line I thought damn that nigger he forgot to feed her again I ran down the hill in that vacuum of crickets like a breath traveling across a mirror she was lying in the water her head on the sand spit the water flowing about her hips there was a little more light in the water her skirt half saturated flopped along her flanks to the water's motion in heavy ripples going nowhere renewed themselves of their own movement I stood on the bank I could smell the honeysuckle on the water gap the air seemed to drizzle with honeysuckle and with the rasping of crickets a substance you could feel on the flesh.<sup>19</sup>

Quentin, like the protagonist of *The Blind Owl*, is obsessed with absolute truth combined with innocence and he wants to project his world view on the world, being innocent of the fact that the world is imperfect and, if one tries to search for perfection in it, one will be absolutely disillusioned. Quentin's perfectionism eventually leads to his suicide. In *The Blind Owl*, we find a similar predicament for its protagonist. Perfectionism is observed in both of them in the form of obsession-compulsion. Quentin brushes his teeth before committing suicide and arranges his clothes neatly in his suitcase:

I laid out two suits of underwear, with socks, shirts, collars and ties, and packed my trunk. I put in everything except my new suit and an old one and two pairs of shoes and two hats, and my books. I carried the books into the sitting-room and stacked them on the table, the ones I had brought from home and the ones *Father said it is used to be a gentleman was known by his books: nowadays he is known by the ones he has not returned* and locked the trunk and addressed it. The quarter hour sounded. I stopped and listened to it until the chimes ceased.<sup>20</sup>

Why should a person attempting suicide in a few hours arrange his clothes so neatly in his suitcase and what difference would it make if his books and clothes reach their destination? The only justification for this neurotic eccentricity is obsessive-compulsive abnormality which forces the victim to put things in an absolutely perfect order just a few hours before bidding farewell to this world. We notice a similar affliction in *The Blind Owl* in the form of phobia:

Lying in this damp, sweaty bed, as my eyelids grew heavy and I longed to surrender myself to non-being and everlasting night, I felt that my lost memories and forgotten fears were all coming to life again: fear lest the feathers in my pillow should turn into dagger-blades or the buttons on my coat expand to the size of millstones; fear lest the bread crumbs that fell to the floor should shatter into fragments like pieces of glass; apprehension lest the oil in the lamp should spill during my sleep and set fire to the whole city; anxiety lest the paws of the dog outside the butcher's shop should ring

like horses' hoofs as they struck the ground; dread lest the old odds-and-ends man sitting behind his wares should burst into laughter and be unable to stop; fear lest the worms in the footbath by the tank in our court yard should turn into Indian serpents; fear lest my bedclothes should turn into a hinged gravestone above me and the marble teeth should lock, preventing me from ever escaping; panic fear lest I should suddenly lose the faculty of speech and, however much I might try to call out, nobody should ever come to my aid.<sup>21</sup>

The phobia seen in the form of obsessive–compulsiveness observed in both protagonists is because the world is imperfect; it is a world in which only “the rabble” can be safe and happy. For men of heart and soul, this world, the real world, should be entirely altered and remoulded:

Ah, Love! could you and I with Him conspire  
 To grasp this sorry scheme of Things entire,  
 Would not we shatter it to bits – and then  
 Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

As Virginia Woolf predicted, the future of the novel must be poetic. Since, in modern and contemporary fiction we notice the absence of a clear plot; of rising and falling action and dénouement. In other words, modern and postmodern fiction is open-ended and the reader is not expected to reach a conclusion. Hence the writer is much freer to use literary devices such as symbols and images. A poet is an alchemist of words; that is to say, he knows how to combine words in order to create rhythmic harmony. Therefore, the principal difference between poetry and prose is not rhyme and rhythm, but selection and combination. In our time, fiction resembles poetry in different respects. In order to elucidate this point, let us examine the following excerpt from *The Blind Owl*.

The night was departing on tip-toe. One felt that it had shed sufficient of its weariness to enable it to go its way. The ear detected faint, far-off sounds such as the sprouting grass might have made, or some migratory bird as it dreamed upon the wing. The pale stars were disappearing behind banks of cloud. I felt the gentle breath of the morning on my face and at the same moment a cock crowed somewhere in the distance.<sup>22</sup>

The use of literary devices such as personification by which inanimate objects like the night taking on human qualities such as “departing on tip-toe” or “shedding their weariness”; or like hearing the sound of “sprouting grass” or “the dreaming of birds”, all testify to the poetic quality of the above passage. Turning to *The Sound and the Fury*, we find plenty of such examples:

When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight o'clock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch. It was

Grandfather's and when Father gave it to me he said, Quentin, I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it's rather excruciatingly apt that you will use it to gain the *reducto absurdum* [*sic*] of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father's. I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. Because no battle is ever won he said. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools.<sup>23</sup>

Reconsidering thematic analogues in both novels, one may reach the conclusion that social, historical and economic upheavals have led both writers to lament such drastic devaluation of values in their societies. If we decode the polysemic aspects of both works of fiction, we will notice that they are not just the lamentations of two lovers for the loss of innocence in their beloveds. The women in both novels may be symbolic of a nation. Caddy may symbolize the United States, especially its southern states which changed from an agrarian culture into an industrial one at the turn of the century. Quentin, who drowns himself for the loss of innocence in his sister, might represent William Faulkner who laments the industrialization of the southern states for destroying the serene, peaceful and calm ambience of the past, and instead bringing on the bel-lowing, the sound and the fury of the idiot brother, Benjy. In the story, the Compson family sells Benjy's pasture, a symbol of the agrarian society, in order to send Quentin to the industrial world of Harvard.

If we compare and contrast the white aristocratic characters of the novel with their negro attendants, we will notice that the blacks have preserved their innocent identity because they lack the sick values and psychology of their modern white masters: they are neither alcoholic nor hypochondriac, and they are not schizophrenic like Quentin Compson. The black characters are happy and healthy because they are not victims of the false values which the Compsons had blindly accepted. It is ironic that "Jason", whose name is a mythological allusion to a leader in a Greek legend in quest of the Golden Fleece, and hence a businessman in the novel, should be the sole master of the family.

Turning to *The Blind Owl* we may observe a similar influence. In some of his earlier writings Hedayat displayed strong nationalist sentiments, and he learned the ancient Pahlavi language, or Middle Persian, from which he translated a few texts into modern Persian. An outspoken example of his nationalist fiction is his first published work, the historical play *Parvin the Sassanian Girl*. A close comparison of this with *The Blind Owl* gives the impression of parallelism both in character and theme. For instance, Parvin may be seen as a counterpart to the ethereal girl, and his fiancée's idealism as corresponding to that of the narrator of *Owl*. The story of *Parvin* occurs in the twenty-second year of Hijra and the setting is the city of "Raghes" or "Ray" – "Raghes" was a flourishing city and a centre of Zoroastrian religion which was conquered by the Arabs. It is also the ancient city in which Part two of *The Blind Owl* is set. It is possible to see the

ethereal woman as symbolizing ancient glory that had ended up in backwardness due to foreign conquest and religious fanaticism, although one must bear in mind that the story of the ethereal girl is set in the midst of contemporary squalor, and it is the story of the bitch which is set in the city of Ray's glorious days.

Both Hedayat's and Faulkner's famous novels reflect on the psychology and sociology of their very different environments. Yet there seem to be structural similarities between them, of which neither of the authors could have been aware.

## Notes

- 1 Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott, introd. Svatva Pirkova-Jacobson (Austin, TX, 1968).
- 2 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (Harmondsworth, 1972).
- 3 Sadeq Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, trans. D.P. Costello (London, 1957): 4. All future references are to this English rendition of the novel.
- 4 *Ibid.*: 19.
- 5 William Faulkner, *The Sound and The Fury* (New York, 1964): 93. All future references are to this edition of the novel.
- 6 *Ibid.*: 102.
- 7 *The Blind Owl*: 1.
- 8 *Ibid.*: 115.
- 9 *The Sound and the Fury*: 219–220.
- 10 *The Blind Owl*: 76.
- 11 *Ibid.*: 3.
- 12 *The Sound and the Fury*: 19.
- 13 *The Blind Owl*: 79–80.
- 14 *The Sound and the Fury*: 85.
- 15 *The Blind Owl*: 33.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 *Ibid.*: 36.
- 18 *Ibid.*: 78.
- 19 *The Sound and the Fury*: 185–186.
- 20 *Ibid.*: 99.
- 21 *The Blind Owl*: 19.
- 22 *Ibid.*: 27–28.
- 23 *The Sound and the Fury*: 93.

## 7 Women in Hedayat's fiction

*Homa Katouzian*

In the not so well-known short story “Katiya”, the Austrian engineer tells the narrator:

You know, it's always women who must approach me. I never approach a woman. Because if I did that I'd feel that she has not accepted me for my own sake, but for money or fast-talking or something that's outside of me. It'd look artificial, unnatural. But if a woman approaches me first I'd worship her.<sup>1</sup>

This presents the reader with two points: (1) the engineer's approach (or lack of approach) to forming a relationship with a woman; (2) his own explanation and justification of it, or indeed lack of it. The reality of the matter is no doubt exactly as he says, namely that he would never take the initiative in forming a relationship, regardless, apparently, of the degree of attraction towards the woman in question. But if a woman – and, apparently, any woman – takes the preliminary steps, he “would worship her”. The question is to what extent his own explanation is realistic, however sincere he may be in believing it to be true. Is it reasonable to think that his attitude arises from what he says it does, from the fear that, if he succeeds, the woman will not have come to him for his own sake? And what exactly is the meaning of this? How can the “self” in question be described apart from what is known and observed in him; apart from what he looks like, how he talks and how much power he displays, be it through his money or intellect or, for that matter, sexual prowess? And instead of such rationalisations, would it not be more realistic to think that the trouble is what in common parlance is called shyness, and in the scientific tradition is described as sexual immaturity and/or fear of women in the flesh – a lack of self-confidence which is sometimes put down to pride and sense of self-respect?

Whatever the answer to these questions regarding the engineer's remarks in “Katiya”, in some other of Hedayat's stories the reader comes across a similar situation displayed and disguised in other forms, and once again explained, if at all, in unrealistic ways. A supreme example of this is the short story “Puppet Behind the Curtain”, which anticipates the main plot of *The Blind Owl*, with the

difference that, unlike the latter, it uses a realist, not modernist, technique. It is the story of an Iranian student in France who falls in love with a soulless model or manikin in a shop window displaying a women's dress on sale:

Mehrdad was a boy whose sexual inexperience was a metaphor in his family and among his relatives. And he would still blush most visibly the minute the word "woman" was mentioned in front of him. His French fellow students poked fun at him, and when they spoke of their fun and game and love life, he would listen attentively, but would not have anything of his own to add to it. This was because he had been brought up a mummy's boy, gutless, sad and depressive. He had not yet talked to a woman outside of his family and relatives. His parents had filled his mind with the moral dicta of a thousand years before; and, to stop their son going after girls, had had him engaged to his cousin Derekhshandeh.<sup>2</sup>

Yet it is clear that his extreme shyness is not just due to the effect of the parents' moral preaching because Mehrdad is even shy of his cousin and fiancée, who, in any case, he does not really love:

His sole memory of this love went back to the day that Derakhshandeh came to see him off with tears in her eyes [when he was departing for France]. But Mehrdad could not find words to comfort her. That is, shyness would not let him, even though he and her cousin had grown up in the same house and had been playmates in their childhood.<sup>3</sup>

It was against this background that, in Le Havre, where he was at college, he came across the "statue" of a woman "with blonde hair and tilting head" in a shop window, and fell in love with it:

This was not really a statue. It was a woman, no, better than a woman, an angel, who was smiling at him. Those deep dark blue eyes, that noble and winning smile – a very extraordinary smile – the slim, delicate and proportioned body; the whole thing represented love, ponder and beauty. Besides, this girl would not talk to him. He would not have to pretend deceitfully that he loved her. He would not have to take any trouble on her account, or become jealous. Always silent, always beautiful, she represented his highest ideal [in a woman].<sup>4</sup>

We shall discuss the similarity, both in form and substance, of this "statue" to *The Blind Owl's* "ethereal woman".<sup>5</sup> It is important at this point to emphasise the reasons why Mehrdad falls in love with it. The soulless manikin is, in his eyes, not a woman but an "angel"; that is, the symbol of a woman, perfect and ideal but void of ordinary human attributes. And precisely for that reason it does not threaten the "gutless mummy's boy" Mehrdad, who, at the same time, is a perfectionist:

Would he be able to get it, smell it, lick it and put his favourite perfume on it? Apart from that, he would not feel shy towards this woman, since she would never give him away.... And he would always remain the same chaste and pure Mehrdad.<sup>6</sup>

In several places in the story there is talk of the “sadness”, “depression” and “darkness” in Mehrdad’s life without mention of their possible cause or causes. But if one of the main factors making for his unhappiness is his alienation from society, and not just French society, another is his alienation from women:

He reflected on the fact that the whole of his life had been a roll of darkness. He did not love his fiancée, Derakhshandeh... As for European women, he knew he could not form a relationship with them easily, since he shunned dancing, talking, entertaining, wearing smart clothes, flattery and all other things which are needed for it. Besides, shyness would not let him, and he could not see the guts for it in himself. But this statue was like a light which lighted up his whole life.<sup>7</sup>

And even more than that, the “statue” had more substance, more truth, in itself than real-life women:

In the streets he was looking closely at the faces of women with their make-ups. Was it these who would make men fall and go mad for them? Was not each and every one of them much less of a statue than that in the shop window? ... The boy and girl who were sitting in front of him with their hands round each other’s necks likewise looked ridiculous to him. There was only one truth for Mehrdad, and that was the statue in the shop window.<sup>8</sup>

In the end he buys the “statue”, keeps it for five years while he is studying in France and takes it with him to Tehran in a suitcase “which looked like a coffin”. On his return, he gives up his engagement with his cousin/fiancée – who still lives at their extended family house – and declares to her mother that he has taken a decision never to get married. The mother thinks that he is no longer “the old self-effacing and obedient” son of hers, whereas in reality he is “the same old humble and gutless Mehrdad”. He hid the “statue” in an alcove, behind a curtain, in his room in the family house. In the evenings, on getting back home from work,

he would have a few drinks, pull the curtain off, and sit on the couch opposite the statue for hours, lost in admiring her [*sic*] beauty. Sometimes when he got tipsy he would get up, go forward and stroke her hair and breasts. All his love life was limited to this; and this statue was for him the very embodiment of wish, love and passion.<sup>9</sup>

Not surprisingly, the people at home discover the statue and begin to call it “the puppet behind the curtain”. On the other hand, and for totally unexplained reasons, one day Mehrdad decides “to break up with her and kill her”. He even buys a gun for the purpose but still hesitates to “kill” the puppet. One night when he goes home and, as usual, pulls the curtain off and begins to stroke the puppet, the puppet comes to life. Mehrdad walks backwards in terror and throws himself on to the couch. The statue moves towards him. He pulls the gun out and shoots: “But this was not the statue; it was Derakhshandeh who was soaking in her own blood.”

This story, as it has been explained by this author elsewhere, is a forerunner of *The Blind Owl*, i.e. it is one of the short stories in which the main theme and plot of *Owl* has been developed before reaching its most complete and subtle form in the later novel.<sup>10</sup> The statue compares with the ethereal woman, and Derakhshandeh, with the harlot, who is killed in the end by the narrator’s kitchen knife. Just as Derakhshandeh looks like the puppet or statue, the harlot is a mirror image of the ethereal woman, who, like the statue, looks like an angel, is silent, and personifies the perfect woman. But neither of them is a human being, obviously so in the case of the statue, and mystifyingly so in the case of the ethereal woman. On the other hand, although Derakhshandeh is not whorish like the harlot in *Owl*, both of them represent real women, or women in the flesh, imperfect and human. It is clear that in the narrator’s eyes women are either angels or harlots. And precisely for this reason he does not have access to either of them: the angel is not human; the harlot has no time for his perfect, profound and demanding love. The narrator of *Owl* says of the ethereal woman, the angel:

No I will not mention her name. Since, with her ethereal, slim and misty stature . . . she does not belong to this base and rapacious world. No, I must not pollute her name with the things of this earth . . .<sup>11</sup>

This girl, no this angel, was the source of an inexplicable puzzlement and inspiration for me. Her whole being was so delicate that it could not be touched. She made me feel what it meant to worship someone. I am sure that the look of a stranger, an ordinary person, would make her shrink and wilt.<sup>12</sup>

As noted above, the ethereal woman is just like the statue in “Puppet Behind the Curtain”: she is an embodiment of purity and perfection, and does not exist as a human being. She too is a perfect statue, silent and soulless. Therefore at the first contact with the narrator she is totally speechless and then mysteriously dies:

To me she was at once a woman and a super-human thing. . . . My heart stopped. I held my breath. I was afraid that if I breathed she would disappear like clouds and smokes. Her silence was like a miracle in the making. It looked as if a wall of crystal separated us.<sup>13</sup>

Her face was still and motionless as before... Her eyes were now shut. In an attempt to see her face better I lowered my head. But, no matter how much I kept looking, she seemed totally remote from me. I thought of saying something but was afraid that her ears being used to soft heavenly music she might hate my voice.<sup>14</sup>

We thus approach the point of discovering that the ethereal woman is no more than an apparition, certainly not of this world:

I could now feel the warmth of her body and breathe the damp aroma that arose from her long, thick, black hair... I don't know why I raised my trembling hands and stroked her hair, because I had no control of them ... I then pushed my fingers through her hair. It was damp and cold; cold, totally cold, as if she had been dead a few days. No, I was not wrong, she was dead. I put my hand on her breast and her heart. There was no heartbeat. I held the mirror in front of her mouth, but there was no sign of life in her.<sup>15</sup>

The extreme opposite of that is "the harlot", the other side of woman's face, and the ethereal woman's mirror image in the second part of the story. She is very much alive, acting as the devil's instrument for torturing and degrading her husband, the narrator:

I had called her "harlot" because no name would be more fitting than this ... The reason I married her was that she approached me first. That too was a product of her venal nature ... [She] was a capricious and inconstant woman, who needed one man for sex, another for love and a third one for torture. I am not sure even if this exhausts the list, but she had definitely chosen me for torture.<sup>16</sup>

She had loose relationships with *rajjaleh-ha*, the rabble, the amoral and self-seeking people who succeeded in everything, in money, in sex, in social position, precisely because they were void of any higher aspirations and any feeling for others: "All of them were made of a mouth from which a bunch of intestine hung up and connected with their genital organ."<sup>17</sup> *Rajjaleh-ha* is a familiar term from Hedayat's psycho-fiction; so is their description as such.

In the short story "Three Drops of Blood" which, like "Puppet Behind the Curtain", anticipates *The Blind Owl*, *rajjaleh-ha* are represented, not by a man but by a tomcat, just as the harlot is symbolised by Nazi, the she-cat loved by Siyavosh. As the spring begins, Nazi is courted by several cats, but she chooses the tomcat, "one of those thievish, lean, hungry and stray cats". Jealous of the tomcat, Siyavosh shoots at it in the dark. Nazi takes the corpse of her mate away, but Siyavosh goes on hearing the dead cat's cry of anguish. Each time he hears the cat's cry he shoots in its direction, and each time three drops of fresh blood drip down to the foot of the pine tree.

At this stage a distinction must be made between portrayals of women in

different groups of Hedayat's fiction. It is in the psycho-fiction group of his works that, directly or indirectly, women are portrayed as either harlot or angel (and men as rabble). The point to emphasise is that the psycho-fictions exclusively concern the lives of the modern middle and upper classes of the time to which Hedayat belonged. And although none of them may be described as autobiographical, to different degrees the author's presence (i.e. the reflection of his moods and values) may be sensed in them. It is in these stories, stories written about the lives of people of his own social and cultural *monde* and milieu, that explicit value judgements are freely made, and betrayal, anger, frustration, defeat, disappearance and death, experienced. This should be contrasted to his critical realist fiction – putting aside *Hajji Aqa*, which is a political satire – which reflects aspects of the lives of the traditional urban middle and lower-middle classes. They are realist in style, focus on social types rather than individual characters (i.e. on social and objective as opposed to psychological and subjective events and experiences), and are clearly far removed from the author's personal experience and close observation. And, as we shall see further below, the portrayal of men and women in these stories is, just like the form and substance of the stories themselves, distinctly different from the psycho-fictions.

Hedayat's earliest psycho-fiction, the short story "Buried Alive", was written in France in 1930, two years after his first suicide attempt in Paris. Following that attempt he had said in a postcard to his brother Mahmud, "Recently I committed a folly which ended well". He was to write to his friend Taqi Razavi in Paris shortly after returning to Tehran in September 1930, "I intend to publish [the short story] 'Buried Alive', which is an account of that folly". That was Hedayat's shorthand way of showing the connection between that short story and his suicide attempt. In fact it is not "an account" of that attempt. It is a fictional story, although it is clearly based on the experiences of a student in Paris who has known depression at first hand and has made an attempt on his own life. The narrator meets a Parisian girl, but the day he is due to take her home he decides not to keep his date and goes to walk in Montparnasse Cemetery instead:

It's nine days since I saw her last. She asked me to go and bring her to my room the next day. But I don't know why I changed my mind. Not that she was bad looking or I didn't like her, but some unknown force stopped me doing it. . . . Without consciously willing it I went to the cemetery.<sup>18</sup>

He explains his behaviour by saying that he wished to sever all his ties, did not want to see the girl, wanted to end all of his relations, and just wished to die. But a few lines before he had said that he did not know why he failed to keep his date with her. And the fact that he was due to take her to her room that day is not without significance.

In the little-known short story "The Masks", the narrator's girlfriend is close enough to him to have seen him alone at least once at his home, something that was a rare occurrence in Tehran in the early 1930s even in the upper-class

circles, although it is clear that the relationship has not gone further than that. But for some not very convincing reasons he is angry with her and decides on "revenge":

He decided to make up with Khojasteh and exchange this life ... with one night. Khojasteh will be there; they'll take poison and die in each other's arms. He found this thought appealing and poetical.<sup>19</sup>

This reminds one of *The Blind Owl*, both when the narrator pours the poisoned wine down the throat of the ethereal woman, and when, embracing the harlot in bed, his kitchen knife – which is somehow there in the bed – slips "somewhere inside her body". Another striking point in the short story "The Masks" is the opinion which the lover puts forward about love and loving. He tells the girl:

You know there is no reality outside our own self. This point shows itself up clearly in the act of loving. Each of us loves the other person with the power of his imagination. And it is his own imagination which satisfies his desire, not the woman sitting next to him, the woman he thinks he loves. The woman is the ultimate image of our self; *she is no more than an illusion, far from reality.*<sup>20</sup>

To love a woman, then, is to love an ideal image which exists in the man's mind, not the real-life woman who, however attractive she may be, is bound to be an imperfect human being; it is to love an ideal image, just like the ethereal woman in *The Blind Owl* and the puppet in "Puppet Behind the Curtain", both of whom the narrator and anti-hero of those stories love passionately and without qualification, and neither of whom exists in the real world. The ending of the short story "The Masks" is also reminiscent of the other psycho-fictions. Here too the two lovers die in a car crash deliberately caused by the man just as they are leaving town to spend a few days together for the first time.

In the short story "S.G.L.L.", one of the two in which Hedayat has tried his hand at writing science fiction, the woman tells the man that he is a "mother's boy", that he seeks, not love, but the pain of loving, and that it is just that pain that has made an artist of him. And when she dares him to jump into bed with her, he refuses and says he wished they lived in old times, when he could stand behind her window and play a serenade to her. In the course of the conversation, he goes on to say that in one of his dreams he had made love to her dead corpse. Here again, as soon as the narrator confronts, not love in the mind, but passion in the flesh, it fails to consummate, and the woman dies or is already dead.<sup>21</sup>

In the short story "Dead End" the story's main character is once again very different, and therefore alienated, from his friends and acquaintances, who, just like the rabble in *The Blind Owl*, "their passions had leaked from their lower organs to their jaws". Belonging to a notable provincial family, when he finishes his studies in Tehran and returns home he marries his cousin. There has been no intimate relationship between them before, and on the night of the wedding

somehow things go wrong. When they are alone in the room, the girl suddenly begins to laugh “a long and mocking laughter that wrecked Sharif’s nerves”. Why she breaks into that laughter cannot be read from the text, although it may be read into it. The poor man sits in the corner of the room, thinking, apparently for the first time, how much his bride resembles her mother and how she was bound to look as ugly as her once she entered middle age, and imagining the baseless quarrels which would inevitably follow in their family life. It is not clear from the text, once again, why the groom could not have thought of any of this before he got as far as the wedding night. At any rate, he sleeps separately from the bride that night and next day leaves town without saying goodbye to anyone. And as we read in the text “his cousin created a scandal and his father paid a heavy fine [no doubt including his wife’s *Mehr*] for his indiscretion”.<sup>22</sup>

The virtually unknown short story “Manifestation” or “Revelation” happens somewhere in Eastern Europe. Hasmik’s husband, another member of the rabble, “was running after money and collecting coloured banknotes like a dog whose feet are burnt”. She has a lover and the lover takes music lessons from a talented violinist, who also plays in a café in the evenings. This man, Wasilitch, secretly loves Hasmik, but does not have the courage to make it known to her. One night she catches him approaching a street lady, who rejects him while shouting, “Get lost. Have you no shame. You miserable thing; you’re not a man. Even that one time that I came with you was too many. It’d be better off to go with a dog.”<sup>23</sup> Hearing this, Hasmik, who has great admiration for the man as a violin player, first wonders how a man of his talent could have such needs, then thinks that he is a lonely and pathetic man, deprived of the joys of ordinary people. The story ends when Hasmik visits Wasilitch at his home by mistake, thinking that she would find her lover there, and Wasilitch, suddenly finding himself alone with the woman he secretly adores, utterly loses confidence, makes some disjointed remarks, and quickly begins to play his violin to cover up his acute embarrassment. A few minutes later he realises that the woman has left the room. He begins to cough and throws himself on to his bed.

As mentioned above, such portrayals of women, as also of men and their relationships, are found only in Hedayat’s psycho-fictions, which concern the lives and loves of people in his own social and cultural environment. Two of them, *The Blind Owl* and “Three Drops of Blood”, use modernist techniques, but all of them involve different levels of subjectivity, where the emphasis is on characters rather than types, or, to put it differently, on a psychological type within a social category. Hedayat’s realist stories, on the other hand, are about various aspects of the lives of ordinary townfolk. Although, like any good novels and short stories written in the critical realist style, their fictionality is not in question, they portray objective realities relevant to their context authentically, so that one can readily think of types of people and situations in real life corresponding to them. It follows that both the women and the men in these stories look like their real types in society. And whatever judgement readers may make about them, their lives, loves, ways and morals, they would not surprise their readers nor would they engage his mind in complex questions. Indeed the readers would be

delighted to enjoy reading a good story about interesting aspects of these people's lives, and would have their hands largely free to form their own views about it.

In the comic short story "Alaviyeh Khanom", a group of Mashad pilgrims are portrayed who display various human attributes such as kindness and charitable-ness as well as duplicity and sexual promiscuity. What goes on is something that they are more or less used to. These simple folk are so largely devoid of hidden psychological constraints that they normally speak and behave with the utmost openness, and are not too embarrassed when they are caught at something that even they might think they should not have done. Their life is certainly not appealing to sophisticated people, but no impression is gained that it is not worth living.<sup>24</sup> In the short story "Asking for Absolution", all the three pilgrims of Karbala who are closely portrayed turn out in the end to have committed capital crimes. But the main story is the tragic experience of Aziz Agha, who, being barren, her husband had taken another wife. The new wife had given birth to two infant boys whom the wretched old wife had killed one after the other, being deeply depressed at the loss of her status in the household. Feeling remorse, instead of killing the third boy born to the younger wife, she had decided to get to the root of the matter and so killed the mother.<sup>25</sup>

In the short story "The Legaliser", the man divorced his wife in a fit of rage and quickly became remorseful, since it was an absolute divorce and it was not possible for him to remarry his wife unless she had been married to and divorced from someone else. He used the familiar traditional technique, though with heavy heart, of paying another man to act as a *mohallel*, who would marry the divorced woman and divorce her later to make it possible for the original husband to marry her again. But the new husband took to the woman and refused to divorce her afterwards, a complication that did occur in real life from time to time. The two men meet by chance a few years later, when the first husband has become a wanderer from the grief of losing his beloved wife, and the second has been abandoned by her.<sup>26</sup>

Such short stories as "The Ghouls" and "Hajji Morad" are generally in the same mould.<sup>27</sup> The little-known short story "The Woman Who Lost Her Man", the only fiction of Hedayat involving peasant life, has a different turn to it. Probably written with some modern psychological concepts and categories in mind, it describes the life of a peasant woman abandoned by her husband. She may not be a masochist, and sheer habit may have led her to associate her husband's beatings and the smell of animal dung on his body with sexual pleasures. When she finds him in the end he denies any and all knowledge of her. Hitching a ride on another peasant man's donkey, she wonders to herself if he too is a wife beater and smells of dung.<sup>28</sup>

The highly admired short story "Dash Akol" deceptively, but not unreasonably, looks like one in Hedayat's critical realist style. But beyond the surface of an authentic, if tragic, story about the lives of common people, there is the figure of Dash, a psycho-fictional character, proud, self-regarding, uncompromising, charitable to the point of self-sacrifice, shy and self-effacing, deeply in love but

incapable of communicating it. And just like the figures in the main psycho-fictional stories he does not belong to the common folk. Far from it, he comes from a leading family of the town who has turned *luti*. He morbidly loves the girl Marjan who exists in the story virtually by her name alone and is once again an ideal and therefore inaccessible woman. Dash Akol is eventually killed by the other big *luti*, who represents the familiar rabble of Hedayat's psycho-fiction, on the night of the girl's marriage to someone less than himself in every respect, which he has dutifully arranged. His parrot tells the hidden truth after his death when he repeats: "Marjan ... Marjan ... you're killing me ... your love is about to kill me."<sup>29</sup>

To sum up, there is dualism in the portrayal of women in Hedayat's psycho-fiction, on the one hand as an ideal, unattainable angel, on the other as a harlot. This corresponds to the portrayal of men: the lonely, misplaced, misunderstood, well-meaning, honest, sincere and moral narrators and anti-heroes who fail in every aspect of their living; the rabble who succeed in every aspect of theirs. His critical realist fiction about the lives of ordinary townfolk is different: both men and women are shown as they normally are, even though their vices often seem to outnumber their virtues.

The question has been posed in recent times if *The Blind Owl* and similar stories imply male homosexuality. This is of course merely of critical and interpretive interest. Male (and female) homosexuality in Europe, which in recent decades has been translated into Persian as *hamjens-bazi* and *hamjens-gera'i*, normally refers to love affairs between adults of the same sex. Male homosexuality refers to men who have no desire at all of liaising with women at any sexual level. Such men may even be disappointed and frustrated in their desires for a deep bond with their ideal man, but unlike the narrator of *The Blind Owl* and similar Hedayat fiction, they would not desire women, whether "angels" or "harlots", let alone experience such extreme agony in being disappointed by them. If this is the normal meaning and implications of homosexuality, as it certainly is from its cultural source in Europe, then it would make no sense at all to attribute it to the narrators and anti-heroes of the psycho-fictions.<sup>30</sup>

## Notes

- 1 See Sadeq Hedayat, "Katiya" in *Sag-e Velgard* (Tehran, 1963): 72.
- 2 See Sadeq Hedayat, "Arusak-e posht-e pardeh" in *Sayeh Roshan* (Tehran, 1963): 81–82.
- 3 Ibid.: p. 82.
- 4 Ibid.: p. 84.
- 5 For a full discussion of the structural similarity between "Puppet Behind the Curtain" – and others of Hedayat's psycho-fictions – with *The Blind Owl*, see Homa Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat, The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer*; "Ravan-dastan-ha-ye Sadeq Hedayat" in *Sadeq Hedayat va Marg-e Nevisandeh*, 3rd impression (Tehran, 4th impression, 2005).
- 6 See Sadeq Hedayat, "Arusak-e posht-e pardeh": 85.
- 7 Ibid.: 87.
- 8 Ibid.: 89–90.

- 9 Ibid.: p. 93.
- 10 See the quotation cited under note 5 above.
- 11 See Sadeq Hedayat, *Buf-e Kur*: 11, and Homa Katouzian, *Dabareh-ye Buf-e Kur-e Hedayat* (Tehran, 4th impression, 2005): 2.
- 12 Ibid.: 18.
- 13 Ibid.: 22.
- 14 Ibid.: 23.
- 15 Ibid.: 61.
- 16 Ibid.: 68.
- 17 Ibid.: 76.
- 18 See Sadeq Hedayat, "Zنده beh gur" in *Zنده beh Gur* (Tehran, 1962): 12–13.
- 19 See Sadeq Hedayat, "Suratak-ha" in *Seh Qatreh Khun* (Tehran, 1962): 105–106.
- 20 Ibid.: 160–162, emphasis added.
- 21 See "S.G.L.L." in *Sayeh Roshan*.
- 22 See "Bon-bast" in *Sag-e Velgard*: 55.
- 23 See "Tajjali" in *Sag-e Velgard*: 14.
- 24 See Sadeq Hedayat, "Alaviyeh Khanom" in *Alaviyeh Khanom va Velengari*; Homa Katouzian, *Tanz va Tanzineh-ye Hedayat* (Stockholm, 2003): 6.
- 25 See Sadeq Hedayat, "Talab-e Amorزش" in *Seh Qatreh Khun*; Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*: 6.
- 26 See Sadeq Hedayat, "Mohallel" in *Seh Qatreh Khun*; Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*: 6.
- 27 See Sadeq Hedayat, "Mordeh-khor-ha" and "Hajji Morad" in *Zنده beh Gur*; Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*: 3 and 6.
- 28 See "Zani keh mardash ra gom kard" in *Sayeh Roshan*; Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*: 14.
- 29 See "Dash Akol" in *Seh Qatreh Khun*; Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*: 6.
- 30 See further, Homa Katouzian, "Nameh-ha va mas'aleh-ye Hedayat", *Iran Nameh*: XIX, 4 (fall 2001): 535–549.

## 8 Satire in *Hajji Aqa*

*Firoozeh Khazrai*

Hedayat's *Hajji Aqa* appeared in 1945 with a small circulation of only sixty copies. The immediate public reaction is not known, but the fact that by 1964 the book had gone through its sixth edition ought to demonstrate that it had a wide readership. However, it took some more years and the benefit of hindsight for the Iranian literary critics of all kinds to comment on the value of the work and its position in Hedayat's oeuvre. The bulk of those critics were left-leaning intellectuals who proclaimed the work as "the summit of Hedayat's optimistic period",<sup>1</sup> and applauded him "in the trenches of struggle" against imperialism and capitalism.<sup>2</sup> The remaining critics very soon followed suit and portrayed Hedayat as a campaigner for the lower classes and the uneducated poor in his realistic stories and satires such as *Hajji Aqa*.<sup>3</sup> Even later critics were not immune to these interpretations and succumbed to the same conventional views of *Hajji Aqa* as "the best example of Hedayat's unbending critical views of the administration of the time".<sup>4</sup> All these interpretations might prove valid to some degree but I believe they have hindered any in-depth engagement with the text of *Hajji Aqa*. Even though many of these critics considered the work to be a realistic masterpiece in satiric form, none of them set out to do justice to this piece, which is "Hedayat's longest fiction and the most celebrated after *The Blind Owl*".<sup>5</sup> Could a cultural prohibition be at work on part of the literary critics warding off serious approaches to works labeled "satire"?<sup>6</sup>

This chapter strives to draw attention to some aspects of his work that have hitherto gone unnoticed or have been passed over too hastily, in the hope of stirring further critical discussions. The aim here is not to talk so much about the reception of the work, since Homa Katouzian has examined that issue very extensively in his book,<sup>7</sup> but to talk more about the work itself. I will first briefly address the form of *Hajji Aqa* and its genre, then proceed to discuss the characters and what they might or might not purport to signify. At the end, I will take up only one aspect of the reception, namely the issue of 'optimism', and then draw some conclusions about the possible interpretations of the work.

The story is set in Iran during the ending months of Reza Shah's reign, his ensuing abdication and the subsequent occupation of Iran by Allied Forces. The main character, Hajji Abu-Tarab, known by the generic name of Hajji Aqa, is a bazaar merchant of dubious origins with a hand in every kind of wheeling and

dealing, from hoarding nails to appointing deputies to the Parliament. The story also renders a satiric representation of various political ideas and conspiracy theories current among various classes in 1940s Iran, and provides a perspective as well on various aberrant ideologies such as Germanophilia and Aryanism of the period.

The author divides the story into four parts.

The first part is an introduction to Hajji by way of his interactions with a host of people from different strata of the society, as well as with his own household of numerous wives, children and his lifelong servant Morad. This part ends with the death of Halimeh Khatun, Hajji's oldest wife, who is sick with a chronic stomach-ache.

The second part consists of the descriptions of the author about the other characteristics of Hajji and facts about his life that might not have been revealed through the dialogues of the first part. It ends with the description of Hajji's flight to Isfahan with his youngest wife Monir following the events of the 1940s (the abdication of Reza Shah).

The third part takes place after Hajji's return from Isfahan and is to some extent a variant of the first part. This part consists of a series of dialogues between Hajji and different interlocutors against the backdrop of Hajji's moaning and complaints about his ailment.

The fourth part occurs in the hospital, where Hajji is on an operating table due to his ailment, and under the influence of anesthetic he goes to heaven and returns.

With regard to the form, if a musical analogy be allowed, the story may be viewed in a tri-partite form, ABA', with a Coda at the end. The A section, which takes place in the vestibule of Hajji's house, consists of a series of dialogues between Hajji, his associates, and a variety of people who come to him for various favors.<sup>8</sup> This part is utterly dominated by the overpowering figure of Reza Shah, who comes up in most of the dialogues and is invoked during the talks about the current state of affairs in the country.

The A' section is exactly like this part with respect to the dialogues propelling the action, but it happens after the events of the 1940s and is dominated by post-Reza Shah's disorderly democracy, long before the entrenchment of the new Shah's power. This is clearly seen in the appearance of the three new characters: Khayzaran-Nezhad, Monadi al-Haq, and the cousin of Davam al-Vezareh (son of Simin-Davat), all of whom readily criticize the political status quo and enthusiastically harbor the need for change and revolution in various degrees. These three new characters who appear in Hajji's vestibule in this section<sup>9</sup> do so mostly as a result of the unprecedented openness in a society previously ruled by despotism. Here Hedayat realistically presents all the political ideas floating in the society as a polyphony of voices, the density of which gives the impression of several people talking simultaneously, preventing each other from being heard or understood.<sup>10</sup> However, despite some transparency in the society, this section reveals that Hajji's dealing and wheeling with his cohorts continues as ever before.

Another link between these two sections (A and A'), aside from the dialogues, is the reappearance of the two characters of Davam al-Vezareh, a high-ranking politician, and Mazlaghani, a journalist. Davam al-Vezareh has come to thank the Hajji for the fulfillment of the favor he had requested in the first part, and Mazlaghani, who has apparently been promoted to the editorship of his journal based on the Hajji's recommendation in the first section, has returned to curry another favor in exchange for printing propaganda for Hajji's candidacy as a deputy to the Parliament. Evidently Reza Shah's abdication has persuaded Hajji that in order to extract the maximum financial benefit in the new political and social atmosphere, one must participate in the political process. Hajji fraudulently lowers his age in order to qualify for candidacy in the Parliament, and part of his dealing efforts in this section is devoted to collecting votes for himself.<sup>11</sup>

The B section,<sup>12</sup> a shorter section than A and A', is a contrasting section where the author reveals an abundance of details about Hajji through mere descriptions that eke out the picture of Hajji's character. The last section,<sup>13</sup> which I consider a Coda, stands alone as partly descriptive, partly dialogic. What still unifies this section with the other sections is the figure of Davam al-Vezareh, who is represented by a golden bowl presented to Hajji after he regains consciousness on his hospital bed following the operation. Davam has sent the bowl to Hajji as a token of his appreciation for the favor Hajji has rendered his nephew, Colonel Boland-parvaz, in the first part of the story.<sup>14</sup> So the invisible thread of unity and continuity runs through the three sections (A, A' and the Coda) by the figure of Davam al-Vezareh. Both Hajji Aqa as a typical landlord-politician in the guise of a big merchant and Davam al-Vezareh as a member of the political elite, hand in hand, are the two steady pillars of stability in the political and social environment, prolonging and bolstering the hopeless state of affairs in the country.

I hope this brief foray into the structure of the story<sup>15</sup> will demonstrate the fact that even in such a seemingly straightforward piece of fiction one can find complexities of form, especially when the work is by a meticulous author.

Let us now look at the story as a fictional satire. An important question is why Hedayat should have taken satire as his mode of expression. If we look at the etymology of the term, *satire* (or *satira*) originally meant "medley" in Roman times and later misleadingly by a false etymology came to be associated with "satyre" from the Greek satyr plays. Since Satyrs were notoriously and infamously "rude, unmannerly creatures", pursuant to that "satyr" turned out to be obligingly "harsh, coarse and rough",<sup>16</sup> and finally it came to be a medley of coarse language used by the satirist to expose vice and folly and "to appeal, explicitly or implicitly to virtue and rational behavior".<sup>17</sup> In addition, "satirist may use invective, sarcasm, irony, mockery, raillery, exaggeration, understatement – wit in any of its forms – anything to make the object of attack abhorrent or ridiculous".<sup>18</sup> It appears that Hedayat has applied some of these instruments of classical satire, both Persian and Greek, precisely to the word. At the same time the satirist employs discursive and colloquial language in order to reach a wider

public, and poses as an honest man who has been “appalled at the evil he sees about him and he is forced by his conscience to write satire”,<sup>19</sup> and the greatest satirists seem to have exercised a kind of “double vision”.<sup>20</sup> Hedayat had perfected his satirical techniques in some earlier works, such as the cases in *Vagh-Vagh Sahab*<sup>21</sup> and the short story “Al-bi’tha al-Islamiya ila al-Bilad al-Afranjiya”.<sup>22</sup> In addition, his acquired “double vision” could be due to his intellectual and aesthetic disdain for the political elite, his close familiarity with both Persian and European literature, or even his outside and nonconformist relationship with the intelligentsia of his time.<sup>23</sup>

Hedayat could not have articulated all the ideas he delves into, in the course of *Hajji Aqa*, in a psychodrama.<sup>24</sup> Had he put these ideas in the mouth of the characters in any genre other than satire, he would have been accused of making propaganda for this or that political faction or group,<sup>25</sup> and the end-product would not have been so potent and compelling. Besides, in this genre and in the liberty it affords the writer, Hedayat was supreme.

Upon reading *Hajji Aqa*, one is inevitably reminded of another supreme satirist, Nikolay Gogol, in his *Government Inspector*,<sup>26</sup> where the form itself determines the choice of characters, and much about life and politics in mid-nineteenth-century Russia is revealed within a limited space. In *The Government Inspector* everything happens in a house and an inn, and in *Hajji Aqa* everything happens in a house and a hospital, so the brevity of time and space allows an immense spectrum of ideas to flow freely. Likewise, in some respects Hedayat’s affinity with Anton Chekhov, whose short story “Thorned Raspberry”<sup>27</sup> he had translated, cannot be ignored. In this short story, a mean character has similar claims to Hajji’s claim of ancestral nobility, and his attitude and behavior towards his serfs (*muzhiks*) are very similar to Hajji’s attitude to the lower classes. Here are a few snippets from Chekhov’s short story, when the narrator talks about his brother’s complete transformation from a blue-collar worker in the city into a fully fledged village owner: “he did good deeds, not for the sake of good intentions, but for showing off”,<sup>28</sup> or “he would take the *muzhiks* to the court for damage to his lawns one day, and then the next day he would give them a bucket of vodka”, and then he would say, “education is necessary, but it is still too early for the lay people” or “corporal punishment is generally harmful but it is very helpful in some circumstances”. In addition, he boasted, for example, “we the nobility, or . . . I, despite the nobility of the family”, as though he failed to remember that their grandfather was only a *muzhik* himself, and their father only a simple soldier.<sup>29</sup> Such contradictions in speech and behavior are only too familiar to the readers of *Hajji Aqa*. Since whatever Hajji says, in practice he does the opposite, the satire becomes apparent not only in the utterances, but also in the juxtaposition of what is actually said and what is done in the course of the story.

The last word that should be mentioned about the technique is the name symbolism Hedayat employs in *Hajji Aqa*, very much in the vein of Shakespeare and Gogol. Hajji Aqa himself refers to the generic nature of his name,<sup>30</sup> which not only offers the author the liberty to attribute a broad number of vices to his

character, but also turns him into a species that can fit any character with the same idiosyncrasies. Indeed, Hedayat has painstakingly designated such names to every character of the novel,<sup>31</sup> which displays the author's technical competence in this genre.<sup>32</sup>

In contrast to his last satirical work, *Tup-e Morvari*, where he seems to be writing relentlessly and pitilessly, and where the work comes across like a flow of venomous lava, as if he is panting and agitated to utter his ultimate disgust with all that surrounds him, the satire in *Hajji Aqa* is measured, calculated and exceptionally to the point. Incidentally, in one of his letters to Hasan Shahid-Nura'i on May 15, 1947, his intentions in *Tup-e Morvari* are clarified, where he says:

We suffer and endure. It has been our lot or not, doesn't matter anymore. . . . I intend to make something shameless and ridiculous, so that it will be spittle to all. I might not be able to publish it. It doesn't matter, but this is my last straw so that at least after I'm gone, they wouldn't say "so and so was really a fool (an ass)"!<sup>33</sup>

Unlike *Tup-e Morvari*, which stresses the possibilities of satire down to the level of invective, aiming to shock and overwhelm, in *Hajji Aqa*, Hedayat has a sharp, acute eye for details and settings, ranging from the appearance of the characters, to the slightest turn of phrase in their dialogues according to their social stations, gender and age. His objective here seems to be largely different from *Tup-e Morvari*.<sup>34</sup>

Now let us go back to the character of Hajji Aqa. In the first and the third section, where dialogue rather than narrative prevails, Hajji's character is revealed through his interactions with a diverse group of people. What proves most striking here is that Hajji's tone changes depending on whom he is addressing; like a chameleon he alters his tenor and guise with each character. Simultaneously every despicable trait in Hajji seems to find a physical counterpart in his body; for example, this chameleon-like characteristic manifests itself in the tongue, and finds an echo in the following lines: "He thought of the tongue as a mere lump of meat that could be twisted this way and that. Thus, fixing deals, sleight of hand, spying, flattery, and general deception had all become part of his very nature."<sup>35</sup> In this sense, Hajji acts as a verbal "*lakkateh*"<sup>36</sup> who employs his tongue in any way which would suit his interests.

Furthermore, Hedayat transmutes Hajji into a mouthpiece for all the grievances of ordinary people, and Hajji fulfills this role by acting as a sounding board for the often contradictory ideas from conflicting quarters:

Just as an archeologist gazes with reverence when confronted with ancient monuments, so people fell awestruck at the cast and shape of Hajji Aqa's ideas, which were in fact nothing but the manifestation of an age of base-ness and insensitivity. Seeing him as an influential figure, they took account of him and swore by him. . . . In their eyes he was a straight dealer, pious and

honorable, so that it was often heard said of him: "Don't just call him Hajji Aqa, he is an angel in disguise!"<sup>37</sup>

In this particular role Hajji resembles the projection of the people's ideals gone awry. Everyone seems to project their own ideals, be it good or evil, on Hajji. On the other hand, it appears that they cannot shake the illusion that Hajji is in fact a benevolent man who does everything that he can for the people, and they consider him to be trustworthy.

This brief description of Hajji's status in the society is an important feature of the story. In *Hajji Aqa*, ordinary, gullible people resemble the Golden Calf worshippers, and are far from glorified. This is corroborated by another of Hajji's lines when he is attacking Reza Khan: "They brought in a coarse peasant and entrusted him with their very all; and a bunch of louts did a pretty dance around him, beating their breasts and buttering him up, until they landed us where we are today."<sup>38</sup> Although these lines are uttered by Hajji himself regarding Reza Shah, they ironically fit his own behavior as well, showing that not only does he understand perfectly the nature of the people, but he also knows how to profit by it. The ordinary people in *Hajji Aqa* are not mere spectators or victims, they are full-fledged participants in the vicious circle of deception, and bear full responsibility in making Hajji into a semi-angel cum little despot (if not a demi-god). There is not much empathy for them, and the same is true of many of Hedayat's critical-realist stories.<sup>39</sup> In this sense Hajji's vestibule where all the action takes place becomes a microcosm of what has gone wrong with the country and its people.

Hajji's relationship with his household is likewise woven with another web of deception. He has several wives (some being temporary), two sons, several daughters and a lifelong servant, who are all seen only through Hajji's lenses. Hajji blames them for the chaos in his domestic life, and for competing with each other. He shows extreme callousness towards all of them, especially his oldest wife, Halimeh Khatun, who dies in the A section. Meanwhile he makes every effort to take control over every aspect of their lives. The very reason why he settles in the vestibule of his house from morning till night is that he is determined to have control of all the comings and goings, and to be able to inspect everyone and everything, lest anyone do anything without his knowledge or permission,<sup>40</sup> and yet his family turns out to be the only sphere where in reality he does not wield any influence. He is very suspicious of his last two (temporary) wives who are very young and childlike: one of them is Monir, who mocks Hajji behind his back, and Mohtaram, who has a two-year-old child and is pregnant again. Hajji is painfully aware that after his second son, Keyumars, he has not been able to have children for sixteen years due to a hernia, but here is Mohtaram apparently bearing her second child by him. He is very suspicious of Mohtaram's cousin, Gol o Bolbol, who visits her freely in the "andaruni" (women's quarters of the house), and to whom Hajji's youngest daughter Sakineh bears a distinct resemblance.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, this element also turns into another satirical irony;<sup>42</sup> his wives and their sphere is one instance which,

despite his towering dominance, is beyond Hajji's control. Therefore, the only people who are cognizant of his true nature, and are not deceived at all by his duplicity and cunning, are his wives, and his servant Morad, who calls him "pire-kafar" (the Old Hyena) behind his back. Hedayat deliberately paints a telling portrait of Hajji's reaction to Halimeh Khatun's death at the end of the first section, which shows him as the cool, calculating and insensitive individual he is, caring for little but money.<sup>43</sup> Still, as mentioned above, the most significant point of the section on Hajji's domestic life is how dispassionately his wives and servant are portrayed. He tries to oppress all of them, but they too turn out to be deceptive and fraudulent. They may be his victims, but they are either of the same cut, or they think they must respond to oppression through cheating and deception.

To complete the picture, even the household's children are not exempted from this, and are portrayed in somewhat unflattering terms. Hajji's children appear only in two very short scenes. One is when his daughter Sakineh enters the vestibule, where Hajji entertains his visitors, along with her mother: "Hajji saw it was his daughter, Sakineh, clutching a wretched sparrow, feathers and wings plucked, and only half alive, to her breast with one hand, while the other hand was held by Mohtaram."<sup>44</sup> This scene can be interpreted in at least two ways. One immediate interpretation would be to identify what happened to the broken-winged sparrow as something that might happen to any poor creature who would be raised in such an environment as Hajji's house, but a further question arises as: "Who did this to the wretched sparrow in the first place?" The answer quickly becomes obvious: the household children, i.e. Hajji's and the servants', perhaps including the little girl herself.<sup>45</sup>

The other scene with the children takes place in the third part of the story, when Hojjat al-Shari'eh and Hajji are about to enter the women's quarters, when "Keyumars [Hajji's son] and a girl with a shaven, pitch-smear'd head were chasing a mouse, which had been set on fire".<sup>46</sup> This critical description of the children's behavior also finds expression in the words of Davam's nephew who has recently returned from Europe, where he claims:

The rottenness of our stock is evident in our children, our old men, our youth. We're all making a pretence at living – if only it were a pretence, it's not even that! We make faces at life, though in reality we don't have the gumption of a donkey and are always being led by the nose.<sup>47</sup>

From such scenes involving the children the impression is gained that they too are trapped in Hajji's microcosmic world of callousness and cruelty, and are initiated in it from an early age.

A noticeable feature of *Hajji Aqa* is the profusion of visual details. Throughout the story, the descriptions of Hajji's appearance and behavior become very cinematic and visual, and complement his actions in a fascinating way. Incidentally, Hedayat himself seems to be thinking of this particular story in visual or dramatic ways since he remarks "that if one day they decide to stage a play on

Hajji's life, they would save money by setting it in just one scene, a vestibule".<sup>48</sup> Such visual descriptions display an abundance of physical peculiarities. In the case of Hajji, they include particularly revolting physical secretions, such as the spittle that is spreading in the air and settling on the speakers, and nose droppings which Hajji seems to manage to rub off anywhere and everywhere.<sup>49</sup> All such physical attributes contribute to an image of Hajji as a filthy body with little trace of a soul. He seems to be quite conscious of his body and soul when he tells Morad the day before he is due to leave for the simple operation in the hospital:

"I'll be unconscious. They'll stick the knife in, sure enough. . . . Will I have any further control of my body? There it will lie senseless and motionless. I won't recognize it, but my spirit will see everything, understand everything. . . . But all my memories, my whole life, are part of that body. If I can't recognize my body anymore, what will be left to me? What possible thing can have any value for me? Nothing will remain but regret. God forbid! When I'm gone, I don't want to look down in regret on all these pretty women and all these fine foods that will be left in the world. What, then, will have been the point of all my efforts? . . . No, no! I don't want to die!"<sup>50</sup>

Thus Hajji sums up his whole philosophy of life. For him the meaning of life is bound up with the perishable physical body. No spiritual world exists beyond his body, and although he talks of a spirit, it emerges only when the anesthetic forces it out of his body.<sup>51</sup> He even deceives himself as he does others, saying, "I don't believe I've ever done a bad thing in my whole life", thus deluding himself that his is utterly innocent of any wrongdoing.<sup>52</sup> He does not seem to be concerned about any spiritual matters but only about physical ones. He associates his entire life and his memories with his rotten corporal reality beyond which there is no spiritual meaning. I shall return to this topic later in the conclusion.

In the contrasting middle section (B), we learn more about Hajji's attitude towards money and religion. We discover that not only his sole concern is how to accumulate money, but he considers any means as legitimate for so doing.<sup>53</sup> For him, money will buy anything, even eternal salvation; hence his belief that "it is possible to buy the other world with money as well".<sup>54</sup> His father, who had become rich by hoarding tobacco during the Tobacco Boycott in 1891, had purified his gain from it by going to Mecca.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, while he puts up a pretense to be religious, he would not fast or perform his ritual prayers unless the situation required it,<sup>56</sup> since he views religion as yet another tool for profiteering. Not surprisingly then, he says, "believing is important for people, since they must be muzzled", and it may be used for exploiting them.<sup>57</sup>

Given his attitude to life and society, he advises his son Keyumars that

"in the world, there are only two classes of people, the fleecers and the fleeced. If you don't want to be one of the fleeced, try to fleece others first.

You don't need much education: that only drives people crazy, anyway, and holds them back in life."<sup>58</sup>

He goes on: "the society is a den of vipers, wherever you touch, you will be stung."<sup>59</sup> Further, he tells his son how to relate to people, how to behave towards them so that they will believe every word he says and whatever he does.<sup>60</sup> The reader may be reminded of *Qabus-nameh*,<sup>61</sup> Kaykavus ibn-Eskandar's book on virtuous living, written for the benefit of his son, except that Hajji's advice to his own son is based on an extremely cynical view of social life: "you should think you live in a mountain pass and everyone is going to rob you."<sup>62</sup>

In the third section we are introduced to three new characters, Davam's cousin Kheyzaran Nezhad, and Monadi al-Haq, whose appearance, as mentioned above, is related to the newly created political atmosphere. Davam al-Vezareh, who has dropped in on Hajji to thank him for the favor he has rendered his nephew, fulminates against the young people who go to Europe and return only to denounce everything about their native country, and refers extensively to his cousin (son of Simin-Davat). According to Davam, they bring back only "revolutionary ideas, false patriotism and reproachable habits".<sup>63</sup> Some of what Davam al-Vezareh quotes from his cousin is very telling:

"The fact is that we consider ourselves the smartest creations but are always waiting for a thug to appear miraculously to deceive us... Our only art is making ewer spouts... All our philosophy is summarized in nothing more than arguments about moot or trivial questions of religious observance... Everyone from Sufi and dervish to old and young, businessman and beggar are after money and status... We are living in the cesspool of the world and like a worm we wriggle in poverty, sickness and dirt, and the irony is that we think we are living the best of lives."<sup>64</sup>

Similar views may be found in the letters Hedayat was later to write to Shahid Nura'i,<sup>65</sup> but the context in which they are aired here makes them ambivalent, having different possible implications. Just as they hit out at the rottenness and corruption in the country, they likewise disapprove of the students who go to Europe "with their eyes and ears shut", learning superficially from Europe instead of gaining some of the deeper knowledge and experience from which their country could benefit.

Minutes after Davam's departure, Hajji Aqa utters these same sentences to his next visitor, Mazlaqani, like a parrot, and as we proceed it becomes obvious that all the statements spoken by these characters are double-edged and ambivalent, and can be interpreted in various ways. The character who appears next in the third section is Khayzaran-Nezhad who has accompanied Mazlaqani, the editor of *Dobb-e Akbar* (Big Bear).<sup>66</sup> Khayzaran-Nezhad is a journalist who had been jailed under Reza Shah. He advocates revolution. After commenting on the state of affairs in the country he says that "either we must make fundamental changes ... or we should be annihilated in the most ignominious manners. I see

no other solution but revolution.”<sup>67</sup> Khayzaran-Nezhad’s hot-headed pronouncement is of course in response to Hajji’s remarks, which happens to be a recycled version of the views of Simin Davat’s son quoted by Davam, making the reader wonder whether Hajji’s intention is not just to provoke his radical visitors to draw them out.<sup>68</sup>

Khayzaran-Nezhad opposes those who think of the post-Reza Shah period as being merely transitional, and believes that all the talk about transition is just to calm people down. He thinks that what the country really needs is a bloody revolution, so that people avoid giving way to gradual death and are able to determine their own fate.<sup>69</sup> Yet the reader may be surprised that Khayzaran-Nezhad finds Hajji worth engaging, and it is perhaps remarkable that he has come to Hajji’s house together with Mazlaqani, the shady newspaperman who licks Hajji’s boots for his support to become an attaché at the Iranian Embassy in the US.<sup>70</sup> In short, neither the words of Simin-Davat’s son, the turn-around European-educated character, nor those of the revolutionary Khayzaran-Nezhad, may have a positive effect on the reader, despite their critical remarks on the deplorable conditions of the country, and suggestions of reform and revolution for correcting them. They both seem to be partners and participants in the carnival of deception dominating the country, rather than representatives of a new progressive generation.

Finally, we come to the last of the new characters entering Hajji’s assembly, Monadi al-Haq (Proclaimer of the Truth), who is a recluse poet, and whom Hajji seems to have summoned in order to write an ode in praise of democracy. Monadi reacts violently to Hajji’s request and they exchange the most colorful lines of the story and which are often quoted by the critics.<sup>71</sup> Monadi is the only character in the story who puts the mirror in front of Hajji so that he can see his own reflection:

“All you and the likes of you are foolish people who eat, belch, steal, sleep and make children, then die and are forgotten. Now it is from the fear of death and nothingness, that you are seeking some status for yourself. Thousand generations of humans must come and go till finally one or two people come that give meaning to life and give the right of existence to this unknown horde who ate, slept, stole and copulated, leaving only feces. What humanity seeks is not thieves, bandits or the sponger, humanity needs some meaning for his life. One Ferdawsi is enough to exonerate millions of the likes of you and you – whether you want it or not – derive your meaning of life from him and take a pride in him. But now that science, art, and culture have taken their leave from this country, it is obvious that only thieving, spying and deception can give meaning and worth to this life.”<sup>72</sup>

He goes on to tell Hajji that “the world will change and even if his generation doesn’t change anything, eventually coming generations will root out his offspring”, but, despite the suggestion by some critics, he does not advocate revolution.<sup>73</sup>

Monadi has been seen as airing the author's own views and sentiments, for example, when he angrily comments, "my best poetry will be to eliminate you and the likes of you who condemn hundred thousands of people to death and misery."<sup>74</sup> But this may not be quite right. For unlike Monadi, Hedayat does not seem to have believed that his art should be used to fight the Hajji Aqas of this world. At any rate he did not believe in *engagé* literature, in the specific sense that the concept has been used since World II.<sup>75</sup> The author represents different voices of Iranian intellectuals in this third section, but, though his own sentiments may be nearest to Monadi, he would not necessarily agree with all that he says.

Apart from that, Monadi, who seems to materialize suddenly out of nowhere and without connection to any other characters in the story, may represent something else, apart from his role in confronting Hajji with his own truth. He may be seen as personifying Persian culture and specifically poetry. It is significant that Monadi refers to Ferdawsi as the source of pride and supplier of meaning for millions of anonymous people who just come and go, a sentiment no doubt shared strongly by the author himself, as evidenced by his life and works and his high regard for cultural and literary legacy. Therefore, Monadi's character is fundamental, not only as someone who tears off Hajji's mask, but also as an anthropomorphization of a potent cultural legacy that has been given a voice and cannot be effaced by the Hajji Aqas of the world.

The last part, the Coda of the story, takes place in the hospital where under the influence of anesthetic, Hajji goes to heaven and returns. Again, the scene has been depicted in great detail, and seems to be a satirical parody of *Ardawiraf-nameh*, which Hedayat has mentioned in his writings.<sup>76</sup> The suggestion is warranted not only because Hedayat knew this text, but also since he had previously employed similar themes in his other satirical works such as "The Case of Purgatory and Hell".<sup>77</sup> Mention has already been made of the possible relevance of the classical text *Qabus Nameh*. *Ardawiraf-nameh* is a Pahalvi text. Hedayat had learned Phalavi in Bombay, partly at least motivated by his early romantic nationalist tendencies; tendencies, which if they had not been lost already, were certainly lost by the time he came to write *Tup-e Morvari*.<sup>78</sup>

Let us now go back to what happened to Hajji in the Coda. Under the influence of anesthetic he dreams of going to the other world, where he realizes that he has been appointed doorman to Halimeh Khatun's castle in heaven for being kind to a fly.<sup>79</sup> The clearest lesson of the dream experience is that Hajji has learned nothing at all from it. When he "returns", the first thing he asks is whether the gift to him from Davam is real gold. His character does not reform, despite this spiritual journey to another world induced by anesthetic. If the reader has not yet been absolutely convinced that Hajji is but a body with no soul, the Coda will prove it to him beyond any doubt. He looks like a perfect prototype of *rajjaleh-ha* or the rabble in *The Blind Owl*, in some of Hedayat's other psycho-fictions, and in many of his letters. Thus says the narrator of *The Blind Owl*: "I passed among the rabble, all of whom, with greedy faces, were

running after money and sex. I had no need to look at them, since one of them typified all the rest. They were all a mouth, followed by a handful of guts and ending in genitalia.”<sup>80</sup> Compare this with Monadi’s description of Hajji to his face: “All that you care about is the bathroom, the kitchen and the bed.”<sup>81</sup> Hajji’s body reminds one of the narrator’s body in *The Blind Owl* at the end of the story, when he loses himself and becomes the odds-and-ends seller. The difference is that the Hajji is still bound up with his own body and has no desire for completion into something else.<sup>82</sup> The story, then, becomes a mock-heroic journey of a *rajjalleh-cum-lakkateh*, who actually goes to another world and returns unscathed. The fact that *rajjalleh-ha* survive and remain static and unchanged may be viewed as a pessimistic outcome of the story, but this is only too familiar from Hedayat’s other psycho-fictions.

There is thus no conflict between the spirit behind *Hajji Aqa* and *The Blind Owl*, despite views to the contrary by critics who regarded *Hajji Aqa* as an optimistic novel,<sup>83</sup> except that the pessimism here is reflected not through psycho-fiction or by the use of surrealist technique, but starkly in a critical and realistic form. The world of *rajjalleh-ha*, which resembled an abstract concept in the psyche of the narrator of *The Blind Owl*, has been exteriorized in *Hajji Aqa* and not just in the person of Hajji alone. In the world of *Hajji Aqa* no one is absolved of participation in the carnival of corruption, decay and banality. Everyone, or almost everyone, acts as a little despot who feeds and makes up the great despot, and here the vicious circle of Iranian politics is re-enacted. That is why Monadi appears to be out of place, as he is the hopeless voice of the culture that outlives the rabble and survives severe personal and social tests. If Hedayat’s highest inspiration from Khayyam was indeed the view that “life is a cruel joke”,<sup>84</sup> in *Hajji Aqa*, he seems to be representing the “joke” in its darkest aspects.

## Notes

- 1 See, for example, A. Omid (pseudonym), “Sadeq Hedayat”, *Majallehe-ye Shiveh* (March/April 1953), reprinted in *Aqayed va Afkar darbareh-ye Sadeq Hedayat pas az marg* (Tehran, 1954), 147. For this reference and many others, I have benefited from Homa Katouzian’s *Sadeq Hedayat, The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer*, paperback edition (London and New York, 2001), which was also a point of departure for my chapter. For the theory of Hedayat’s life cycle, see Katouzian, 44–46.
- 2 Ayn. (anonymous), *Ruznameh-ye Paygir* (March/April 1951) II, No. 6, reprinted in *Aqayed*, 40. For a Soviet view of Sadeq Hedayat see D.S. Komissarov, *Sadeq Hedayat: Zhizn i tvorchestvo (Sadeq Hedayat: Life and Works)* (Moscow, 1967), especially 58–59, where he considers *Hajji Aqa* as one of the best examples of socialist realist literature.
- 3 See e.g. “Dargozasht-e Sadeq Hedayat”, *Majalleh-ye Ettela’at-e Mahaneh* (March/April 1951), and yet many others in *Aqayed va Afkar*, 42–44. For a critique of this view see Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*: 64–65.
- 4 See e.g. Iraj Bashiri, *Hedayat’s Ivory Tower: Structural Analysis of The Blind Owl* (Minneapolis, 1974), 47.
- 5 Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*, 179.
- 6 Two prominent exceptions to these critics are Homa Katouzian, who has allocated a

- chapter of his book, mentioned above, to the discussion of *Hajji Aqa* and the short story “*Farda*”, 178–201. Another is Alireza Manafzadeh, “Sadeq Hedayat va tajaddod dar Iran”, *Akhtar*, 10 (autumn 1992), who has looked at *Hajji Aqa* as the confrontation of traditionalism and modernity in the Iranian society of the 1940s. I am grateful to Houra Yavari for this reference.
- 7 Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*, 178–201.
  - 8 See *Hajji Agha: Portrait of an Iranian Confidence Man*, trans. G.M. Wickens (Austin, TX, 1979), 1–30. Hereafter I will refer to this English edition. I may make modifications in the translation if I have a different opinion from the translator’s choice of some words.
  - 9 Simin-Davat’s son appears only by reference. Davam al-Vezareh mentions him at length in a criticism of the young people who have been educated in Europe; see *HA*, 76–79.
  - 10 *HA*, 53–112; this section is indeed the longest in the story.
  - 11 See *HA*, 56–57.
  - 12 *Ibid.*, 30–53.
  - 13 *Ibid.*, 113–122.
  - 14 Hajji had put in a good word for Boland-Parvaz who, in the first section of the novel, stood accused of the unlawful killing of nomadic people and embezzlement. In the third section, following Reza Shah’s abdication, he has been rewarded and promoted. See *HA*, 20–22 in the first section and 73–74 in the third section.
  - 15 For a different perspective on the form of the story, see Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*, 180. Another view of form in *Haji Aqa* may be found in the introduction to the translation of *Haji Agha* (Wickens) by Lois Beck, xxix.
  - 16 For these quotations and the subsequent ones on satire, see “Satire” in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton, NJ, 1990), 738–740.
  - 17 *Ibid.*, 738.
  - 18 *Ibid.*
  - 19 *Ibid.*
  - 20 *Ibid.*, 739.
  - 21 *Vagh-Vagh Sahab* [Mr. Bow Wow] (Tehran, 1962).
  - 22 *Al-bi’tha al-Islamiya ila al-Bilad al-Afranjia* (Islamic Mission to European Cities) (Stockholm, 1988).
  - 23 This refers to his disagreements with the Tudeh Party which was to surface in full force from 1946 onwards. See Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*, 44–46. For a detailed analysis of Hedayat’s position in society, see the last chapter, pp. 257–274.
  - 24 For a definition of psycho-fiction in Hedayat’s work see Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*, pp. 62–64. See further, Homa Katouzian, “*Ravan-dastan-ha-ye Sadeq Hedayat*” in *Sadeq Hedayat va Marg-e Nevisandeh*, 4th edn (Tehran, 2005).
  - 25 Perhaps he would then have been even more misunderstood.
  - 26 N. Gogol, *The Government Inspector*, in *Four Russian Plays*, trans. Joshua Cooper (London, 1990). Incidentally, Hedayat published a review of the first translation of *The Government Inspector* into Persian in 1944. For the review, see *Payam-e Naw*, 1 (July/August 1944), reprinted in *Neveshteha-ye Faramush-shodeh-ye Sadeq Hedayat*, ed. Maryam Dana’i-Borumand (Tehran, 1997). Indeed, he may already have known Gogol’s work through its French translations. In any case his review shows a thorough familiarity with the Russian masterpiece, and *Hajji Aqa* demonstrates numerous affinities with Gogol.
  - 27 A. Chekhov, “Tameshk-e Tighdar” (Thorned Raspberry), in Hasan Qa’emiyan, ed., *Neveshteh-ha-ye Parakandeh-ye Sadeq Hedayat* (Tehran, 1965), 26–43. This translation was first published in *Afsaneh*, 23 (June 1931).
  - 28 Chekhov, *Neveshteh-ha-ye Parakandeh*, 36.
  - 29 See *Neveshteh-ha-ye Parkandeh*, 37; cf. Hajji boasting about “We nobles of the first rank”, and “We men of good family” in *HA*, 34.

- 30 *HA*, 10.
- 31 Some critics have thought that *Hajji Aqa* was written in a journalistic style and in haste, for example, Jalal al-e Ahmad in his “*Hedayat-e Buf-e Kur*”, *Elm va Zendegi*, 1 (December/January 1951), reprinted in *Aqayed va Afkar*, 87, a view which may have contributed to insufficient reflection on the novel by some critics. For an explanation and translation of the characters’ names into English, see Wickens, xi–xiii, and Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*, ch. 10.
- 32 There is no claim that Hedayat was meticulous in all of his works, but many details in *Hajji Aqa* show that a lot of thought and planning went into writing it.
- 33 See Naser Pakdaman. ed., *Sadeq Hedayat: Hashtad va daw Nameh beh Hasan Shahid Nura’i* (Paris, 2000), letter no. 27, 109.
- 34 For an extensive discussion of these two dramatic satires, see Homa Katouzian, *Tanz va Tanzineh-ye Hedayat* (Satire and Irony in Hedayat) (Stockholm, 2003, 7, “*Hajji Aqa va Tup-e Morvari*”.
- 35 *HA*, 46.
- 36 “*Lakkateh*”, of course, is a reference to the female character of *The Blind Owl*.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 69.
- 39 On the issue of Hedayat’s treatment of ordinary people in his fiction, see Katouzian. *Sadeq Hedayat*, 64–65.
- 40 See the first section of *HA* for Hajji’s relationship with his household, especially 1–8, 10–11 and 30.
- 41 See *ibid.*, 37–39.
- 42 For this very point, see also Beck in Wickens, trans., *Hajji Agha*, xxvi, though I will ultimately draw a different conclusion from this view.
- 43 See *HA*, 30.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 45 One of the entertainments of some children in Hedayat’s times was the habit of hitting birds with a stone from a catapult and capturing them. Hedayat was very much concerned about the welfare of animals as is demonstrated in his youthful essay, “Man and Animal”. This finds expression in some of his stories, and profusely in the short story “Stray Dog”, but elsewhere as well, for example, in *HA*, 75, the poignant description of a kitten hit by a car. See further Homa Katouzian, “*Sag-e Velgard-e Hedayat*”, *Iranshenasi*, 15, 1 (2003), and “Man and Animal in Hedayat’s ‘Stray Dog’”, Chapter 13, this volume.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 103.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 77.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 33; translation is mine.
- 49 See *ibid.* especially 9, 79, and 112.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 58–59.
- 51 All the other times that he talks about dreaming of his first wife, who also appears in the other world, seem to be induced by anesthetic; see e.g. p. 59.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 58.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 41–42.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 42.
- 55 Exactly like the characters in the short story “*Talab-e Amorzesh*” (Asking for Absolution).
- 56 *Ibid.*, 42–43.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 47.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 46.
- 59 *Ibid.*, 47.
- 60 *Ibid.*, 47–49.
- 61 See Onsor al-Ma’ali Kaykavus ibn Eskandar, *Qabusnameh*, ed. Gholamhossien Yusefi (Tehran, 1996), especially the chapters on accumulating wealth, pp. 103–107; more on this in the conclusion.

- 62 Ibid., 47.
- 63 Ibid., 77.
- 64 Ibid., 77–78.
- 65 See e.g. letter No. 4, pp. 57–58, or letter No. 25, especially p. 105 in Pakdaman, *Hashtad va daw Nameh*.
- 66 He is the journalist who was promoted to editorship in the first part of the story, a return of favor for printing an article in praise of Hajji's meager donation to a poorhouse on the front page of his newspaper.
- 67 Ibid., 88.
- 68 Ibid., 85–86.
- 69 Ibid., 87–88.
- 70 Ibid., 91–92.
- 71 Ibid., 95–101.
- 72 Ibid., 96–97.
- 73 See e.g. A. Omid (pseudonym), "Sadeq Hedayat", *Majallehe-ye Shiveh* (March/April 1953), reprinted in *Aqayed va Afkar*, 146.
- 74 Ibid., 100–101.
- 75 For a convincing refutation of Hedayat as an *engagé* author see Katouzian *Hedayat*, 271–274.
- 76 See "Darbareh-ye Iran va Zaban-e Farsi" (About Iran and the Persian Language), reprinted in *Neveshteh-ha'i az Sadeq Hedayat* (Some Writings by Sadeq Hedayat), (Stockholm, 1988), 89.
- 77 See e.g. "Qaziyeh-ye Zamharir va Duzakh" (The Case of Purgatory and Hell), in *Neveshteh-ha'i*, 37–48.
- 78 See further Katouzian, *Tanz va Tanzineh*, 7.
- 79 See pp. 113–122. There may be several interpretations of this last section, but here we shall discuss only one.
- 80 Sadeq Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*, trans. D.P. Costello (London, 1969), 72–73.
- 81 *Haji Aqa*, 99.
- 82 See e.g. Houra Yavari, *Ravankavi va Adabiyat: Daw Matn, Daw Ensan, Daw Jahan* [*Psychoanalysis and Literature: Two Texts, Two Selves, Two Worlds*] (Nashr-e Tarikh-e Iran, 1995), 169–211, especially 196–197, where she views the end of *The Blind Owl* as the end of the narrator's self-exploration and his horrifying journey to the inner layers of his collective unconscious. See also her Chapter 4, this volume.
- 83 Many critics have considered *Haji Aqa* "optimistic", as opposed to the alleged "pessimism" of *The Blind Owl*. See e.g. the essays in *Aqayed va Afkar*.
- 84 See Leonard Bogle, "The Khayyamic Influence", in Hillman, *Hedayat's The Blind Owl*, 97, where he says that "to the Khayyam that he [Hedayat] presents us, life is nothing but a cruel joke".

## 9 Narrative identity in the works of Hedayat and his contemporaries

*Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi*

The recovery of ancient grandeur and purity constituted foundational concerns for Sadiq Hedayat (1903–1951) and for many of his contemporaries. Informed by an Aryanized account of Iranian history, like other nostalgic nationalists of the 1920s and the 1930s Hidayat scapegoated the Arabs as the destroyers of Iran's ancient grandeur. He called them the corrupters of pure Iranian blood, who through miscegenation left behind "filthy Semites" (*kesafat-ha-ye sami*) who were held responsible for the dissemination of "cheating, treason, thievery and bribery."<sup>1</sup> Recognizing Islam as an Arab religion imposed on Zoroastrian Iran, like other modernists of his generation Hidayat sought to expose the false piety and religious duplicity of his "mixed-race" compatriots in critical anthropological short stories such as "Seeking Absolution" (*Talab-e Amorzesh*),<sup>2</sup> "The Absolver" (*Mohallel*),<sup>3</sup> "The Man who Killed his Ego" (*Mardi Keh Nafsash ra Kosht*),<sup>4</sup> and "Madam Alaviyah" (Alaviyeh Khanom).<sup>5</sup> While innovative in form, all of these narratives were intended to expose a Muslim piety that he thought masked criminality.

Like Hosein Kazemzadeh Iranshahr, Sadeq Rezazadah Shafaq, Ahmad Kasravi, and his other contemporaries who wrote retrospectively on Iranian subjectivity and character (*nafs va shakhsiyat*), Hedayat devised an introspective self-narrative which Homa Katouzian has characterized as psycho-fiction.<sup>6</sup> In these soul-searching and self-interrogating narratives Hedayat explored a schizophrenic and schizochronic self that was concurrently ancient and contemporary, Aryan and Arab, Zoroastrian and Muslim. A product of "inherited thoughts" (*afkar-e mawrusi*),<sup>7</sup> this fractured self had a "surmised and jargonized existence" (*vojud-e mawhum va mozakhrif*).<sup>8</sup> Like the mother-Iran of his contemporary political discourse,<sup>9</sup> the fractured self that was exposed in "Buried Alive" (*Zنده beh Gur*) and the *Blind Owl* (*Buf-e Kur*)<sup>10</sup> was simultaneously suicidal and "immortal" (*ru'in tan*), and it appeared to oneself as an "alien being" (*adam-e biganeh*).<sup>11</sup> Losing its humanity, this retrospective self, particularly in *Buf-e Kur*, was haunted by memory and forgetting, the past and the future, retrospection and prospection. The self that Hedayat psycho-analyzed and psycho-narrated was a self that was exceptionally similar to the historical lamentations on the desperate conditions of contemporary Iran. Like his contemporaries' nostalgic retreat from an ignominious contemporary Persia to a magnanimous

ancient Iran,<sup>12</sup> Hedayat's fictive Self admitted, "Often to forget, to escape from myself, I recall my days of childhood" (*aghlab bara-ye faramushi, bara-ye farar az khodam, ayyam-e bachchigi-e khodam ra beh yad miyavaram*).<sup>13</sup>

This intense desire to forget via a creative remembering of a remote past was a distinct feature of the works of Hedayat and his romantic contemporaries.<sup>14</sup> Ashamed and dissatisfied with the existing order of things in early twentieth-century post-Constitutionalist Iran, they sought to create an *archaeotopia* (*archaeo* + *topia*), an archaic and archaeologically informed Aryan past that consoled their sense of inferiority in comparison with contemporary Europeans, a sense of the past that was cogently explained in Katouzian's *Sadeq Hedayat*.<sup>15</sup> The active remembrance of an antique past often served as a scenario for the making of a modern future. Thus the political Iranian self traversed the full hermeneutic circle of escaping from the contemporary Islam of the 1920s to an imaginary ancient Iran, and from a present manufactured in the image of that past in the 1930s back to a re-venerated "socialist" Islam in the 1940s, a newly imagined Islamic past that Hedayat satirized in his *Tup-e Morvari* (*Morvari Canon*).<sup>16</sup>

Thus by the 1940s the earlier nationalist project of purging Arabic from Persian was displaced with a project for purging "the Islamic nation" of non-Muslim "political religions." Observing these disturbing vacillations, Hedayat came to characterize "the spiritually sealed Iran" (*Iran-e Minu-neshan*) as a "stink-istan/stinkland" (*gandistan*).<sup>17</sup> He had irreverently remarked, "We have a cesspit-like homeland [*vatan*]/And are in it like Hossein in Karbala."<sup>18</sup> Whereas in his early works Hedayat utilized history for the making of a particularistic Aryan Iran, in the *Morvari Canon* one of his characters observed that "one of the distinctions of every new generation is to forget the trials of their predecessors." According to his view, "one of the benefits of historical studies is that one becomes pessimistic about the progress and the future of humanity."<sup>19</sup> Applied to Iranian history, he punningly attributed to the Shi'i Imam Ali the observation that "the history of [Iran's] guarded domains [*mamalek-e mahruseh*] begins with the Pishdadiyan and ends with the Pasdadiyan."<sup>20</sup> Whereas Pishdadiyans were viewed as anterior Iranians, Pasdadiyan were the contemporary or posterior Iranians. Playing with the double meanings of prefixes *pish* (posterior/front) and *pas* (anterior/rear) and the verb *dadān* (to give/to be fucked), Hedayat made a sexual innuendo in this observation that could also be read as the history of Iran begins with frontal-fuckers and leads to rear-fuckers. This type of irreverence distinguished Hedayat from most of his hyper-nationalist contemporaries. Despite this mark of distinction, the contents of Hedayat's narratives were ultimately mimetic. This can be ascertained by locating Hedayat in the pertinent context of early twentieth-century Iranian intellectual and cultural history.

### Nationalist archaeotopia

Configured in the nineteenth century, the nationalist memory project was informed by a late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century neo-Zoroastrian

identary narrative that sought to dissociate Iran from Islam. By crafting an Iran-centered historical memory that extended back to preadamite times, the exemplary texts of this India-based exilic movement refigured the pre-Islamic period as a politically and intellectually impressive past.<sup>21</sup> In the nineteenth century these liminal texts, which informed the early development of Aryan race theory in Europe, provided the basic grammar for an Iranian nationalist system of recollection that constituted the pre-Islamic age as an archaetopia – an idealized and memorialized historical period – and sought to recover the pure Persian that supposedly existed prior to the Arab conquest of Iran in the 650sCE. The retrospective configuration of this remote imperial past served as a prospective scenario for a desired modern future.<sup>22</sup>

The Iranian fascination with the ancient past became more intense with the characterization of Iran as a dying 6000-year-old mother on the eve of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 to 1909. The prospect of the motherland's "imminent death" made possible a narrative totalization of history through an organic integration of the past, present, and future. Unlike the episodic structure of earlier chronicles, this historical diagnosis introduced a *longue durée* pattern of sequence and consequence that explained contemporary "illnesses" as the presence of the past in the national body-politic. The recognition of the past as "illness" rather than "tradition" authorized an accelerated alteration of the existing order of things for the sake of "curing" the motherland (*madar-e vatan*) and reinstating her to her pre-Islamic youth and magnanimity. Thus the future, for long limited to eschatological expectation for the return of the Mahdi, was transformed into a horizon of expectation for the prognosis of Iran. Whereas the Mahdist future was unpredictable and beyond human agency, this prognostic future was rational and progressive and depended on the actions of the citizen-children of mother-Iran. Aware of this significant shift, Hedayat became interested in the origin of eschatological expectations in Zoroastrian cosmology and their shaping of an optimist perception of the future, themes that he explored in *Zand-e Vahman Yasn*<sup>23</sup> and *Darbarah-ye Zohur va Ala'em-e Zohur*.<sup>24</sup> These explorations are indicative of Hedayat's concurrent interest in the past, present, and future.

By introducing a causal mode of recollection, the medicalization of the past during the Constitutional Revolution provided the discursive foundation for a conspiratorial comprehension of politics in twentieth-century Iran. Informed by this mode of remembering, the post-Constitutionalists' generation that included Hedayat attributed "the illnesses of mother-nation" not to her own internal composition but to "foreign diseases" – Greek, Arab, and Mongol – which infected her otherwise healthy and powerful body. For instance, this historical conception of Iran was reproduced in *Un-Iran (Aniran)*, a 1931 collection of short stories by Shirazpur Partaw on the Alexandrian conquest ("Shab-e bad masti" [The Night of Excessive Drunkenness]), Bozorg Alavi on the Arab conquest ("Div, Div" [Demon, Demon]), and Hedayat on the Mongol conquest of Iran (*Sayah-ye Moghol* [the Mongol's Shadow]).<sup>25</sup> In "The Night of Excessive Drunkenness," which is set in spring 334, Partaw recounted the tragic destruction of the "Aryan

city of Persopolis” by the binge-drinking Alexander the Great. In a sensational short narrative of sex, revenge, and war, this short story concluded, “One night’s binge drinking destroyed the Aryan city and set behind the world civilization for many centuries.”<sup>26</sup> In “Demon, Demon”, which was set approximately 1300 years earlier, Alavi narrated a sensational account of how Arnavaz, the daughter of an Iranian general who was accompanying his fiancée, was taken hostage and sold to an Arab as a slave in the bazaar of Kufa. Twelve years later she managed to escape back to Hamadan along with her son Gazravan, and before dying she turned over the custody of her son to her former fiancé and asked him to raise her son as an Iranian. In the concluding section of this short story, which expressed an intense hatred for the Arabs, Arnavaz’s mixed-race son proved to be a “Satanic Arab collaborator” and was thus murdered by his true Iranian wife.<sup>27</sup> In the “Mongol’s Shadow” Hedayat narrated the story of Shahrokh who escaped into the Harazpy Forest after the Mongols had plundered his village and raped and killed his fiancée, Golshad. This incident altered the view of Shahrokh and a group of Iranian youth who had initially viewed the Mongol invasion as an opportunity “to eliminate the filthy Semite race” of the Arabs.<sup>28</sup> Shahrokh had recognized that, while “the Arabs gradually poisoned the people’s thoughts,” the Mongols were “the enemy of all living things and of humanity (*doshman-e jonbandeh va doshman-e jani-ye hameh va doshman-e adamiyat*).”<sup>29</sup> Thus he decided to take revenge on a Mongol general for the murder of his fiancée. Having realized this goal he escaped into the jungle, where he had the opportunity of reflecting on his father’s last words before he died: “As long as alive, do not allow Iran to fall into foreign hands. . . . Do worship the land of Iran.”<sup>30</sup> With a dagger that his father had presented to him on that occasion, Shahrokh at the end managed to kill the Mongol who had murdered his fiancée.

### Ancient glow and glory

While classifying Islamic tradition as Arab, the post-Constitutionalist Iranian nationalists sought to recover “national memory” (*hafezeh-ye melli*) and to reawaken the “national spirit” (*ruh-e melli*) by exploring all that was pre-Islamic. The exploration of pre-Islamic poetry, music, religion, history, art, and architecture included both Iranian and European scholars such as Forsat Shirazi (1854–1920), Mohammad Qazvini (1877–1949), Abbas Eqbal (d. 1955), Hasan Taqizadah (1878–1969), Hosein Kazemzadah Tabrizi (Iranshahr), Ebrahim Purdavud (1885–1968), Ahmad Kasravi (1891–1946), James Darmesteter (1849–1894), A.V. Williams Jackson (1862–1937), Arthur Christensen (1875–1945), Erich F. Schmidt (1897–1964), and Ernst Herzfeld (1879–1948). For instance, Hosein Kazemzadeh Iranishahr, a prolific writer and theorist of Iranian modernity and nationalism, viewed the discerning of Iran’s “ancient civilization” (*tamaddon-e qadim*) as the “best tool” (*behtarin vasileh*) for the “awakening of nationalist sentiments in the heart of every Iranian” (*bara-yi bidar kardan-e hess-e melliyyat dar del-ha-ye afrad-e Irani*).<sup>31</sup> Kazemzadeh’s *Manifestations of Iranian Spirit in Historical Ages (Tajalliyat-e Ruh-e Irani dar*

*Advar-e Tarikhi*), which was drafted in February 1919, became a canonical text on the historical survival of the “Iranian spirit” (*ruh-e Irani*) and its multiple manifestations in the spheres of politics, religion, economics, and ethics. Like his contemporaries, Kazemzadeh characterized that spirit as a “lantern that never dies” (*in cheraqhist nagardad hargez khamush*).<sup>32</sup> In the same vein, Abbas Eqbal argued that “music reached its ultimate degree of development” during the reign of the Sasanid king Khosraw Parviz (590–628).<sup>33</sup> Discerning a direct relationship between fine arts and civilizational development, in an article appearing in the official daily *Iran* in 1920, Karim Taherzadeh Behzad, a German-trained architect, similarly sought to demonstrate the civilizational achievements of Iran on the basis of ancient archaeological and architectural evidence. Following the arguments of Eqbal, Taqizadeh,<sup>34</sup> and Kazemzadeh, Taherzadeh explained that architectural monuments and inscriptions in Istakhr, Madayin, Behistun, and Ray were manifestations of “historical greatness of Iran and the superiority of its architecture and masonry.” Informed by Kazemzadeh’s *Manifestations of Iranian Spirit* Taherzadeh became an advocate for the preservation of ancient Iranian monuments, monuments that were viewed as expressions of ancient Iranian spirit. Like Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani, Taherzadeh argued that with the Arab conquest, the spiritual power of Iran was shattered and “the barefooted and desert-treading victors . . . disrespected and destroyed magnificent buildings and temples that for many years served as worship-sites for Iranians and as kissing-sites (*buseh-gah*) for our predecessors.” According to this narrative that came to shape the works of Sadeq Hedayat and his contemporaries,

in a short time span the garden of civilized world (*golestan-e jahan-e madaniyat*), which was a product of many centuries of endeavor and had reached perfection, was transformed into a barren and green-less desert like Arabia. The colorful flowers of fine arts were uprooted . . . and all that glow, glory, and grandeur, eclipsed like sun behind the Arab dark clouds.<sup>35</sup>

Explaining how, with “the twilight of Sasanian sovereignty most traces of ancient Iranian civilization were destroyed by the hurricane of foreign domination,” Taherzadeh contended that the maintenance and preservation of ancient remains were urgent tasks for contemporary Iranians.<sup>36</sup>

To sculpt a new Iran that mirrored the magnificence of the imagined archaetopia, which was modeled after Persepolis, in 1922 a group of leading Iranian scholars and statesmen established the National Heritage Foundation (*Anjoman-e Asar-e Melli*).<sup>37</sup> The Foundation sought to foster national pride and sensitivity by organizing lecture series on the world historical significance of Iranian monuments, which were in a state of disrepair. Among prominent speakers were the German archaeologist Ernst Herzfeld, the Iranian chief Minister Muhammad Ali Forughī, and the American art historian Arthur U. Pope.<sup>38</sup> In his August 1925 lecture, for instance, Herzfeld argued that the real national heritage of Iran began nine centuries prior to the birth of Christ with the emergence of

“the Aryan tribes, after whom this country was called Iranshahr.” Addressing a highly receptive audience, he argued that unlike other nations Iran flourished at four different historical stages during the Achaemenid, the Sasanid, the Saljuq, and the Safavid periods. In Herzfeld’s account, “in reality the Sasanid era constituted the age of Iranian modernity.”<sup>39</sup> Unlike Herzfeld who bolstered the Iranian sense of pride, Mohammad Ali Forughī drew attention to the defacing and destruction of the grand monuments of Isfahan and Persepolis. By shaming his distinguished audience, he proclaimed that “the preservation of national monuments is contingent upon popular sentiments and aesthetic judgments (*hess va zhawq*).” Like Taherzadeh five years earlier, Forughī considered the “the awakening of such sentiments as a responsibility of the National Heritage Foundation.”<sup>40</sup>

To provide a “scientific foundation” for Iran’s “glorious ancient past” the National Heritage Foundation also sought the expertise of orientalists such as Ernst Herzfeld,<sup>41</sup> André Godard, and Arthur Pope.<sup>42</sup> With the assistance of Herzfeld whose 1907 work on *Pasargadae* had impressed the Iranian émigrés and students who resided in Berlin during and after World War I,<sup>43</sup> the Foundation compiled an inventory of national monuments in 1925 and prompted a new age of archaeological discoveries with the 1926 to 1927 finding of the inscriptions of Darius in Hamadan and the 1932 discovery of the inscriptions of Xerxes during the excavation of Persepolis. Based on these inscriptions, Herzfeld constituted 520 BC as the date for the building of Persepolis.<sup>44</sup> These discoveries provided an occasion for the celebration of Iran’s 2450-year-old “ancient grandeur.”<sup>45</sup> A few decades later, this conjectured date provided the chronological foundation for Muhammad Reza Shah’s 1971 celebration of the 2500 anniversary of the founding of the Iranian empire and the consequent invention of an imperial calendar in 1976. In that year the basis of the Iranian calendar was altered from the Islamic 1355 to the Imperial 2535, beginning with the founding of the Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BC).

The celebration of Ferdawsi’s millennium in 1934 was the highlight of the public activities of the National Heritage Foundation for the refashioning of Iran as a rejuvenating ancient Aryan nation.<sup>46</sup> Literary explorations of Persian literature in the previous decades had crystallized in the recognition of Ferdawsi and his *Shahnameh* as a source of “national pride.” Following a trend established in the nineteenth century, Hasan Taqizadeh, writing in *Kaveh* in 1920, represented the *Shahnameh* as “Iranian history on the basis of indigenous sources” (*tarikh-e Iran az ma’khaz-e bumi*) and as “the story of ancient Aryan nation” (*dastan-e qadimi-ye mellat-e Arya’i*).<sup>47</sup> Thus the monumentalization of Ferdawsi became an integral part of the cultural and literary politics of early Pahlavi Iran.

Having built a new tomb for Ferdawsi that resembled Pasargadae, the celebration of Ferdawsi’s millennium showcased leading orientalists from Czechoslovakia, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Russia, Yugoslavia, and the United States. The list of invitees also included scholars from Afghanistan, Egypt, India, Iraq, Japan, and Palestine. During this celebration Hedayat met and then maintained correspondence with scholars such as

Arthur Christensen (1875–1945) of Denmark, Henri Massé (1886–1969) of France, Jan Rypka (1886–1968) of Czechoslovakia, and later Bahramgur Anklesaria (1873–1944) of India.<sup>48</sup> Whereas Christensen and Massé inspired Hedayat's study of folklore,<sup>49</sup> Anklesaria later enthused his study of Zoroastrian texts. Hedayat's *Zand-a Vahman Yasn (1323/1944)* was basically a Persian rendering of Anklesaria's *Zand-i Vohûman Yasn and Two Pahlavi Fragments* (Bombay, 1919).

Like many of his contemporaries, Hedayat shared the regressive Aryanist conception of Iranian history that instituted the Sasanid era as the height of Iran's historical development, an imagined golden age brought to an end with the Muslim conquest of Iran. Thus during the millennium of Ferdawsi purified Persian language and pre-Islamic Iran were the loci of scholarly deliberations. These deliberations were reflective of a purist and exclusionary political context that in its narrowness of vision was impertinent to the text of *Shahnameh* and its author.

Informed by European fascism, racial and linguistic purity were the key elements of the national and cultural revivalism of the 1920s and 1930s. The enthusiasm for the "renewal of ancient glory" (*tajdid-e azemat-e bastani*)<sup>50</sup> was coupled with anti-Arab zealotry, a distinctly Iranian form of anti-Semitism. The nostalgia for a pure pre-Arab past and Aryan spirit informed the literary, historical, and political imaginaries of those decades. The early short stories of Sadeq Hedayat are exemplars of such nostalgic romanticism that sought to recover Iran's assumed "Aryan purity" by attributing all impurities to the corrupting influence of Semite, both Arabs and Jews.

"Parvin Daughter of Sasan," which was completed on December 12, 1928 in Paris, was an early example of Hedayat's nostalgic romanticism. Situated in Rey on the eve of the Arab invasion in 22 Hijra/643 CE, this historical play enacted the tragic resistance of an Iranian family consisting of Sasan, the Portraitist (*Chehrehpardaz*), his daughter Parvin, her fiancé Parviz, and their servant Bahram. Staged in a palatial Sasanid setting that was informed by German art historian Friedrich Sarre's *Die kunst des alten Persien* (1922), the Iranians in this play appeared as elegant and courtly whereas the Arabs were barefooted and swarthy. The Portraitist, a leading figure in this play, articulated the sentiments that were the cornerstones of a nostalgic romanticism fraught with anti-Arabism. The lamentations of the Portraitist on the eve of the Arab invasion of Rey were the lamentations of a generation of modern Iranians who blamed all ills of early twentieth-century Iran on the Arab conquest in the seventh century. Mimicking Karim Taherzadeh's essay, cited above, the Portraitist lamented, "this cultivated and enlivening land, which was the envy of heaven, has become the resting place of owls.... Iran, a heaven on earth, became a frightening Muslim graveyard (*gurestan-e tarsnak-e mosalmanan*)."<sup>51</sup> On his deathbed, he lamented with agony,

Ah, it was yesterday, yesterday, the Arabs attacked, ... killed, ... captured, ... burned.... All free peoples of the world are unable, they are unable, to

free you [Iran] from the [domination of] filthy Arab savages. The oppressors have bent your [Iran's] back. In her last breath... Iran is suffocating slowly!<sup>52</sup>

But in this play, the Arab conquest was resisted by the likes of Parviz, Parvin's fiancé. Refusing to capitulate, he proclaimed,

Our destiny, and the expecting gazes of our ancestors and our predecessors are focused on us. The spirit of our ancestors will curse us... Escape from the enemy? Never, this is a shame, where could we hide? We will fight for freedom until the last drop of our blood. Leave our ancestral homeland for the demons?<sup>53</sup>

In another scene, the Portraitist's daughter appeared in front of the Arab military chief, who finding her attractive, proposed that she convert to Islam and marry him. Parvin's response, likewise, included a litany of charges against the Arabs:

Our religion is as old as the world... You view yourself righteous but you behave like demons and animals. The god that you worship is Ahriman, the lord of war, the lord of slaughter, the lord of revenge, a savage god that thirsts for blood. Torture and indecency is the foundation of your deeds, your approach, and behavior. You are thirsty for human blood and your deeds pollute the earth and corrupt the human race.<sup>54</sup>

Before killing herself with the dagger of the Arab military chief, Parvin warned the Arab chief, "Do all that you can today. But we will not accept force. Even though your army has dominated us and had committed unspeakable crimes, one day we will expel you from our country and will re-ignite the eternal light."<sup>55</sup> Placed in the pertinent context of post-Constitutionalist Iran, the theme of death in the works of Hedayat served as an allegory for the threat of Iran's imminent demise. This conception of death, as in the case of the Constitutional Revolution, was a call for prognostic alteration of the future.

Like other nostalgic lamentations concerning the collapse of the Sasanid Persian empire, Hedayat depicted the Arabs as "desert-treading and lizard-eating" (*biyaban navard-e susmarkhar*),<sup>56</sup> as "the enemies of God and the plagues of life" (*doshman yazdan va afat-e jan*),<sup>57</sup> and as "a bunch of Satanists and bloodthirsty demons who had risen to uproot Iranians."<sup>58</sup> Such characterizations prevailed in other works of Hedayat, particularly in his satirical works the *Caravan of Islam* (1930) and the *Morvari Canon* (1948). In the 1933 introduction to *Mazyar*, a conjoined historical narrative and play written with Mojtaba Minovi, who had co-authored a book on the inscriptions of Hamadan with the German Jewish archaeologist Ernst Herzfeld, Hedayat and Minovi referred to the Arabs as "snake-eaters of the demon race" (*markharan-e ahriman nezhad*), who disseminated "cheating, treason, thievery and bribery" among pure Iranians. Disseminated through miscegenation, the anthropological stories of

Hedayat were devised to expose the false piety that was the cultural product of the mixing of Iranians and Arabs. "Seeking Absolution" (*Talab-e Amorzesh*) is exemplary of criminals who washed away their crimes through pilgrimage to holy shrines.

Like his purist contemporaries, Hedayat viewed the recovery of indigenous ancient culture as a scenario for the rejuvenation of Aryan Iran. This in part explains his interest in folklore and the origin of popular beliefs, customs, and superstitions. Seeking to discover and to preserve the indigenous cultural practices, in *Neyrangestan* he divided folklore into the practices of the "early Indo-Iranian race" and those that were imported by alien Partians, Greeks, Romans, and "the Semite, that is the Chaldeans, Babylonians, Jews and Arabs." According to Hedayat's pseudo-scientific explanation, the alien beliefs and superstitions were "either injected into [Iranian] people through religious imposition or through misrepresentation, interpolation, and alteration of indigenous costumes" (*dar natijeh-ye tahmil-e mazhabi beh mardom tazriq shodeh va ya tahrif, dakhil va tasarrof dar adab-e bumi keh besurat-e biganeh dar avardehand*).<sup>59</sup> Authorized by François Lenormant's *La divination et la science des presages chez la Chaldéens*,<sup>60</sup> he attributed the decline of Zoroastrianism to the dissemination of astrology, superstition, fortune-telling, and witchcraft by "alien races" (*nezhad-i biganeh*).<sup>61</sup> Believing in the original purity of Iran and the rationality of Zoroastrianism, like his proto-fascist contemporaries, Hedayat viewed the entrenchment of superstition in Iran as a product of Greek invasion, Roman proximity, Jewish migration, and Arab conquest.<sup>62</sup> Due to racial and familial connections, according to Hedayat, Jews and Arabs played a significant role in the dissemination of these "rotted ideas" (*afkar-e pusideh*), which were "unfortunately" made available in numerous published books in Tehran's Tinsmith Bazaar (*Bazaar-e Halabisaz-ha*), where religious books were sold.<sup>63</sup> Similar to other nostalgic nationalists, he believed that:

the intellectual and life condition of the general public, particularly those of women, changed after Islam. Women became slaves of men. [With] polygamy, and the injection of predestination, lamentation, sorrow and pain the peoples' attention shifted from work and endeavor to magic, talisman, supplication, and jinns.<sup>64</sup>

In Hedayat's account, the alien nations (*mellal-e biganeh*) not only disseminated superstition but also sought to alter the pedigree of Iranian cultural heritages. For instance, he explained that all the heroic acts that were attributed to Alexander were originally the attributes of Rostam, the superhero of the *Shah-nameh*; the tomb that was identified as that of Solomon's mother was indeed the tomb of Cyrus, founder of the Achaemenid empire; and the title "demon-capturer" (*Divband*) which was attributed to Solomon was originally the title of Tahmures, one of the earliest Persian kings. Similar to Dasatiri authors of the seventeenth century, Hedayat wondered, "It is not clear with whose prompting and invention Solomon displaced all Iranian names and was represented in all stories. With such efforts, they sought to obliterate [our] ancient legacies."<sup>65</sup>

To encounter superstitions, Hedayat argued that “nothing is more effective than their publication. Thus their significance can be reduced and their shortcomings exposed.”<sup>66</sup> While exposing alien practices and superstitions, Hedayat sought urgently to preserve those “exquisite and appealing” practices such as the ceremonies of Mehregan, Nawruz, Sadeh, and Charshanbeh Suri, which were the relics of the glorious days of Iran.<sup>67</sup> For instance, in the same year that he wrote *Neyrangestan*, he characterized Mehregan as “the celebration of Iran’s liberation from the Arabs. It was on that day that Kavah the Blacksmith prevailed over Zakhak and freed Fereydun who was imprisoned in Damavand Mountains. Once again Iran returned to its ancestral eminence and creed.”<sup>68</sup> In Hedayat’s estimation, the revitalization and preservation of such ceremonies were “amongst the most significant national responsibilities” (*vazayef-e mohem-melli*).<sup>69</sup>

The revitalization of Iran’s ancient eminence was a task vigorously pursued by many of Hedayat’s contemporaries. The prominence of this cultural and political strategy was evident in the illustrated pages of *Iran-e Bastan*, which had initiated a public campaign for the celebration of the Ferdawsi millennium and for establishing a language academy for the cleansing of “sweet Persian.”<sup>70</sup> Edited by Abdorrahman Seif-e Azad, a former seminarian turned fascist,<sup>71</sup> between 1933 and 1935, *Iran-e Bastan* also provided an influential public forum for the concurrent celebration of ancient Iran and contemporary Germany, which was viewed as a descendant of Aryan Iran. In addition to the photographic depiction of German power and the prosperity of Indian Parsis, who were invited to return to their ancestral home, most issues of *Iran-e Bastan* included articles on linguistic and racial purity. For instance, in “Ancient Iran, Modern Iran” (*Iran-e Bastan, Iran-e Naw*), written in January 1933, Reza Kalantari proclaimed: “In the shadow of the Pahlavi royalty, we wish to fashion the new Iran in the shape of ancient Iran and to re-endow her with her ancient glory.”<sup>72</sup> Viewing a purified Persian language as “the only bridge connecting the ancient and the new Iran,”<sup>73</sup> Kalantari called for the establishment of a *Kanun-e Zaban-e Farsi* (Persian Language Institute). In another article, “Mother Tongue” (*zaban-e madari*), Safiniya likewise called for the establishment of an academy “for the expelling of Arabic and Turkish from our language so that the Persian language could be purified and sweetened.”<sup>74</sup> In the same year Mahmud Azar Yaghma’i similarly contended that “to be an Iranian” “the Arabic language must leave and migrate from this land and the maternal language must return.” In response to the question of “when could we have our mother tongue [back]?” he replied, “when we expel Arabic terms and advance Persian writings!” He viewed Arabicized Persian as the “relic” (*yadgar*) of Arab domination, which had to be destroyed and “its privileges abrogated” (*emtiyaz-e anra laghv kard*).<sup>75</sup>

Like the German promoters of *Gemeinschaft*, Kadivar, another language purist, observed that “today, pure Persian can be learned only from the mountaineers, villagers, cultivators and peasants and not from the city-dwellers.” He maintained that “the ancient spirit is enshrined within the bodies of villagers and

mountaineers” and not within the cosmopolitan bourgeoisie who had mixed with alien races. Kadivar believed that:

the [Arab] wreckage of the [Persian] language was no less than the bloodshedding of the Mongols. The wars, the blood-sheddings, and the plunderings have passed but the linguistic wreckage has persisted. Intense endeavor and perseverance is needed to topple that language and to uplift the sweet and heartwarming Persian (*ta an zaban ra barandakht va zaban-e shirin-e Parsi-e dilnishin ra barafrahkt*).<sup>76</sup>

The call for the purification of the language, like Hedayat’s folklore, was often grounded on the assumption that the revival of Persian could rejuvenate the ancient imperial spirit. Writing in June 1933, for instance, Mir Hasan Tabataba’i argued that “with the recovery of the Persian language, which is the sole sign of the times of glory of our ancient nation, all ancient behaviors and manners that instigated the development and growth of ancient Iran and our ancestors will return.”<sup>77</sup> Aware of the simplicity of such fashionable assertions, Shoja’ al-Din Shafa who was also a noted purist flippantly advised, “Oh you young Iranians, instead of pure Persian, let us import factories.”<sup>78</sup>

These romantic linguistic projects, which prompted the establishment of the Academy of Language in 1935, were grounded in a nostalgic imperial memory that intensified the feelings of contemporary inadequacy in comparison with ancient ancestors. These feelings of inadequacy often prompted a violent rage against the scapegoated “Arab other” who was held responsible for Iran’s decay. As an example, in 1933 Iraj Deilamani recalled that when his father first recounted the collapse of the Sasanid empire in the 650s and consequent Arab expansion:

[M]y ears turned red, the veins on my forehead inflated, and I began to shed tears. From then on, every time that I read this part of history, I gasp and become nearly mad. When I remember the glory, power, and luster of the Sasanid court ... I curse involuntarily the people who caused the degradation of this country.<sup>79</sup>

Accounts of ancient luster and glory, according to ‘Ata-Allah Shahabpur, rejuvenated the readers of this literature and created in them “the power of patriotism.”<sup>80</sup> Shahabpur, a regular contributor to *Iran-e Bastan* who founded the “Islamic Propaganda Society” (Anjoman-i Tablighat-e Islami) in 1941, explained how after reading a fine foreign work on ancient Iran he actually dreamt of that past. Dreaming, he found himself in Persepolis, in front of a grand palace surrounded by soldiers who denied him admission. As he was gaping at the majesty and splendor of Persepolis, an ancient man approached him and asked him if he was an Iranian (*aya Irani hasti?*). Responding positively, a long conversation ensued. That venerable dreamt man, addressing Shahabpur, said:

Oh you Iranian, did you know that your land was the most powerful and the most splendid nation? Were you aware that Iran possessed half of the world of that time and most costumes, traditions, and innovations belonged to us and that other nations mimicked us? Did you know that when the Arabs entered Iran they gaped at the elegant and fine Iranian clothes?

The old man informed Shahabpur that after its ancient grandeur, Iran fell from her peak into a dangerous chasm. As it tumbled down to the bottom of the abyss a savior, who obviously represented Reza Shah, reached out and uplifted her.<sup>81</sup> Thus the remembrance of the ancient past, instead of delegitimizing the present as it did on the eve of the Constitutional Revolution, was used to sanction it as the path of national rejuvenation and progress. In the pages of *Iran-e Bastan*, as in many other contemporary journals, Reza Shah, the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1926, was constituted as a legitimate son and a worthy successor of the ancient Iranian kings.

The growing confidence in this vision of history was bolstered by the popular acceptance of Iran as the original home of the Aryan race, a pedigree that enlarged the regal sense of Iranian selfhood. In an article, “Why are we superior?” (*ma chera bartarim*), like his nineteenth-century predecessors, Seif-e Azad argued that the Aryan race, which includes “the Iranian, the German, the English, and the French . . . has the God given gift of being always interested in change, renovation, derivation, and growth” (*tanavvo’, tajadddd, eshteqaq va tazaiod*) whereas “the Semitic peoples are always plain and simple” (*naw’-e sami hamisheh beh besatat va sadegi peivastegi darad*).<sup>82</sup> He further argued that “radiation and illumination . . . are the signs of Aryan victory and are respected everywhere, whether on the tiles of the Royal Mosque in Isfahan, or on the pillars of the Dawlat Gate in Tehran, or on the flag of Germany, or on the arm of Hitler.”<sup>83</sup> To prove the fraternal relations of Iran and Germany, *Iran-e Bastan* published Wolfgang Schultz Gurlitz’s “Iran and Zoroaster,” which had appeared in an official journal of the National Socialist Party.<sup>84</sup> In this essay, Gurlitz depicted Zoroaster as the Ayrian prophet.

The imagined sodality with European fascism prompted the Iranian Foreign Ministry in March 1935 to request that the international community should no longer use the terms “Persians” and “Persia” to refer to “Iranians” and to “Iran.”<sup>85</sup> Commenting on this request, the semi-official newspaper *Iran* explained that the recent investigations by European scholars on racial origins and linguistic etymologies indicated that “Iran” was a derivative of “Ary” and “Aryia” and not of “Iraj,” as had been believed by the Iranians themselves.<sup>86</sup> This racialization of “Iran” was largely the outcome of the presence of an emerging public that had mastered European languages and was able to vernacularize European fascism and anti-Semitism.<sup>87</sup>

The making of a shared Iranian-German Aryan memory had a devastating impact on the Jewish communities in Iran, a devastation that is rarely linked to the nationalist crafting of an ancient grandeur. Imitating German anti-Semitism, *Iran-e Bastan* fabricated sensational reports on Jewish plots. In an article pub-

lished on the occasion of Reza Shah's birthday on March 15, 1934, *Iran-e Bastan* reported that the joyous Jewish festival of Purim was an occasion of mourning for Iranians. Based on an article that had originally appeared in *Shafaq-e Sorkh*, Seif-e Azad argued that the enemies of Iran were celebrating on that day the massacring of 77,000 pure-race Iranians.<sup>88</sup> Parandeh Monzavi, the author of the original article, had reversed the account of Haman's plot to massacre the Iranian Jews into a Jewish plot enacted by Esther and Mordecai against pure Iranians.<sup>89</sup> Informed by this counternarrative, *Iran-e Bastan* called upon Reza Shah to announce the abrogation of this Jewish festival as he had done in the case of "capitulation and other traitorous concessions."<sup>90</sup> Likewise, in an earlier report, "Neither Camel's Milk, Nor Arab Visitation, Neither Alien investments, Nor Jewish Domination" (*nah shir-e shotor nah didar-e Arab, nah sarmayeh-ye ajnabi nah estila-ye johud-ha*) *Iran-e Bastan* crafted a concurrently anti-Arab and anti-Jewish agenda.<sup>91</sup> This report warned that Iran's recent foreign investors were predominantly Jews who had "no mores other than saving money, developing Palestine, and producing moral corruption in the society."<sup>92</sup>

Originally nationalist and secular, these reports provided a foundation for the anti-Jewish Islamist campaigns in the 1940s and beyond. An aspect of this transference may be located in the conspiratorial political narratives that have been actively retained until today. For instance, on the occasion of the 1934 inauguration of Razi Hospital in Tehran, *Iran-e Bastan* instigated an insidious public campaign against the Jewish community that had established and stocked the hospital's pharmacy, which made medicine freely available to the patients. *Iran-e Bastan* maintained that the pharmaceutical businesses were dominated by Jews and this had alarmed "the intelligent and observant people" (*mardoman-e hush-mand va basir*). Jews were accused of not only setting high prices but also of intentionally distributing fatal medicines.<sup>93</sup> A decade later, these anti-Semitic conspiratorial schemes of the 1930s found a new target in the Baha'is, who were viewed as the willing hands of imperialism and Zionism. In February 1949, for instance, eight members of the Fada'iyan-e Islam organization in Kashan murdered Dr. Birjis, an Iranian Baha'i who was accused of killing 100 Muslims by distributing fatal medicines.<sup>94</sup> These acts were instigated by a mode of retention and protention that sought to re-create past purities in the future by purging undesirables in the present. With the shift from an Ayrized past to an Islamized past in the 1940s, the ethnic othering of Arabs and Jews was displaced by the religious othering of Baha'is and Jews. Whereas the Semitic Arabs were blamed for Iran's fall from ancient grace and glory, Baha'is and Jews were increasingly depicted as imperialist agents responsible for the plundering of contemporary Iran. While the former narrative prompted the harsh treatment of Muslim clerics during the reign of Reza Shah, the latter provided the foundation for the emergence of an exclusionary Shi'i public sphere, a sphere that was initially linked to the state's anti-communist propaganda in the 1940s and the early 1950s.

## Notes

- 1 Mojtaba Minovi and Sadeq Hedayat, “*Dibachah*” in *Maziyar*, 3rd edn (Tehran, 1342/1963): 11.
- 2 Sadeq Hedayat, “*Talab-e Amorzesh*” in *Seh Qatreh Khun*, 3rd edn (Tehran, 1341/1962): 74–88. *Seh Qatreh Khun* was originally published in 1311/1932.
- 3 Sadeq Hidayat, “*Mohallel*” in *Seh Qatreh Khun*, 6th edn (Tehran, 1341/1962): 152–165.
- 4 Sadeq Hedayat, “*Mardi Keh Nafsash ra Kosht*” in *Seh Qatreh Khun*, 6th edn (Tehran, 1341/1962): 130–149.
- 5 Sadeq Hedayat, “*‘Alaviyeh Khanom*” in *Alaviyeh Khanum va Velengari*, 4th edn (Tehran, 1341/1962): 11–57. “*‘Alaviyeh Khanom*” was originally published in 1312/1933.
- 6 Homa Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer* (reprint, 1991; New York, 2002).
- 7 Sadeq Hedayat, *Zendeh beh Gur*, 6th edn (Tehran, 1342/1963): 10. *Zendeh beh Gur* was originally published in 1309/1930.
- 8 Hedayat, *Zendeh beh Gur*: 10.
- 9 Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, “From Patriotism to Matriotism: A Tropological Study of Iranian Nationalism, 1870–1909,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 34 (2002): 217–238.
- 10 Sadeq Hedayat, *Buf-e Kur*, ch. 13 (Tehran, 1349/1971). *Buf-e Kur* was originally published in Bombay in 1315/1936.
- 11 Hedayat, *Zendeh beh Gur*: 28.
- 12 In March 1934 the name of Iran was officially changed from Persia to Iran. This change was due to the belief that Iran would have a suitably Aryan connotation.
- 13 Hedayat, *Zendeh beh Gur*.
- 14 For instance, in *Buf-e Kur*, Hedayat writes, “From the bottom of my heart I hoped to submit myself to the sleep of forgetfulness [khab-e faramushi].”: 42.
- 15 Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*, 5: 67–90.
- 16 Sadiq Hedayat, *Tup-e Morvari* (Tehran, 1980).
- 17 Hedayat to Minovi, 12/3/37. “kharej shodan az gandistan”: 180.
- 18 On this see Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*, fn. 16, p. 279. Describing this verse Katouzian noted, “The emphasis is on motherland, not Hosain. That is: our motherland is like a cesspit, and we are being martyred in it as Hosain was martyred in Karbala” (Katouzian, *Hedayat*: 51).
- 19 Hedayat, *Tup-e Morvari*: 94.
- 20 *Ibid.*: 105.
- 21 For a detailed exploration of this historical narrative see Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Nationalist Historiography*, St Antony’s Series (Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2001); idem, *Tajaddod-i bumi va baz andishi-ye tarikh* (Tehran, 1382/1983): 9–39.
- 22 For a detailed exploration of this historical narrative see Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*.
- 23 Sadeq Hedayat, *Zand Vahman Yasn (Bahman Yasht): mas’alah-e roj’at va zohur dar a’in-e Zartosht, va karnameh-ye Ardeshir Papakan* (3rd edn; Tehran, 1342 [1963]); idem and Hasan Qa’imiyan, *Dar bareh-ye zohur va ‘ala’em-e zohur* (Tehran, 1964).
- 24 Hedayat, *Darbareh-ye Alay’em-e Zohur*: 61.
- 25 Sheen Partaw, Bozorg Alavi, and Sadeq Hedayat, *Aniran: Seh Novin* (Tehran, 1931).
- 26 Shirazpur Partaw, “*Shab-e bad masti*,” in *Aniran*: 3–19.
- 27 Buzurg ‘Alavi, “*Div, Div*” in *Aniran*: 20–35.
- 28 Hedayat, “*Sayeh-ye Moghol*,” in *Aniran*: 35–48; quote on 40.
- 29 *Ibid.*: 43.
- 30 *Ibid.*: 43.

- 31 Kazemzadeh Iranshahr, *Tajalliyat-i Ruh-e Irani dar Advar-e Tarikhi* (Tehran, 1956): 13.
- 32 Ibid.: 91.
- 33 Abbas Eqbal, "Musiqi-e Qadim-e Iran," *Kavah*, 2, 5, May 9, 1921: 14–16.
- 34 Abbas Eqbal Ashtiyani, "She'r-e Qadim-e Iran," *Kaveh*, New Series, February 10, 1921: 11–116.
- 35 Karim Taherzadeh, *Saramadan-e Honar* (Berlin, 1923).
- 36 Tahirzadeh, *Saramadan-e Honar*: 30–31.
- 37 The founders of the National Heritage Foundation included Hasan Mostawfi, Hasan Pirniya, Mohammad Ali Forughi, Hasan Esfandiyari, Ebrahim Hakimi, Abdolhossein Teymurtash, Firuz Mirza Firuz, Nasrollah Taqavi, and Arbab Keykhosraw Shahrokh.
- 38 In addition to a number of descriptive catalogs, Pope's early publications included *Persian Art and Culture* (New York, 1928); *An Introduction to Persian Art Since the 7th Century* (London, 1930); *The Spirit of Persian Art* (New York, 1931) Persia (Chicago, IL, 1933); *A Sasanian Garden Palace* (Chicago, IL, 1933); *Prehistoric Pottery Found in Persia: "Entirely Unexpected" Types from Syalck* (London, 1934).
- 39 Hasan Bahrololumi, *Karnameh-ye Anjoman-e Asar-e Melli az aghaz ta 2535 Shahanshahi* (Tehran, 1355/2535/1976): 4–5.
- 40 Bahrololumi, *Karnameh-ye Anjoman-e Asar-e Melli*.
- 41 Early publications of Herzfeld included *Pasargadae. Aufnahmen und Untersuchungen zur persischen Archaeologie* (Tübingen, 1907); *Samarra; aufnahmen und untersuchungen zur islamischen archaeologie* (Berlin, 1907); *Paikuli, monument and inscription of the early history of the Sasanian empire* (Berlin, 1924); *A new inscription of Darius from Hamadan* (Calcutta, 1928); *Rapport sur l'état actuel des ruines de Persépolis et propositions pour leur conservation* (Berlin, 1928); *Kushano-Sasanian coins* (Calcutta, 1930); *A New Inscription of Xerxes from Persepolis* (Chicago, IL, 1932).
- 42 For the role of these three individuals and their intrigues against one another see *Asnadi az bastanshenasi dr Iran: Hafriyat, atiqat va banaha-ye tarikh* (Tehran, 1380/2001).
- 43 "Estekhdam-e Professor Ernst Herzfeld tabe'-e dawlat-e Alman baray-e mo'alemi-ye alsaneh-ye qadim va tarikh-e qadim-e Iran, mosavvabeh-ye 3 Khordadmah 1307 Shamsi," in *Fehrst-e Qavanin-e Mawzu'eh va masa'el-e mosavvabeh-ye dawreh-ye sheshom-e taqniniyeh* (Tehran): 368.
- 44 Ernst Hertzfeld, "Kashf-e Alvah-e Tarikh: Sanad-e Bana-ye Takht-e Jamshid," *Iran-e Bastan*, 2:8 (March 10, 1934/19 Esfand 1312): 2; idem, "Kashf-e Alvah-e Tarikhi: Sanad-e Bana-ye Takht-e Jamshid," 2:9 (March 15, 1934): 2–3.
- 45 "Yadgar-e Azimat-e Iran-e Bastan Peydashodan-e Geran-baha-tarin asnad-e tarikhi," *Iran-e Bastan*, 2:8 (March 10, 1934): 12; Ali Asghar Hekmat, "Anjoman-e Mohtarm-e Asar-e Melli!," *Iran-e Bastan*, 2:8 (March 15, 1934): 2.
- 46 The Ferdawsi Congress and the establishment of the Ferdawsi Mausoleum, 12–27 Mehr 1313.
- 47 Hasan Taqizadeh, "Mansha'-e Asli va Qadim-e Shahnameh," *Kaveh*, 5: 10 (October 15, 1920): 9–14; quotes on 9 and 11.
- 48 For evidence of correspondence between Hedayat and Arthur Christensen see *Az Marz-e Enveza: Majmu'eh-ye Kart Postal-ha-ye Sadeq Hedayat* (Tehran, 1980/2001): 95–98. This collection also includes a postcard from Henry Massé (p. 100), and three postcards from Vladimir Minorsky (1877–1966).
- 49 Christensen's pertinent publications included *Fortællinger og fabler af persiske rammeværker* (Copenhagen, 1899); *Firdusi: Beschen og Menische: en episode af Schahname* (Copenhagen [s.n.], 1900); *Omar Khajjâms Rubâijât: en litterærhistorisk undersøgelse* (Copenhagen, 1903). Massé had enjoyed the collaboration of Hedayatin writing *Croyances et coutumes persanes, suivi de contes et chansons populaires* (Persian beliefs and customs) (Paris, 1938). According to Ulrich Marzolph, Henry

Massé's *Croyances et coutumes persanes* drew "information from local informants and was helped by a number of renowned Persian intellectuals, such as Mohammad Taqi Bahar, Ali Akbar Dehkhoda, Sa'id Nafisi, and Sadeq Hedayat."

- 50 *Iran-e Bastan*: 1.  
 51 Hedayat, "Parvin dokhtar-e Sasan": 32.  
 52 *Ibid.*: 30.  
 53 *Ibid.*: 22.  
 54 *Ibid.*: 46.  
 55 *Ibid.*: 48.  
 56 *Ibid.*: 21.  
 57 *Ibid.*: 15.  
 58 *Ibid.*: 20. See also Houra Yavari, Chapter 4, this volume, on *Parvin* and nationalism.  
 59 Hedayat, *Neyrangestan*: 15–16.  
 60 François Lenormant, *La divination et la science des presages chez la Chaldéens* (Paris, 1875). Hedayat cited pp. 22–23.  
 61 Hedayat, *Neyrangestan*: 16.  
 62 *Ibid.*: 17.  
 63 *Ibid.*: 17–18.  
 64 *Ibid.*: 18.  
 65 *Ibid.*: 20–21.  
 66 *Ibid.*: 23.  
 67 Hedayat, *Neyrangestan*: 25.  
 68 Hedayat, *Maziyar*: 99.  
 69 Hedayat, *Neyrangestan*: 25.  
 70 [Seif-e Azad], "Zaban-e Farsi: Andisheh-ye Ma," *Iran-e Bastan* 7 (24 Isfand 1311/March 15, 1933): 5.  
 71 Sheikh Abdorrahman Seif-e Azad was born into a bazaari family in Tehran. His father was an *attar*. Rahman studied in maktab until the age of fourteen. He then left for Karbala and studied there until he was twenty. He returned to Tehran prior to the killing of Mirza Ali Asghar Atabak and was introduced to Constitutionalist leaders, and began preaching during that time. Well connected to bakers and *allafs*, he used this connection for political advancement. He then left for Berlin and began publishing a journal. He was also the editor of *Iran-e Bastan*. See Khanbaba Moshar, *Mo'allefin-e Kotob-e Chappi-ye Farsi va Arabi* (Tehran, 1341 [1962]), v. 3, p. 380. Among Seif-e Azad's publications are *Demokrasi va Azadi dar Hend: Tarikhcheh-ye Fariqeh-ye Isma'iliyeh* (Tehran, 1329); *Rahnama-ye Banowan* (Tehran, 1330); and *Majmu'eh-ye Sanaye'-e Alman* (Tehran). See also *Majalleh-ye Roshanfeker*, no. 5, and *Ruznameh-ye Ettela'at* (4/31/333).  
 72 Reza Kalantari, "Iran-e Bastan, Iran-e Naw": 2 (8 Bahman 1311/January 28, 1933): 4.  
 73 *Ibid.*  
 74 Safiniya, "Zaban-e Madar!" *Iran-e Bastan*: 5 (3 Isfand 1311/February 22, 1933): 3.  
 75 Mahmud Azar Yaqhma'i, "Bara-ye pishraft-e zaban-e Farsi cheh bayad kard?" *Iran-e Bastan*: 7 (24 Isfand 1311/March 15, 1333): 6.  
 76 Kadivar, "Ziyan-e Zaban" *Iran-e Bastan*, 8 (1 Farvardin 1312/March 21, 1933): 3.  
 77 Mir Hasan Tabataba'i, "Fara-ye bazgasht-e farr va shokuh-e bastani," *Iran-e Bastan*, 24 (31 Tir 1312/June 23, 1933): 24.  
 78 Shoja' al-Din Shafa, "Arezu-ha-ye shirin," *Iran-e Bastan*: 37 (4 Aban 1312/October 26, 1933): 3.  
 79 Siyavash Deilami, "Iran ta abad payandah bad," *Iran-e Bastan*, 7 (24 Esfand 1311/March 15, 1333): 2.  
 80 'Ata'ollah Shahabpur, "Yek khab raje' beh Iran-e Bastani," *Iran-e Bastan*, 16 (28 Ordibehesht 1312/May 18, 1933): 8.  
 81 Ata'ollah Shahabpur, *ibid.*

- 82 “*Ma chera bartarim*,” *Iran-e Bastan*, 35 (22 Mehr 1312/October 14, 1933): 2.
- 83 Ibid.
- 84 The introductory section of Wolfgang Gurlitz’s article was published in *Iran-e Bastan* (2: 25/26: 23). It was serialized from 2: 27 (20 Mordad 1312/1934): 3. This article was reprinted in its entirety in the last issue of *Iran-e Bastan* in my possession. “Iran va Zartosht,” *Iran-e Bastan* 3: 17 (?December 1935): 7–13.
- 85 During this period many joint ventures substituted Iran for Persian in their name. For instance, Anglo Persian Oil Company Limited changed its name to Anglo Iranian Oil Company Limited (“*E’lan-e Rasmi*,” *Majalleh-ye Rasmi-ye Vezarat-e Adliyah*, no. 1859 (8 Farvardin 1314): 2, C-ie Percheries Perso-Sovietique “Persryba” to C-ie des Pecheries Irano-Sovietique “Iranryba” (“*E’lan*,” *Majalleh-ye Rasmi-ye Vezarat-e Adliyah*, no. 1860 (10 Farvardin 1314): 1.
- 86 “Iran va Iranian,” *Iran*, 4571 (6 Day 1313/December 26, 1934): 1.
- 87 See, for instance, Wolfgang Shultz Gurlitz, “*Iran va Zartosht*,” *Iran-e Bastan*, 2: 29 (3 Shahrivar 1312): 3; Friedrich Rosen, “*Jashn-e Hezar Saleh-ye Ferdawsi*,” *Iran-e Bastan*, 2: 28 (27 Mordad 1312): 2; idem, “*Jashn-e Hezar Saleh-ye Ferdawsi*,” *Iran-e Bastan*, 2: 29 (3 Shahrivar 1312): 4.
- 88 “*Eid-e Ester va Mordekhai ruz-e matam-e Iraniyan va ruz-e shadi-ye digaran ast*,” *Iran-e Bastan*, 2: 9 (March 15, 1934): 6.
- 89 Parandeh Monzavi, “*Eid-e Ester*,” *Iran-e Bastan*, 2: 9 (March 15, 1934): 6–7.
- 90 “*Niyaz*,” *Iran-e Bastan*, 2: 2 (25 Esfand 1312/March 15, 1934): 6.
- 91 “*Nah shir-e shotor nah didar-e Arab, nah sarmayeh-ye ajnabi nah estila-ye johud-ha*,” *Iran-e Bastan* 16: 2 (28 Ordibehesht 1312/May 18, 1933): 19.
- 92 Ibid.
- 93 Ibid. Similar to conspiratorial assertions, *Iran-e Bastan* claimed that there must be a half-bowl beneath the bowl [dar zir-e kaseh nim-kaseh’i ast]. See “*Nah shir-e shotor nah didar-e Arab, nah sarmayeh-ye ajnabi nah estila-ye johud-ha*,” *Iran-e Bastan* 16: 2 (28 Ordibehesht 1312/May 18, 1933): 11.
- 94 Interview with Reza Golesorkhi, “Fada’iyan-e Islam va Hawzeh-ye Elmiyeh-ye Qom,” *Tarikh va Farhang-e Mo’aser* 1: 2 (Zemestan 1370 [winter 1992]): 173–189; particularly 183. See also Davud Amini, “*Asnadi darbareh-ye Fada’iyan-e Islam va Navvab Safavi beh monasebat-e chehelommin salgard-e shahadat-e Navvab Savafi va yaranash*,” *Tarikh va Farhang-i Mo’aser* 4: 3/4 (Pa’iz/Zemestan 1374 [fall/winter 1995]): 125–167, particularly 134.

# 10 Hedayat's translations of Kafka and the logic of Iranian modernity

*Nasrin Rahimieh*

Much has been said about Sadeq Hedayat's interest in Franz Kafka and the affinity he believed to have found with the Czech writer. Some commentators have examined Hedayat's translations of Kafka as the roots of possible influence for Hedayat's own literary creations. Others have disputed the concept of influence and have focused on Hedayat's translations as adaptations shaped by his own worldview. Fortunately we have an important document in Hedayat's essay, "Payam-e Kafka" (Kafka's Message), which enables us to grasp the broader contours of Hedayat's understanding of Kafka. But there is an even more profound link between Hedayat's readings and translations of Kafka and his vision of modern Persian literature. As one of the most prominent literary figures of his era, Hedayat played a significant role in shaping Persian literary modernity. Hedayat's translations of Kafka and his essay on Kafka are part and parcel of his continuous search for literary and cultural revivification and a transition to modernity. Hedayat was not the only member of his generation to be preoccupied with such questions, but for him the boundary between the personal, the national, and the cultural was utterly blurred so that finding answers to his questions about the modern world became ontological in nature. In this sense, Hedayat became the very embodiment of a culture at the crossroads between what it believed to be its own historical stagnation and a modernity that was native to Europe only.

What I propose in this study is a reading of Hedayat's translations and his commentary on Kafka as manifestations of his paradoxical position within the discourses of Iranian nationalism and modernity. To situate my argument, I will provide a brief overview of Hedayat's relationship to European literatures and the manner in which his knowledge of European sources was integrated into his passion for creating a new literary language and form of expression in Persian. I will follow this analysis with a close examination of aspects of his translations of Kafka which I will then read in light of his essay on Kafka.

Hedayat and his generation of Iranian literati and intellectuals continued the tradition of translation that pre-dated them, one which has been masterfully studied by Christophe Balaý in his *La Genèse du roman persan moderne*<sup>1</sup> and *Aux Sources de la nouvelle persane*.<sup>2</sup> As we discover in these two studies, the translations of European sources had to become part of a Persian literary system

itself in transition. In Bozorg Alavi's personal reminiscences, we read about the passion with which Hedayat responded to Alavi's own interests in European literature. He appears to have been delighted to have found an Iranian interlocutor with whom he could converse about his literary discoveries and, as Alavi points out, Hedayat's library was crucial to the friendship that developed between the two writers. Hedayat would lend Alavi copies of his own books in French:

So I would read [the work] in French. My French was rather weak to begin with. But since it was difficult for me to get books from Germany, and Hedayat had all these books in French, I started reading in French. These were things that drew us together.<sup>3</sup>

Hedayat's passion for reading was linked to an equal zeal for creativity. For instance, in response to a question about Hedayat's influence on his own writing, Alavi states:

Well, yes, in a way. To the extent that you could say we were all under his influence. That much I accept. Because. . . . You see, he would dig up words which you couldn't find in dictionaries and then give them life! I remember, for example, him pointing out that people were always using the English word "net," as in "net profit," instead of the Persian *mok*. . . . He was constantly digging up words.<sup>4</sup>

I cite this example, limited as it is to the realm of philology, for its significance in grasping what I see as Hedayat's spirit of inventiveness. While immersed in reading European literary sources, Hedayat constantly sought native words that could fulfill the needs of Persian. His literary creativity, I would suggest, falls within the same pattern. What he read fueled his own imagination which he transplanted onto his native Persian world. In other words, Hedayat adopted *and* transformed both native and foreign sources.

In his *Hedayat's Blind Owl as a Western Novel*, Michael Beard argues for a similar placement of Hedayat, a middle position that circumvents the binarism of national exclusivity or foreign influence. Beard extends the middle position to the work of the critic and the reader, and therein we find the possibility of reading Hedayat beyond the familiar binary of the native and the foreign:

There is a logic of the middle position for the reader and analyst as well. The dilemma of a writer whose discourse is not contained by a single culture stems from the choice of dialects, the difficulty of visualizing how much the reader is likely to know. (We could describe that dilemma as a condition of freedom or one of vertiginous anxiety.) It is a dilemma for us as readers because of the disciplinary pressure to contain him within what Jonathan Culler has called "pieties of nationalisms."<sup>5</sup>

What Beard calls Hedayat's middle position, anchored at once in Persian and Western literary traditions, is a productive approach to understanding Hedayat's role in carving out new modes and means of literary expression in Persian. My study of Hedayat's work on Kafka aims to uncover yet another instance of the work that went into forging a Persian literary modernity that enthusiastically embraced European literary norms but disavowed the Perso-Islamic cultural heritage. It is within the paradoxes of Iranian modernity that we can best place Hedayat's own creativity and its relationship to the work of European authors like Kafka.

The search for new forms of literary expression in Iran coincided with attempts at modernization and the emergence of nationalism. In his configuration of modern Persian literary history, Kamran Talattof uses the term "Persianism" to capture:

the nature of the literary movement that resulted in the emergence of modern Persian literature . . . its advocates had several immediate objectives: to denounce the use of Arabic terminology; to work toward the purification of the Persian language through poetry; to promote a fictional language closer to common parlance instead of the conventional style; to link ancient Iran to the present time and expunge centuries of Islamic dominance from the memory; and, finally, to promote modernity by creating new literary forms.<sup>6</sup>

Although the term "Persianism" encapsulates the nationalist fervor that engulfed generations of writers, it does not sufficiently highlight the ethos that informed the search for a pure Persian linguistic and cultural heritage that at once rejected the Arabic and Persian and Islamic literary and cultural heritage, but paradoxically looked to the West for sources of inspiration.

The paradox, as explained by Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, is rooted in a "Eurocentric definition" of modernity that posited European Enlightenment as the cornerstone of Western progress and modernization, and consequently maintained that "non-European societies were 'modernized' as a result of Western impact and influence."<sup>7</sup> This conceptualization, Tavakoli-Targhi argues, has informed Iran's understanding of its own history: "By claiming that the Persian publication of Descartes in the 1860s is the beginning of a new age of rationality and modernity, the historians provide a narrative account that accommodates and reinforces the foundational myth of modern Orientalism."<sup>8</sup> Tavakoli-Targhi goes on to point out that: "Such a conception of modernity reinforces the exceptionality of 'Occidental rationality' and corroborates the programmatic view of Islamic and 'Oriental' societies and cultures as static, traditional, and unhistorical."<sup>9</sup> From this position it follows that to enter modern history the nation must purge itself of all that blocks its access to progress. Because of earlier movements that had invoked a Pre-Islamic Persian heritage, the search for modernity could also look to a distant past which was believed to hold the secret to the future:

The formation of a modern Iranian national identity was linked intimately to the configuration of its national history and restyling of the Persian language. . . . To catch up with the “civilized world,” the architects of Iranian nationalism sought to “reawaken” the nation to self-consciousness by reactivating and inventing memories of the country’s pre-Islamic past. The simplification and purification of Persian were corollaries of this project of national reawakening. Like the glorification of the Pre-Islamic past, these language-based movements helped to dissociate Iran from Islam and craft a distinct national identity and sodality.<sup>10</sup>

Thus it was that, like his contemporaries, Hedayat became doubly fascinated with Pre-Islamic Iran and looked to the West, particularly to Europe, for expressions of modernity.

This is not to say that Hedayat merely copied European literary works. As I have already stressed, his unique imagination often took him far beyond what can be deciphered as possible sources of influence. One of the best arguments against reading Hedayat within the logic of influence is articulated by Michael Beard. While discussing *The Blind Owl*, he writes:

more important than specific influences are the affinities we can discern between *The Blind Owl* and Western modernists he did not read, writings that create a new narrative self-consciousness the same way he did, out of the cast-off parts of an exhausted naturalism. *The Blind Owl* is more an experimental construct. . . . There are evident lapses into hallucination . . . as well as refusals of symmetry that make it impossible simply to mesh the two [parts]. This form produces a supplement to the inexplicable parts, those corners inaccessible to the light of exegesis. The result of such asymmetries is to put the readers face-to-face with writing itself, forcing them to confront the individual phrase, transition, or mood, or voice independent of its context, in the manner of the French nouveau roman. Kafka’s critiques of language and the limits of referentiality became popular in Europe in the thirties, but Hedayat discovered them only later; it was a discovery that must have validated his own experiments.<sup>11</sup>

This is precisely how we must approach Hedayat’s translations of Kafka. In Kafka he found words and images that resonated deeply within him and incited him to seek further parallels to his own universe.

In Kafka’s texts Hedayat found the fragility and the vulnerability of the modern which corresponded to his own anxieties and what Homa Katouzian calls “Hedayat’s utter and intractable determinism – if not fatalism.”<sup>12</sup> Entangled within this personal and artistic dynamic which informs Hedayat’s vision of Kafka are the impossible paradoxes of Iranian modernity. To uncover these correspondences, I shall now turn to examples from Hedayat’s translations of Kafka.

In my 1994 study “*Die Verwandlung* Deterritorialized: Hedayat’s Appropriation of Kafka,” I analyzed Hedayat’s translation of Kafka’s novella, “The

Metamorphosis,” by undertaking a close textual analysis of the Persian, the French translation on which Hedayat had based his translation, and the German original. I found some interesting discrepancies, which revealed how Hedayat had filtered Kafka’s text through his own image. In that study, I established that Hedayat must have had to rely on Alexander Vialatte’s translation of Kafka’s novella first published in 1938, for in 1943 when Hedayat completed and published his translation Vialatte’s would have been the only translation available in French. The comparison of the three texts uncovered examples of deliberate or inadvertent transformations of the original. I would like to draw attention to two such instances for the benefit of the present study.

The first example is drawn from toward the end of the first part of the novella and concerns the scene in which Gregor Samsa, the giant vermin, has crawled out of his room and is being chased back into it by his father. The original German reads: “Unerbittlich drängt der Vater und stieß Zischlaute aus, wie ein Wilder.”<sup>13</sup> This would translate into “Pitilessly the father drove him back, hissing like a savage.” The French translation reads: “le père impitoyable traquait son fils en poussant des sifflements des Sioux.”<sup>14</sup> The French translator, interestingly, equates the savage or wild man of Kafka’s text with Sioux Indians. It is possible that Hedayat did not understand the reference to the Sioux. In his translation the attribute “wild” is transferred from the father to the son: “valy pedar-e bi morrovvat pesarash ra donbal mikard va beh tarz-e ram konandegan-e asb-e vahshi sut mikeshid.”<sup>15</sup> This change and reversal of meaning inadvertently shifts the narrator’s perspective, which in Kafka’s text is closely identified with that of Gregor. In the Persian text, Gregor is already portrayed as utterly exiled from the human community around him in so far as the father is seen as the tamer of wild animals whereas in the original the father is the wild man. Thus, in Hedayat’s translation we see Gregor through the eyes of his father, the tamer of his son’s inhumanity. This image of Gregor is reinforced in the next example of transformation wrought by Hedayat.

The passage in question is about Gregor’s sister’s increased reluctance to enter her brother’s room. It describes how on one occasion Grete enters the room and upon noticing her brother jumps back in alarm and slams the door on her way out. Of the sister’s reaction, the narrator points out: “ein Fremder hätte geradezu denken können, Gregor habe ihr aufgelauert und habe sie beißen wollen,”<sup>16</sup> which would translate into “a stranger might well have thought that he has been lying in wait there for her intending to bite her.” Vialatte’s French translation is very close to the German: “un étranger aurait pu penser que Grégoire épiait l’arrivée de sa soeur pour la mordre.”<sup>17</sup> Hedayat’s version becomes: “yek nafar khareji mitavanest hads bezanad keh Gerehgoar khwaharash ra mipayad ta gaz nagird.” Hedayat may have been partially misled by the French text in his translation of the word “étranger” as “foreigner,” though this scenario seems unlikely given his command of French. Moreover, his superior mastery of Persian should have led him to choose “biganeh” instead of “khareji.” This infelicitous and jarring introduction of a foreigner into the narrative again distances us from Gregor’s perspective as the primary focalizer. Kafka’s choice of words

emphasizes the degree to which Gregor still sees himself as a member of the core of the family. He thinks like an insider who is not surprised that his sister rushes out of his room. Someone from outside this inner circle could have interpreted the scene differently, the German text suggests. In Persian, it is Gregor who is the victim. It is he who worries that he might be bitten, whereas in Kafka's text it is the sister who is represented as fearing the same outcome. In sharp contrast, the German and the French versions portray Gregor as the potential aggressor; in other words, far from the victim we encounter in Hedayat's translation.

In my earlier reading of *Maskh* I did not give sufficient attention to the manner in which the portrayal of Gregor Samsa as victim in these early stages of the narrative affects the whole of the novella. On the most obvious level, the Persian text hastens the pacing and the conclusion. Persian readers already know of Gregor's banishment from his family by the end of the first part, and Gregor's tragic end, which becomes inevitable only in the third part of the German original, is already apparent by the end of the second part of the Persian translation.

It is impossible to reconstruct the path Hedayat took in the process of transforming these passages, willingly or inadvertently. To discuss the degree of his fidelity to the original is to focus primarily on his role as translator, but, as we shall see in his essay on Kafka, these translations acted as entries into Kafka's world, or more accurately Hedayat's understanding of that world. As I will demonstrate, in Hedayat's essay on Kafka we find echoes of an interpretation that might well have led Hedayat to represent Gregor as having accepted the hopelessness of his situation at the outset of the narrative. Before turning to "Payam-e Kafka," I will pause to review my findings about Hedayat's other translations of Kafka's stories. This detour will bring me back to the very point I have just raised about Hedayat's representation of Kafka's protagonists as always already doomed to a tragic end.

Hedayat also translated the following texts by Kafka: "Der Jäger Gracchus" (The Hunter Grachhus), "Vor dem Gesetz" (Before the Law), and "Schakale und Araber" (Jackals and Arabs). We glean from "Payam-e Kafka" that Hedayat had read almost all of Kafka's stories, fragments, and letters, or at least what would have been available to him in French at that time. Why he would have chosen these specific pieces for translation is not a question that can be answered in the absence of more documentary evidence.

Returning to the three translations I have examined, by and large they follow the original closely. There are certainly no glaring transformations of the kind found in *Maskh*. The one exception is the choice of the tense used in the translation of "Before the Law." In the German text, the narration is consistently in the present tense, whereas in Hedayat's version it is in the past. For instance, the opening sentence of the original German reads: "Vor dem Gesetz steht ein Türhüter"<sup>18</sup> which translates as: "Before the law stands a doorkeeper," the Persian text is: "Jolo-e qanun pasebani dam-e dar qad afrashteh bud."<sup>19</sup> The change in verb tenses is consistent in Persian and gives the impression that we are reading about an event that has already taken place. In contrast, the German

continues in the present despite the fact that the narrative takes place over a period of time during which the protagonist ages while awaiting permission to enter. In the final sentence, also delivered in the present tense, the gatekeeper informs the man that he has waited in vain, the gate was meant for him only, and that he will now close the gate. The verdict, uttered in the present tense, is made all the more urgent. As the gatekeeper speaks, we wonder if it is not too late for the supplicant to walk through the gate. This immediacy is absent from the Persian text since we have already been placed within a narration of past events. The difference might appear subtle, for the impression with which we are left is the futility of the man's long ordeal. But in Kafka's text, the perpetual present underlines the fact that the knowledge and the wisdom that would have resolved the man's dilemma was always available but just beyond his reach. In other words, in the original German there is a fine balance between fate's seeming inevitability and humanity's ability to supplant it. This balance, precarious as it might be, is missing from Hedayat's translation, as it is from his vision of Kafka's message, strongly echoed in his essay on Kafka.

In his comprehensive analysis of "Payam-e Kafka," Katouzian provides the historical and political context within which Hedayat wrote this essay. It was to be his last published work (1948) and is written against "the fashionable negative judgment of the Communist intellectuals in Iran and elsewhere at the time about Kafka as a pessimistic, if not decadent, writer."<sup>20</sup> As Katouzian points out, Hedayat writes as much in defense of Kafka as himself: "he tries to substantiate his defense of Kafka and (himself) . . . by putting forward an alternative interpretation of what others were describing as decadence and pessimism."<sup>21</sup> One is nevertheless struck by the number of times the word futility, *puchi*, is repeated in the essay. There is an overwhelming sense of foreboding which seems to reflect Hedayat's own increasing angst that would ultimately lead to his suicide. But, as Katouzian has cogently argued, Hedayat's reading of Kafka is not simply filtered through his psychic pain or the harsh realities of his times. In Katouzian's words:

Hedayat displays awareness of what we may describe as Kafkaesque dialectics, though his awareness is vague and literary as opposed to precise and philosophical. This is a dialectic without a synthesis in which contradictions and antinomies persist in justifying each other in a circular, tautological fashion.<sup>22</sup>

It is indeed clear that Hedayat sees Kafka's world as caught in a dialectic. What he finds remarkable in Kafka's writings is the skillful manner in which Kafka describes ordinary protagonists, everyday events, but gives them a twist and suddenly throws his readers into the world of improbability and futility. The essay returns repeatedly to this sense of futility permeating Kafka's works, but it ends on a slightly different note:

This world is not fit for living. It is stifling. That is why [Kafka] goes in search of "the land, and the air, and the law" which can accommodate a

decent life. Kafka believes that this false, ludicrous, and hypocritical world should be destroyed and on its ruins a better world be constructed. If Kafka's world is adrift in futility, it is not to be embraced with open arms. On the contrary, it is a sinister world. One feels that Kafka has an answer, but the answer is not given. In his unfinished works the essence is not uttered.<sup>23</sup>

Katouzian suggests the sudden turn might be "due to a well-intentioned editorial intervention in the later editions of the book."<sup>24</sup> This contradictory logic could well reflect Hedayat's inner struggle to find an answer, for as Katouzian goes on to say, "Otherwise, he would not write at all."<sup>25</sup>

It is interesting to note that Kafka himself speaks about writing as the means of fighting against annihilation. On October 19, 1921, Kafka writes in his diary:

Anyone who cannot cope with life while he is alive needs one hand to ward off a little his despair over his fate ... but with his other hand he can jot down what he sees among the ruins, for he sees different and more things than the others; after all, he is dead in his own lifetime and the real survivor.<sup>26</sup>

The answer Hedayat seeks in Kafka's writings but finds unuttered is the act of writing itself. The precarious balance Kafka pinpoints between despair over one's fate and survival remains elusive for Hedayat. Hedayat's world, or the modern world with which he identifies and equates with Kafka's, also lies in ruins. Yet Kafka sees writing as the very possibility of erecting something new among the ruins, while Hedayat's gaze is fixated on the ruins. As a result, he misses part of Kafka's message and makes him into his own equal and soulmate, as we see in "Payam-e Kafka."

We find one of the most obvious signs of Hedayat's remaking of Kafka in his own image in his discussions of Kafka's relationship to religion. In his essay on Kafka, Hedayat's negative views of Islam become extended to Judaism. For instance, he disputes Max Brod's claims that Kafka was drawn to Zionism, claiming that: "Kafka was and remained much more German than Jewish."<sup>27</sup> In setting up an incompatibility between German and Jewish identity, Hedayat unwittingly replicates the prevalent racist ideologies of his time, or at least the Iranian versions thereof, which Katouzian views as "the product of a *defensive* sense of national shame, inferiority and weakness, rather than an *offensive* play for the subjugation and humiliation of other peoples and races."<sup>28</sup> It is crucial to read Hedayat's comments in the appropriate cultural context and *Zeitgeist*, but the same naive and sentimental nationalism was at the root of some of the impossible dead-ends Hedayat encountered. While we cannot fault Hedayat for not knowing the complexities of Kafka's cultural heritage, we can delve into them to see whether they offer solutions to the impasses Hedayat read into Kafka's world and, by extension, the modern world he believed to be inhabiting. It is with this aim that I return to the question of Kafka's relationship to Judaism and Hedayat's interpretation of it.

In reality, Kafka's personal views on Judaism and Zionism are far from straightforward. As many Kafka scholars have indicated, the Jewish question remained prominent and vexing throughout Kafka's life. The German-Jewish intellectuals of Kafka's generation reacted as much to the anti-Semitism of their milieu as to the illusory life created by the Jewish middle class of the time. They did rebel against these constructs of Jewish identity, and in the words of Hannah Arendt: "For the Jews of that generation ... the available forms of rebellion were Zionism and Communism."<sup>29</sup> As I have indicated in my earlier study, "Kafka was more ambivalent towards Zionism than his trusted friend, Max Brod. Yet ... it is not possible to see Kafka as completely divorced from his Jewish heritage. . . . Not only did Kafka study Hebrew, he also became a defender of Yiddish language and culture."<sup>30</sup> Ritchie Robertson goes further and points to evidence that in 1917 Kafka might have contemplated emigrating to Palestine.<sup>31</sup> Regardless of the extent of Kafka's involvement, he belonged to a generation who could not and was not allowed to forget that he was a Jew.

The figure that best embodies the values of this generation is Walter Benjamin, Kafka's junior by ten years. Benjamin's essays on Kafka, which he wrote before his own suicide in 1940, address the ways in which Kafka engaged with his Jewish intellectual heritage. Needless to say, Hedayat could not have known of Benjamin's essay, for it would not have yet been translated into French. Nor would he have known of Benjamin's personal attempt to escape the Nazi-occupied France that led to his despair and suicide. The questions of religion and Jewish identity with which literary figures like Kafka and Benjamin grappled were far more complex than the outright rejection of religion Hedayat attributes to Kafka, as evidenced in this sentence in "Payam-e Kafka": "Nishkhandhayash bishtar motevajjeh-e mazhab mishvad."<sup>32</sup> Yet, in the next paragraph, Hedayat reports that reading segments of *The Trial* to a circle of his friends, Kafka was so overcome with mirth that he had tears running down his cheeks. It seems to have escaped Hedayat that the example he provides does not fit his own point about humor directed at religion. Of all of Kafka's works, *The Trial* would seem to have the least concern with religion.

Hedayat's emphasis on Kafka's need to shun religion stems from his own conviction that Iranian culture had been in decline since the arrival of Islam. As Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi has revealed,

the desire and the will to recover "lost glories" of the past, the nationalist struggle for a new social order became intrinsically connected to the politics of cultural memory and its de-Arabizing projects of history and language. Juxtaposing Iran and Islam, these projects prompted the emergence of a schizophrenic view of history and the formation of schizophrenic social subjects who were conscious of their belonging to two diverse and often antagonist times and cultural heritages.<sup>33</sup>

We can see how deeply these dynamics play themselves out in Hedayat's views and how they place him in an impossible position vis-à-vis his native Iranian lit-

erary and cultural heritage of the Islamic era. From this perspective, the ruins of the modern world to which Hedayat repeatedly refers in “Payam-e Kafka” are also the ruins in which he believed to find his own national culture.

This is indeed one of the most profound paradoxes of Hedayat’s position. His early education immersed him thoroughly in his native Persian heritage, and we see from his writings that he is extremely well versed in this tradition and draws on it both in his fiction and essays. While he denounces the legacy of Islamic civilization in Iran, he finds a fellow traveler in the figure of Omar Khayyam who is a product of that same civilization. We know that his interest in Khayyam dates to the earliest stages of his literary career and yet “[i]n spite of vast differences between Khayyam and Kafka, Hedayat uses exactly the same language to describe their world views in his appraisal of their works: ‘Khayyam wanted to destroy this ridiculous, sordid, gloomy and funny world and build a more logical one on its ruins.’”<sup>34</sup> It is not surprising that his Khayyam is also a recluse who rejects tradition. This assumption about Khayyam obviates the need to place him within either a purely Iranian or Islamic tradition.

But the larger contradiction we discern in Hedayat’s views persists, opening up a huge void within and an alarming sense of exile from a self that can only be seen as whole in the ancient past. Hence, the pervasive sense of isolation we find in Hedayat’s works on writers as divergent as Khayyam and Kafka, to say nothing of his own fiction.

These same works by Hedayat are also sources and documents of Iranian literary modernity and self-portraits of a modern Iranian writer. To be a modern Iranian writer *à la* Hedayat demanded at once a return to a mythical and glorified Pre-Islamic Iran and literary journeys in the West, hence his travels to India and Europe. But these journeys to the sources of the past and the future were suspended over the chasm of a seemingly futile present. This untenable conceptualization belies the reality of Hedayat’s legacy as the bridge between Iran’s pre-modern and modern literature. Unfortunately the dominant cultural discourses to which Hedayat subscribed blinded him to the importance of his own role in crafting a new medium and mode of Persian literary expression that was fed at once by his formation in Persian and European literary traditions.

In this sense Hedayat’s view of himself and his generation bears many resemblances to the image of the angel of history Walter Benjamin describes in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History”:

This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from paradise; it has caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.<sup>35</sup>

Hedayat's gaze did not allow him to see that the future was upon him, or in Katouzian's words: "He lived an unhappy life but left a great legacy behind him. Perhaps the failure of his life was the price for the success of his works."<sup>36</sup>

Fortunately we, Hedayat's readers and critics, are in a position to look where his gaze did not fall and see our own storm of progress and some of the debris it has left behind. Looking closely at some of the pieces of debris might help us adjust our vision of literary progress, to say nothing of literary history. Following the example set by some of our colleagues in the discipline of history, we might do well to take apart our long-cherished definitions of modernity as a first step toward leaving behind the Eurocentric legacy underwriting Persian literary historiography. Only then might we be able to read Hedayat not as a marker of a rupture from the Persian Classics but rather as an instance of the same aesthetics that was not confined by geographical or national borders.

## Notes

- 1 *La Genèse du roman persan moderne* (Tehran, 1998).
- 2 Christophe Balaÿ and Michel Cuypers, *Aux Sources de la nouvelles persane* (Tehran, 2000).
- 3 Raffat, Donn , *The Prison Papers of Bozorg Alavi: A Literary Odyssey* (Syracuse, 1985): 64.
- 4 *Ibid.*: 63.
- 5 *Hedayat's Blind Owl as a Western Novel* (Princeton, NJ, 1990): 227.
- 6 *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature* (Syracuse, 2000): 25.
- 7 *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography* (Basingstoke, 2001): 2.
- 8 *Ibid.*: 8.
- 9 *Ibid.*: 17.
- 10 *Ibid.*: 96.
- 11 "Sadeq Hedayat's Composite Landscapes: Western Exposure" in *Persian Literature*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (New York, 1988): 332–333.
- 12 *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer* (London, 1991): 230.
- 13 *S mtliche Erz hlungen*, ed. Paul Raabe (Frankfurt, 1978): 69.
- 14 *La M tamorphose*, trans. Alexandre Vialatte (Paris, 1938): 36.
- 15 *Maskh*, trans. Sadeq Hedayat (Tehran, 1965): 49.
- 16 *S mtliche Erz hlungen*: 77.
- 17 *La M tamorphose*: 55.
- 18 *S mtliche Erz hlungen*: 131.
- 19 Mohamad Baharlu, ed. *Majmu'eh'i az Asar-e Sadeq Hedayat* (Tehran, 1372): 637.
- 20 *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer*: 231.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 *Ibid.*: 240.
- 23 "Payam-e kafka," in *Goruh-e mahkumin va payam-e kafka*, 4th edn (Tehran, 1963): 74–75.
- 24 *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer*: 241–242.
- 25 *Ibid.*: 242.
- 26 Quoted in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1968): 19.
- 27 "Payam-e Kafka": 19.
- 28 *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer*: 89, emphasis in original.

- 29 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*: 34.
- 30 Nasrin Rahimieh, "Die Verwandlung Deterritorialized: Hedayat's Appropriation of Kafka," *Comparative Literature Studies* 31, 3 (1994): 263.
- 31 *Kafka, Judaism, Politics, and Literature* (Oxford, 1985): 13.
- 32 "Payam-e kafka": 51.
- 33 *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography*: 94–95.
- 34 Nasrin Rahimieh, "Die Verwandlung Deterritorialized: Hedayat's Appropriation of Kafka": 264.
- 35 *Illuminations*: 259–260.
- 36 *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer*: 274.

# 11 Hedayat and the experience of modernity

*Ramin Jahanbegloo*

human beings are not born once and for all on the day their mothers give birth to them, but that life obliges them to give birth to themselves.

Gabriel García Márquez

At the junction of tradition and modernity in the modern history of the Middle East stand generations of intellectuals, diverse in their backgrounds and views, who seek to mediate the transition from traditionalism to modern modes of thinking. In virtually every case these intellectuals are characterized by a consciousness that oscillates furiously between recognizing the perils of being overcome by modernity and the impossible imperative of overcoming it. To many of these intellectuals this experience of modernity comes as a “shock” followed by a pattern of “individualization” rather than by the linear pattern of a monolithic progress. This “individualization” is characterized by a sense of maturity, a process which in turn causes critical thinking and the disintegration of the aura of enchantment. Hence, each experience of modernity for each intellectual contains its own distinctive dilemmas. This is crucial to bear in mind when discussing the experience of modernity pursued within the framework of each intellectual life. Iranian intellectuals began to face these dilemmas for the first time in the late nineteenth century. Throughout a period of about 150 years utopian thinking played a central role in the life and works of Iranian intellectuals and in the dilemmas they faced in the process of modernization. This utopian thinking emerged as a more or less coherent expression of different traditions of thought rooted in particular visions of the past and the future. During this period of time, questions regarding historical inevitability, teleological vision and logical harmony of values in a monistic system of social relations were at the centre of intellectual debates. If we distinguish four generations of Iranian intellectuals starting with the pre-Constitutional period and ending with the post-revolutionary period of the 1990s, we can say that in all of these generations (except maybe the last one) the predominant intellectual type has been the utopian variant whose ascendancy came with different levels of modernization and rationalization of Iranian social life. Yet at least one Iranian intellectual stands out as an outcast among these generations of intellectuals, because of his

critical awareness of reality and his sceptical attitude towards ideological frameworks. That is Sadeq Hedayat.<sup>1</sup>

An outstanding feature of Hedayat's modernism is his secular criticism in regard to the Iranian society. Hedayat thus established a critical approach that was almost unique in the period between the two World Wars in Iran. His modern search for truth avoided any romantic glorification of ideology and adopted a more realistic view of the underdeveloped and underprivileged members of the Iranian society. Much of this was carried out by Hedayat in a universal style and tone. This is perhaps the main reason why Hedayat can be considered as a universal writer and not simply as an Iranian writer. His work belongs to what Goethe described as "*Weltliteratur*" in the last decade of his life as a reaction to Romantic literary criticism's breaking through the traditional limits of European literature by re-evaluating the literatures of the Middle Ages and of the Orient. For Goethe, world literature was not a hierarchically structured thesaurus, but an element contemporaneous to him. In a letter to Adolph Friedrich Carl Streckfuss on 27 January 1827 he compares his situation to that of a sorcerer's apprentice with the world literature streaming towards him as if to engulf him.<sup>2</sup> Goethe echoes Herder in stressing that literature is the common property of mankind, and that it emerges in all places and at all times. "National literature does not mean much at present", affirms Goethe in his conversation with Eckermann on 31 January 1827, "it is time for an era of world literature, and everybody must endeavour to accelerate this epoch".<sup>3</sup> Erich Auerbach has the same idea in mind when he writes: "World literature refers not simply to what is common and human as such, but rather to this as the mutual fertilisation of the manifold. It presupposes the *felix culpa* of mankind's division into host of cultures".<sup>4</sup> Edward Said also reminds us of the relevance of views put forward by Goethe and Auerbach: "The main requirement for the kind of philological understanding Auerbach and his predecessors were talking about and tried to practise, notes Said, was one that sympathetically and subjectively entered into the life of a written text as seen from the perspective of its time and its author. Rather than alienation and hostility to another time and a different culture, philology as applied to *Weltliteratur* involved a profound humanistic spirit deployed with generosity and, if I may use the word, hospitality. Thus the interpreter's mind actively makes a place in it for a foreign "other". And this creative making of a place for works that are otherwise alien and distant is the most important facet of the interpreter's "mission".<sup>5</sup>

It is precisely this attitude of "making place for the other" that provides Hedayat with a unique position among the Iranian writers of his time. There is no doubt that Hedayat was the most modern of all modern writers in Iran. Yet, for Hedayat, modernity was not just a question of scientific rationality or a pure imitation of European values. Indeed, this may largely explain the reason why Hedayat did not become a member of the Tudeh Party despite having many friends and acquaintances among its intellectuals, though he was a fellow traveller for a short period before openly turning against it. By studying Hedayat's life and work one may suggest that for him, being modern was a *flanerie* in the

existential texture of modernity. Hedayat is the Iranian *flâneur* of modernity who sees the rapid changing of the world and folds this change into an experiment of the present. With Hedayat the lived instant (*Erlebnis*) of modernity fused into a narratable experience (*Erfahrung*). In his writings, the experience of modernity became a lived moment and a citable experience. In other words, Hedayat not only saw modernity, but he was seen by it. Modernity represented a new home for him, not as a place of dwelling, but as a point of transition from the old to the new.

Paris offered a great deal to a modern writer like Hedayat as it was an urban texture of thought to writers such as Benjamin and Hemingway. As Homa Katouzian mentions clearly, “There was plenty [for Hedayat] to read and see, the city lights were much brighter than Tehran’s, and the cafés offered him a marvellous meeting point with friends”.<sup>6</sup> Hedayat’s role as a *flâneur* brought him not only a sense of social criticism, but also a melancholic mood and a venomous pessimism. All these aspects created in him a witty satire and a sharp cynicism that one can find very often in his literary work. According to Katouzian,

Hedayat displays no particular sympathy for the subjects of his writing. . . . He writes *about* the lives of the ordinary people, but not *for* them. If anything, there are frequent hints of disapproval, a lot of which falls on their religious views and superstitious practices.<sup>7</sup>

This sense of despair is quite understandable in a writer like Hedayat who was contemptuous of intellectuals as well as ordinary Iranians of his time. His rejection of the Iranian established literary and political groups was completed by a resentful attitude towards the whole of the Iranian society. We find this attitude in plenty of Hedayat’s fictions and letters. For example, in his letter to Jan Rypka, the Czech scholar of Persian literature, he writes,

Everyone tries to make a living by some sort of trade. For example, somebody draws the arc of the [Arabic letter] nun, well, another memorizes classical verse, and somebody else writes flattering letters, and till the end of their days they enjoy a living from what they do. I can now see that whatever I’ve so far been doing has been useless.<sup>8</sup>

As for the second letter, it is sent by Hedayat to his friend Mojtaba Minovi in February 1937 and once again describes Hedayat’s unhappiness with the traditionalism and religious obscurantism of the Iranian middle class. “The thoughts of returning to the country of Mashdi Taqi and Mashdi Naqi,” says Hedayat, “gives me the creeps and brings a kind of stale *degout* [*sic*] up to my throat”.<sup>9</sup>

Hedayat’s letters certainly do not leave the impression that his modernism was future oriented in the same way as some members of the older generation of modernists such as Foroughi and Taqizadeh. The aim of few men like them was to try and bring about a stable condition to make possible “reform from above”,

although, to their chagrin, their constitutionalist values and principles were lost on the way, and they had to withdraw from the scene with regret. It was in pursuit of such goals that Forughī was active in politics both before and after Reza Khan Pahlavi first became prime minister, then Shah (1926). But at the same time he was active in the realm of scholarship by translating works from and writing on Western philosophy, promoting rationalist philosophy in particular, and trying to inform his compatriots of modern approaches to social and philosophical modes of thinking.

The reign of Reza Shah was marked by a series of modern changes in Iran. The Western influences that had been filtering through the Qajar political and cultural elites finally gained ascendancy in the efforts of modern-minded intellectuals and administrators led by men like Forughī. These efforts were of sufficient magnitude to be described as revolutionary at least as they affected the surface of the society. The main ideal behind them was a complete dedication to the principle of modernity through a breakdown of the holistic power of traditional ideas and methods and the instrumental adoption of modern rationality. Yet in the case of a few such as Forughī and Taqizadeh, attachment to modern values was accompanied by a deep commitment to the cultural and spiritual values of Iran. Their aim was to create a strong, centralized government, free from chaos and dependency, and to help to modernize Iranian society without the use of violence, although, despite their wishes, violence was indeed used in the process, thus alienating not only the traditional sectors of the society, but also modern elites who put as much value on democracy and freedom as on bureaucratic and technological development. Like most of the modernist intellectuals of his generation, Forughī considered Reza Shah to be an able and determined leader who could put an end to the chaos that had emerged following the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 to 1909, and had reached its climax after the First World War. It was on this premise that he entered Reza Kahn/Reza Shah's governments, becoming prime minister briefly in 1926 and 1933, before he was sacked and went back to his studies, about the same time that Taqizadeh went into exile and began to teach at the University of London.

Yet Forughī's political career started many years before Reza Shah's rise to power. Among other activities, he had taught at the prestigious School of Law and Political Science and was a delegate to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, although the Iranian delegation were not formally members of the conference on the argument that Iran had not been a party to the War. One of main objectives of Forughī and others like him was to promote modern education and spread among the young people the philosophical outlook of rationality and modernity founded on a wide range of knowledge in politics, economics, science and culture. His translation of Descartes and his emphasis on the Cartesian cogito is an example of his hopes and aspirations in that direction. Yet he was one of the rare Iranian intellectuals of his time who tried to strike a balance between Iranian culture and modern humanism.<sup>10</sup>

Hedayat had lost his enthusiasm for Reza Shah and his official nationalist ideology sooner even than the latter had thrown men like Forughī overboard and

begun absolute and arbitrary rule. He formulated his own unique mode of combining Iranian cultural norms with secular and modernist ideas. As a young man he had been much influenced by modern nationalist ideas, but he would not give up libertarian ideas to the dicta of modern nationalist dictatorships. Thus he wrote in a letter to Mojtaba Minovi in 1937: “You’re talking just like everyone else, that just because Goebbels describes Hitler as the genius of all times, everybody should believe it and praise Hitler. But I say, they should spit on the face of Goebbels and Hitler both”.<sup>11</sup> Hedayat’s natural aversion towards ideological frameworks as well as his critical assessment of superficial voices of modern rationality in the Iranian society discouraged him from becoming a political activist. As a result, he became an exilic figure of modern Iranian intelligentsia, falling out with all forms of ideology and authority and emerging as a solitary wanderer and an abandoned outcast among his contemporaries, most of whom were either believers in Stalin and the Soviet Union or followers of Reza Shah.

Hedayat’s exilic attitude emerges as a kind of homelessness but also as dwelling on coastlines which mediate between different cultures. His secular modernism and exilic *flanerie* are often echoed in his psycho-fiction as well as his letters. The exilic and alienated may be especially observed through the pages of *The Blind Owl* where the narrator makes some very angry and scathing observations on most of the people who occupy the public space. He calls them collectively *rajjaleh-ha* or the rabble and uses a form of poetics of criticism to express his feelings towards them:

I felt as if this world was not made for the likes of me. It was made for a bunch of beggarly, shameless, brazen, pedantic, thuggish and insatiable people who were made to fit in this world, and who flattered and begged the mighty of the earth and the heavens just like a hungry dog which wags its tail for a piece of bone in front of the butcher shop.<sup>12</sup>

Far from having existentialist beliefs as has often been suggested by Iranian literary critics, this passage tends to reaffirm two aspects of his critical modernist and secular pessimist attitudes. One of these is the fact that Hedayat is not just a non-ideological writer, but also an anti-teleological one, even though the element of determinism in his thoughts is strong. In this sense, Hedayat resembles Kafka.<sup>13</sup> That is why, just like Kafka, he was attacked by Tudeh intellectuals of the time, notably Ehsan Tabari, and even as late as the 1980s by his followers, as “petit bourgeois” and “decadent”. It is true that Hedayat’s philosophy of existence resembles Kafka’s more than those of existentialist thinkers, let alone the communists, even including Jean Paul Sartre, about whose non-existing friendship with him there has also been a lot of myth-making.

In “The Message of Kafka” which he wrote in 1948 and is his last published work, Hedayat elaborates his philosophy of man and life as a kind of secular pessimism, very broadly resembling Nietzsche as “a world where there is no room for God – a world of nothingness”.<sup>14</sup> He believed that Kafka was an ori-

ginal thinker and founder of a whole new paradigm and wrote of him: “There are few writers who create a novel idea, theme or approach, and, in particular, suggest a whole new approach to the problem of existence which has not been thought of before. Kafka is the best of such writers”.<sup>15</sup> In fact Hedayat’s critical modernism is the strongest reason behind his satirical rejection of Iranian pseudo-Europeanism of both right and left in his times. He rejected populism as well as conservatism, be it traditional or modern. As Katouzian demonstrates clearly,

His [Hedayat’s] own social class was familiar, at least, and was on the whole the most sophisticated of all established social groups, even though it took a large share of Hedayat’s disdain and disapproval. But an ordinary bazaar merchant represented almost everything which was offensive to his social, cultural and intellectual consciousness; that is, a mainly traditional class of professional money-makers who knew little about literature, lacked modernist and nationalist finesse, and looked and behaved in the old traditionalist ways and manners.<sup>16</sup>

Hedayat expresses his critical views of the worst of traditional culture as symbolized by the character of a traditionalist conservative politician in one of his most acclaimed works, *Haji Aqa*:

Even if you build a Wall of China around yourself, you’ll find that the world is changing too fast for you. . . . All you’re concerned about is the loo, the kitchen and the bed. . . . Never in your life have you owned or beheld anything beautiful, and even if you had you would not have appreciated it. No beautiful scenery has gripped you, no fine painting or inspiring music has ever made a powerful impression on you. . . . You’re nothing but a prisoner of your belly and what lies below it. Your life has less meaning for the world than that of a pig, or the plague bug. Any day would be a festive day for you when you manage to steal another three or four thousand tomans.<sup>17</sup>

Here, Hedayat is reflecting on his experience of modernity as a lived instant in opposition to traditional modes of living at their worst which he criticizes ferociously.

Thus, Hedayat sought to combine his personal experience of the modern with a critical attitude vis-à-vis the non-modern. His understanding of modernity was distinctly different from that of most modern Iranians of both Left and Right – of Marxist Leninist Iranians as well as technocrats in the service of the Pahlavi regime – whose models of modernity and modernization dominated the vision of three generations in the twentieth century. Unlike the conceptions of those two main groups of educated modern Iranians, his modernity is neither self-serving nor utopian, but a non-utopian exploration of the ambiguities of the modern experience. Once again, it is Kafka who according to Hedayat best expresses the ambiguities of modernity via a dialectical approach:

What brings tension in reading Kafka is not the fact that he can be interpreted in different ways. It is because on every issue there is a coded probability of the negative as well as the positive. . . . “Knowledge is at once the step which leads to eternal life and barrier against it”. This is also true of his own works: everything is a barrier, but it could also be regarded as a step.<sup>18</sup>

This last step in Hedayat’s experience of modernity should be understood in terms of his attitude towards death. Through his suicide, Hedayat extended the limits of experience as it was treated in modernity to the point where the concept of modernity itself is jeopardized. Hedayat’s literary experience of modernity is not just an elaboration of anxiety and depression, but also the expression of the mood of a heroic actor who lives through modernity by giving it a weight of experience. By pushing his secular pessimism to its limits, Hedayat allowed his experience of modernity to suspend itself between our past and our future.

## Notes

- 1 As a young man Hedayat was much influenced by the Romantic nationalist ideology which swept over modern Iranian intellectuals in the 1902s, but moderated his views when this became the official state ideology and virtually disowned it towards the end of his life. See further Chapter 13 by Homa Katouzian and Chapter 9 by Mohamad Tavakoli Targhi in this volume, and Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat, The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer* (London and New York, paperback edition, 2002), especially chs 1 and 5. A similar rejection of the existing fashionable intellectual frameworks was also true of Sayyed Hasan Taqizadeh and Khalil Maleki, who were otherwise different both from each other and from Hedayat. Maleki and Hedayat were friends when the latter was a Tudeh party sympathizer and the former was leading the Reformist wing of the party against the party leadership, which ended up in the famous party split of 1948. Leaders of the Reformist wing used to hold their meetings at Hedayat’s home as a safe venue, so they would not be surprised by members of the party establishment. See, for example, Homa Katouzian, “Khalil Maleki, The Odd Intellectual Out” in Negin Nabavi, ed. *Intellectual Trends in 20th Century Iran* (Florida, 2003) and *The Political Memoirs of Khalil Maleki*, 2nd edn (Tehran, 1988). Taqizadeh, like Maleki, had begun his career with a certain amount of idealism, although even then their approach was much less Romantic than most other intellectuals. See further *Iran Nameh*, special issue on Taqizadeh, guest edited by Homa Katouzian, 21(2003): 1 and 2.
- 2 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Werke IV* (Weimar, rpt. Munich, 1987), 44: 101.
- 3 Johann Peter Eckerman, *Gesprache mit Goethe*, ed. Regine Otto and Peter Wersig (Berlin, 1987): 198.
- 4 Erich Auerbach, *Philologie der Weltliteratur, Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Romanischen Philologie* (Bern, 1967): 301.
- 5 Quoted in the *Guardian*, 2 August, 2003.
- 6 See Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*: 35.
- 7 *Ibid.*: 64.
- 8 Quoted in *ibid.*: 57.
- 9 Quoted in *ibid.*: p. 61.
- 10 See Baqer Aqli, *Zoka’ al-Molk Foroughi va Shahrivar-e 1320* (Tehran, 1989).
- 11 Quoted in Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*: 89.

12 Ibid.: 130.

13 See Nasrin Rahimieh, Chapter 10, this volume, and Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*.

14 Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*: 236.

15 Ibid.: 231.

16 Ibid.: 188.

17 Ibid.: 188–189.

18 Ibid.: 240–241.

## 12 Hedayat, vegetarianism and modernity

### Altruism, Leonardo da Vinci, and desublimation

*Hushang Philsooph*

#### **Modernity and vegetarian tendency**

As the history of Western countries shows, one of the characteristics of modernization or industrialization is an increasing vegetarian tendency; that is, a tendency towards vegetarian diets and compassion for animals. This may, for instance, be seen in the well-documented history of the United Kingdom, where modern vegetarianism was born, in the last 500 years or so, particularly in the growing changes in attitudes towards nature, plants and animals, and in anti-cruelty laws, vegetarian societies or societies for the protection of animals. It may also be seen in the biographies of an increasing number of individuals who, to a lesser or greater degree, have supported vegetarian diets or have been against killing or harming animals, such as John Ray, Alexander Pope, John Wesley, Jeremy Bentham, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Henry Stephens Salt, and Annie Besant.<sup>1</sup>

In Iran, where modernity (modernization) began over a century ago, the above tendency has not yet much developed. The notion of vegetarianism or concern for animals is still deeply alien to too many people, even among the intellectual elite. Nonetheless, in the early 1920s Iran produced a remarkable animal-loving vegetarian, namely Sadeq Hedayat, “the best known, most discussed, and most controversial Persian literary artist since the *ghazal* poet Hafez (c.1320–c.1390)”.<sup>2</sup> Hedayat was also the main pioneer of the study of folklore in Iran, and is sometimes called the founder of Iranian anthropology.<sup>3</sup> He was the first Iranian to quote *Primitive Culture*,<sup>4</sup> one of the two books by Edward Burnett Tylor which caused Max Müller in the nineteenth century to refer to anthropology as “Mr Tylor’s science”.<sup>5</sup> Hedayat’s portrayal of the folk customs and beliefs in Iranian towns and villages in his fiction has been a source of inspiration to many, including the present writer, to do folkloric or anthropological studies.<sup>6</sup>

Hedayat’s vegetarianism is a classic case in the sense that it was a major ethical issue for him; he became a vegetarian at the age of twenty or twenty-one and remained so, without any lapses, until the end of his life; he published books in defence of animals and vegetarianism (his first two books, by the age of twenty-three); and his works were influenced by his pro-animal beliefs and emo-

tions to an extraordinary degree. It is also classic in having a traditional, namely ascetic, aspect. In some respects, his vegetarianism is closer to the ideal than that of some renowned figures in the history of vegetarianism. For example, Seneca, the Roman philosopher, and Plutarch, the Greek biographer, were practising vegetarians for only certain periods of time; Michel de Montaigne, the French essayist, and Arthur Schopenhauer, the German philosopher, never put their beliefs into practice; and Mahatma Gandhi became a vegetarian in his late twenties and Leo Tolstoy, as late as the age of fifty-seven.

In modern Iran there are a few people, such as Yusof E'tesam-ol-molk<sup>7</sup> and Hosein Kazemzadeh Iranshahr (see below), who, without being vegetarian, showed some interest in the welfare of animals and vegetarian diets before Hedayat. After Hedayat, in the 1960s Sohrab Sepehri (1928–1980), a well-known poet (and painter), whose works are translated into several European languages, began publishing ecologically conscious poetry with a refreshing sensitivity to beauty and harmony in nature. In his writings he had a caring attitude towards the environment, including animals; and in his personal life he stopped his occasional hunting and refused to go on an excursion with others if he knew one of them intended to hunt.<sup>8</sup> However, he was not a vegetarian, nor did he ever refer to vegetarianism in his poems or prose. His position was similar to that of many Buddhists who, while not being vegetarian, refrain from personally killing or harming animals. (He was familiar with Buddhism.)<sup>9</sup>

I published a two-part article on some aspects of Hedayat's vegetarianism, a neglected subject, in 2003 and 2004, but this chapter is the first study of this subject as a whole.<sup>10</sup> It has also a theoretical orientation and tries to shed light not only on Hedayat's vegetarianism, but also on vegetarianism in general. Due to lack of space a pertinent issue, namely the ascetic aspect of his vegetarianism (relating to sexuality), is reserved for a later publication. As seen above, I employ the term "modernity" in a broad sense. A vegetarian tendency differs from vegetarianism in that the latter is the ultimate or extreme form of the former, not adopted by the majority of people. The term "vegetarian tendency" is used, as mentioned above, for a tendency towards both vegetarian diets and compassion for animals. It may be asked why this tendency, which has now entered the mainstream, is a constituent part of modernity. Suffice it here to mention, apart from the advancement of medical science, what seem to me to be four main contributing factors.

- 1 In modern societies social interactions are increasingly impersonal and unstable, due to the reduction of extended kinship groupings to the nuclear family, social and geographical mobility, population growth, globalization and so forth. Even the nuclear and other forms of family, though believed to be love-based, have become more and more unstable. In such a cultural atmosphere, to have animal companions, whose needs, desires and expectations are finite and unchanging too, is a blessing. To put it in a nutshell, this factor may be called defamiliarization in human-to-human relationships, or simply *human defamiliarization*.

- 2 In contrast with modern societies, in pre-modern times, when urbanization was non-existent or undeveloped, people lived with animals, having close daily contact with them. Familiarity may not breed contempt, but it does dull sensitivity about beauty. What made this worse was that animals were much needed in daily life and for the economy. An animal was remembered not so much for its aesthetic value as for its food value or its value in ploughing and as a means of transport. In modern societies, where animals are distant from us and we can be relatively disinterested in them, there is a better chance to appreciate their beauty and to like them. This factor may be called defamiliarization in human-to-animal relationships, or simply *animal defamiliarization*. Note that here we are concerned with an aspect of the notion of familiarity other than that in the first factor.
- 3 A tendency towards equality is one of the dominant characteristics of modernity. It has many manifestations, especially in ideas of equal rights for less privileged groups, such as lower classes, colonized and later developing countries, ethnic minorities, women, and the disabled. Interest in more and equal rights for animals is another manifestation of the same tendency in relation to another less privileged group. The pro-animal movement has the same characteristics as other equality-seeking movements, such as passionate participants, sympathizers, moderates and extremists. It also uses the same terminology, as in “animal rights” and “animal liberation”. This factor may be called the *levelling tendency*. Note that, paradoxically, another dominant characteristic of modernity is the tendency to compete and excel.
- 4 Some animals have always been conceived of more or less as children, but in modern times this is true of animals in general. With the advancement of technology we are so powerful that animals are not dangerous any more. In a technologically controlled environment they can be as helpless and dependent on us as children. Not being able to serve us as much as before, they are there to be served and cared for like children. Moreover, with the ever more destruction and domination of the environment by humankind, an environment which is also theirs and includes them and their ways of life, they appear to be vulnerable and handicapped creatures. As a result, we tend to feel very protective about them. This factor may be called the *infantilization of animals*. Note that, by contrast, in totemism, widespread in early and preliterate cultures, animals are conceived of as ancestors and protective of humans.

### **The early Hedayat and vegetarianism**

Given the socio-cultural background, Hedayat’s vegetarianism has its roots in his own character and childhood.<sup>11</sup> He was a quiet, shy and excitable child, not inclined to do harm to anyone. What aggression he had seems to have basically been self-directed. When he was upset or angry, he would sometimes, his father says, “forcefully bang his head against the wall”;<sup>12</sup> and sometimes, one of his sisters says, “scratch his face to such a degree that his cheek would bleed”.<sup>13</sup> Later in life he was never involved in any violence against others; and his attempted

suicide and suicide (1928, 1951) may be taken, among other things, as self-directed aggression. In his short story, "Buried Alive" (1930), the protagonist, whose suicidal tendency results in his death, says, "I have heard that if they put a circle of fire round a scorpion, it stings itself. Isn't there a ring of fire around me?"<sup>14</sup>

The well-to-do Hedayat household not only had dogs and cats, but also chickens, to whom Hedayat's mother would pay special attention.<sup>15</sup> As a child, Hedayat was fond of animals and protective of them. One of his elder brothers, Mahmud, observes:

Whenever he [Sadeq] sat in a corner, being withdrawn and sad, our guess was that someone had hurt a cat or a dog and thrown stones at them. His small heart was a load of compassion for all animals. . . . From childhood Sadeq had an extraordinary attachment to animals. He was not yet six or seven years old when we suddenly realized that all the animals in the house and even passing birds had found a small protector in him. Sometimes he would say that he liked a certain chicken and that he did not want anyone to kill it. Then no one would dare to do so. He abhorred slaughterhouses. No one would dare to cut a chicken's head off in front of him. This little child would even be terrified to look at a chicken's blood-stained cut head.<sup>16</sup>

There is further evidence to show that Hedayat's reaction to bloodshed was, or later became, stronger and more physical. In the month of Ramadan while with his nanny, he would tremble when watching ritual flagellation (which sometimes included self-inflicted bloodshed). In another, and probably later, incident he was physically unable to tolerate the sight of bloodshed at all. One day he and his brother Mahmud went to see a remarkable horse owned by one of their uncles. The horse had breathing difficulties. A veterinary surgeon made a cut in the horse's nose with a long and sharp instrument to release him from his suffering. Blood gushed and Hedayat collapsed. Later in life, as his friends reminisce, Hedayat would not tolerate the sight of animals being cruelly treated in the streets of Tehran. Despite being reserved by character, he would become visibly disturbed and would try to intervene. If unable to stop the suffering he would not stay and watch it passively.<sup>17</sup>

There are many children who are interested in animals or have self-directed aggression, but, as can be seen, Hedayat's tendencies were extreme and, consequently, left what seems to be their unmistakable evidence. In his adult life one of his preoccupations was death, as reflected in most of his writings. It is, however, surprising to find early evidence for this even when he was twelve years old or so; that is, when he is said to have reached the age of puberty. He was sent to school at the age of six, and after five or six years he produced a newspaper with the help of Khosraw Hedayat, a classmate and cousin. The small, handwritten newspaper was circulated among friends and relatives; its emblem was by Sadeq Hedayat, whose talent in painting had been noticed since early childhood. The name of the newspaper was *The Voice of the Dead* (*Nedaye amvat*), and its emblem, the angel of death wielding a scythe. We do not know about the contents of the newspaper and how they related to its name,

except that Hedayat wrote on health matters and provided the satires, while his cousin was in charge of current political affairs.

The attention which Hedayat paid to death and his concern for animals' slaughter may have been related. The two may have intensified, if not partly produced, one another. In Iran, at least in Hedayat's time, children would frequently see animals being killed inside or outside their homes on religious occasions or at other times; they would also see hung carcasses and part-carcasses in butchers' shops. For some years to come, Hedayat's attention to death was chiefly manifested through his concern about the death of animals. In 1924 he published his first short story entitled "The Thoughts of a Donkey at the Time of Death".<sup>18</sup> In the same year he published his first translation, an anecdotal story by Alphonse de Lamartine, concerned with the wounding and killing of a roebuck in a hunt.<sup>19</sup> The first book he wrote (he had already edited Omar Khayyam's quatrains with an introduction in 1923/1924) was entitled *Humans and Animals* (*Ensan va Hayvan*, 1924/1925), and the second, *The Advantages of Vegetarianism* (*Favayed-e Giyah-khari*, 1927).

Hedayat's above-mentioned characteristics did not cause him to adopt vegetarianism, but only to become prepared for it. He went as far as not eating any animal's meat if he had seen the animal being killed. He might not yet have known that it was possible to have a vegetarian way of life, and he was too young to show his independence in this matter. He wrote the above publications and adopted a meatless diet after growing up and going to a French school.

He had been in a Persian high school for three years when severe eye pain made him stay at home for six months. (Later he was exempted from military service because of eye problems.)<sup>20</sup> He did not return to that school. The year after, in 1919, at his own request he was sent to a French Roman Catholic missionary school in Tehran called St Louis. He became a vegetarian when he was still at St Louis, the exact date of his conversion not being known. The conversion occurred, coincidentally or not, after he had developed an interest in the occult sciences, including magic, *spiritisme* and occult "magnetism" (such as "animal magnetism"). This interest improved his French and taught him how to order books from France; it also resulted in his becoming an ascetic and eating no meat and little food of any kind. His adoption of a meatless diet continued, despite his loss of active interest in the occult sciences after a while. Since his enthusiasm for the occult had begun in his third year at St Louis, and since, as seen above, he had produced a few publications in support of animals and vegetarianism in 1924 to 1925, we may assume that he became a committed vegetarian in 1923 to 1924, at the age of twenty or twenty-one.

Concerning his attitude towards animals when he was at school, one of Hedayat's classmates at St Louis, in conversation with Homa Katouzian, reminisces:

I was yet to exchange a single word with Hedayat in our class when, one day, I brought a lizard to school for demonstration in the natural history class. On seeing this, Hedayat came straight at me, and began to shout,

curse and abuse me for “torturing the helpless creature”. I explained that this was all in the cause of knowledge and science. He replied: “The unjust always have good excuses for their misdeeds. What, after all, is the difference between you and me, and murderers like Genghis Khan?” “There is no comparison at all,” I replied. “Yes, there is,” he said, “because if they stop killing animals, they will never kill a human being.”<sup>21</sup>

Hedayat’s education at St Louis deserves more attention. This school was founded in 1862 by Lazarist missionaries, who had begun their educational work in Iran in the 1840s. It enrolled both Christian and Muslim pupils and was not concerned with religious matters. The curriculum included modern sciences, French literature, Persian, world history and geography, Persian history and geography, and so forth. At first the school had only primary education, but in 1913 it opened a two-year high school, which was later extended to four years.<sup>22</sup>

At St Louis, Nezam Vafa (1887–1965), an Iranian poet, taught Persian at the time. Some years earlier he had taught a pupil there later known as Nima Yushij (1897–1960), who was the major pioneer of modern Persian poetry. Hence this was the school where the two major pioneers of modern Persian literature were partly educated. Nezam Vafa wrote a narrative poem expressing abhorrence of cruelty to animals. The poem, in forty-nine couplets, is about a boy who breaks a nightingale’s wings, separating the bird from his beloved (red rose) and placing him in a cage. The forceful title of the poem was “The Effects of Criminal Hands”. In 1923 he founded and edited a small, literary magazine, in the first issue of which he published the poem.<sup>23</sup> It was the same magazine that published Hedayat’s first and pro-animal short story and translation the year after.

No more poems of this kind are found in Nezam Vafa’s collected works published after his death.<sup>24</sup> However, thanks to his influence or not, he had another pupil, Pezhman Bakhtyari, a classmate of Nima Yushij and later a famous traditional poet, who wrote some poems, including a narrative one, in support of animals and vegetarianism. Hedayat has cited part of one of the poems in his book on vegetarianism.<sup>25</sup> Nezam Vafa was of further significance in relation to Hedayat. He, too, had a sympathetic interest in Omar Khayyam, as shown in his article entitled “Khayyam’s Flower”.<sup>26</sup> He had two other relevant characteristics: first, as seen in the contents of his magazine and his editorials, he was interested in modern and foreign literature and wished to contribute to the resuscitation of Persian literature. Second, he had extraordinary rapport with his pupils and an exceptional ability to appreciate and encourage innovative talents. His magazine did not run for longer than two years because of financial difficulties. Had it lasted longer, Hedayat might have been encouraged by Nezam Vafa to submit more short stories to the magazine and not wait until January 1930, that is, five years later, to write “Madeline”, his second short story.<sup>27</sup>

Being a poet and non-Tehrani, Nezam Vafa was closer to Nima Yushij, who dedicated his long poem *Fable (Afsaneh)*, 1922/23, the first landmark of modern Persian poetry, to Nezam Vafa, and who acknowledged that it was Nezam

Vafa's care and encouragement at St Louis that led him to poetry. Nezam Vafa's magazine included two contributions from Nima Yushij.<sup>28</sup> In a limited sense, Nezam Vafa reminds one of Ezra Pound, who wished to "resuscitate" English literature and who encouraged innovative poets and writers and helped them to publish their works. But unlike Ezra Pound, firstly, Nezam Vafa himself was not very innovative. Secondly, his resuscitating contribution to the modern literature of his mother language is still partly unknown.

Another neglected inspirational figure in Hedayat's education at St Louis was Father Herman Rigter (1882–1955), a Dutchman born in Amsterdam,<sup>29</sup> who had studied archaeology, and knew some Persian. He was widely read and deeply interested in literature and music, and Hedayat got on well with him. More than twenty years later, Hedayat told a friend:

At St Louis school there was a priest to whom I gave Persian lessons in exchange for French lessons. He was an extraordinary person. Though he was a priest, in literature he had a taste of his own. . . . It was in fact he who encouraged me to write. It was he who handed to me the books written by Merimee, Theophile Gautier, Maupassant, Gobineau, Baudelaire, Edgar Allan Poe, Hoffmann, and so on and so forth. Fortunately, he had no literary prejudices. Literature, whether Russian, German, Spanish or from elsewhere, did interest him. Surprisingly, he even knew the works of the writers who became famous later.<sup>30</sup>

It is noteworthy that Hedayat wrote a short story, "Revelation", published in 1942, in which the protagonist is a Christian violinist with an experience of romantic and unrequited love earlier in his life.<sup>31</sup> Father Rigter may have been an inspiration for this story. He is said to have told Hedayat one day that he had had such an experience, after which he decided to dedicate his life to the service of the Church. Moreover, he was an able violinist and sometimes Hedayat would stay on with him after a lesson to listen to him playing classical music. Hedayat also painted a male violinist in watercolours later.<sup>32</sup> It may be significant that Hedayat's first title for the story (before its publication) was initially in French and had, like the above title, religious connotations: "Illumination".<sup>33</sup>

Father Rigter may have helped Hedayat in finding Western sources on vegetarianism. Hedayat was still at St Louis when Father Rigter left Tehran, after giving a number of books to Hedayat, including *The Effects of Plants*, *[Occult] Magnetism* and *Schopenhauer's Thoughts*.<sup>34</sup> These were of course the types of books in which Hedayat would be interested. He had probably already become somewhat familiar with the German philosopher in the course of his own studies of Omar Khayyam and the history of vegetarianism. In any event, Schopenhauer was a philosopher of whose writings he acquired some detailed knowledge, and, as we will try to show in another publication, who seems to have had some lasting influence on him. He refers to Schopenhauer in all of his early publications mentioned above (excluding his first translation). Apart from pessimism, Schopenhauer is well known for his aesthetics and ethics, and the closeness of

his philosophy to Buddhism. In his view, compassion is the basis of morality and should be extended to animals. Hedayat may have been drawn to Buddhism partly through Schopenhauer.

Apart from Western thinkers, Buddhism was one influence in Hedayat's conversion to vegetarianism. When he was in Paris as a student, he bought a small statue of the Buddha, which he kept in his room in Tehran for the rest of his life. Another influence was Zoroastrianism. In his above-mentioned books, references are made to these religions (as well as to Hinduism, Manichaeism and so forth), and we are told that "it is recorded by Parsees that Zoroaster lived on milk and vegetables".<sup>35</sup> There are also references to Islam, the Qur'an, and the Persian mystics and writers on ethics supporting compassion for animals.

In his early works Hedayat is a religious believer. For example, in *Humans and Animals* he writes: "Every mother and teacher ought to educate children to understand that animals have not been created to be harmed or killed and that in the Creator's eyes all living beings are equal and none is inferior or superior to others."<sup>36</sup> Nationalist/patriotic ideas are not absent from those works either, such as the assumption that ancient Iran was "the cradle of animals' tranquillity".<sup>37</sup> His conviction that his attitude towards animals and food was basically in accord with the cultural spirit of ancient Iran may well have been a factor contributing to his adoption of vegetarianism.

Hedayat's first two books, or rather booklets, have some shortcomings. Sometimes they are factually inaccurate, or the presentation is poor or the prose is even poorer. But they show conviction, wide-ranging interests and a refreshingly cross-cultural perspective. He attempts to demonstrate, in the light of archaeology, physical anthropology and medicine, that vegetarian food is healthier than meat-based food. He also argues, as would other vegetarians at that time, that humans, and other primates such as monkeys and apes, are naturally vegetarian; that is, they are anatomically and physiologically designed to eat only plant food. But since the Second World War, ethological and later anthropological research seems to have established that humans, monkeys and apes are naturally omnivores, not herbivores; that is, they are designed to eat both animal and plant food.<sup>38</sup>

Hedayat's primary motive is compassion for animals. He believes that harming and killing animals are morally indefensible acts. Sometimes for him what matters most and should be enough to prevent these acts is that animals can feel pain,<sup>39</sup> a view which reminds us of Jeremy Bentham and, more recently, Peter Singer.<sup>40</sup> Sometimes he lays emphasis on justice and the rights of animals,<sup>41</sup> reminding us of Henry Stephens Salt<sup>42</sup> and, more recently, the entire animal rights movement.<sup>43</sup>

The early biography of Hedayat will be incomplete without reference to what may be called his *relational position in the family*, a position which has bearings not only on his vegetarianism, but also on other aspects of his life.

Hedayat was the youngest of three sons, and the second youngest of six children. As a child, what probably made him feel lonely and more of a small child is that, on the one hand, there were wide age gaps between him and his brothers and, on the other, his sisters may frequently have been a group by themselves.

Isa, his eldest brother, was eight years,<sup>44</sup> and Mahmud six years,<sup>45</sup> older than him. Isa and Mahmud were therefore closer by age to one another, as their age difference was less than the age gaps separating them from Hedayat. Isa himself observes that “because of age difference between Sadeq and his brothers, his childhood was spent in loneliness and silence”.<sup>46</sup> Sometimes Isa was almost like a father to Hedayat. He was Hedayat’s teacher of history at school, and when their father stayed in Shiraz for some time because of an official assignment, he took care of Hedayat and their family. What made Hedayat feel still more of a small child and in need of a playmate of his own size was that he was also frequently accompanied by such adults as his nanny, maids and servants.

All of this must have contributed to Hedayat feeling close to, and enjoying the company of small animals at home, namely chickens, cats and dogs. The relational position of a child, if not outweighed by other factors, also influences its relationship with other members of its family in later life; in the sense that, for instance, the youngest child may continue to feel and to be treated somewhat as a child. This may well have contributed to Hedayat’s well-known tendency to remain like a child throughout his life. (Another contributory factor in this regard was the fact that he never married.)

Hedayat’s position as the youngest son and almost youngest child had further consequences. His parents were more tolerant, if not sometimes indulgent, towards him. He was indeed his mother’s favourite child. This tolerance was of some help to him in becoming a vegetarian at an early age and while being still dependent on his parents for food and other things, despite the fact that meat avoidance was highly unorthodox and, in his family’s opinion, harmful to his health. The same tolerance helped him to some extent to grow actively interested in the occult sciences and asceticism; to leave his academic studies unfinished; to become a writer, publishing books in a few hundred copies, with negligible sales; and to stay on in his parents’ house for all of his life. Had he been the eldest son he would have been under more external pressure, and indeed internal pressure from his own mind too, to follow conventions, to have a more orthodox outlook on life and avoid remaining in his parents’ house for good, and to train for a more appropriate occupation, as did his two brothers Isa (a high-ranking military officer) and Mahmud (a judge).

To make some final remarks regarding Hedayat’s early biography, we would like to comment on a significant passage, quoted below, from Michael Beard.

It is sometimes said of non-Western students abroad that they become aware of the greatness of their native cultures only after leaving them. Gandhi, for example, became a strict vegetarian and discovered the Bhagavad Gita only after his arrival in London. But as much as we would like to be able to trace visible development in his ideas, Hedayat seems to have formed the opinions he is famous for early in his life. Not only his fascination with ancient Iran, but his vegetarianism, his opposition to Islam, his fascination with death, can all be dated from before his departure for Europe. If Hedayat’s ideas were unorthodox, they were indigenous, and his experiences abroad seem not to have changed them.<sup>47</sup>

It is true that Hedayat did not develop new ideas abroad, but there were notable changes in his earlier ideas or his attitude towards them. Thus, although his fascination with ancient Iran began in his early works, it was in Europe (Belgium and France), where he went for further education (1926–1930), that this fascination changed into an extreme nationalism, resulting in a different attitude towards the Islamic conquest of Iran and Islam. It is noteworthy that, as we have seen, in his early works he was still a religious believer and his attitude to religion was different from what is expressed, for example, in his play *Parvin, the Sasanian Girl*, written in Paris in 1928.

Nationalist tendencies had, of course, begun to grow in Iran before Hedayat's departure for Europe, tendencies which were sometimes found in Iranians who had been abroad or were living abroad, such as Hosein Kazemzadeh *Iranshahr*, living in Berlin and publishing the Persian journal *Iranshahr* (1922–1927). Hedayat must have been familiar with this journal, which showed much interest in Iran and its ancient past, without being anti-Islamic, valuing the study of folklore in Iran,<sup>48</sup> and including several articles on the occult sciences and related issues.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, *Iranshahr* had a sympathetic approach to vegetarianism,<sup>50</sup> it reviewed Hedayat's first book, *Humans and Animals*, favourably, and published his essay on death.<sup>51</sup> In 1926 on his way to Europe Hedayat visited Berlin<sup>52</sup> and may have been encouraged by Kazemzadeh to finish his second book, *The Advantages of Vegetarianism*. This book appeared, with an introduction by Kazemzadeh, as an *Iranshahr* publication the year after.<sup>53</sup> Although finished in Brussels and Paris, his second book, based partly on his notes made in Tehran, expresses his pre-departure attitude to Islam, unchanged in the first year of his stay abroad.

Similarly, although Hedayat's fascination with death began so early in his life, it was in Europe that, coincidentally or not, it took an extreme form, resulting in his suicide attempt in France (1928), where he ended his life on his return later (1951). The case of his vegetarianism was no different, although he was indeed a fully fledged vegetarian before his departure. There were notable changes here too. Suffice it to say that in his writings after 1928, unlike his earlier works, the theme of vegetarianism is often overshadowed by themes of loving relationships, death and nationalism.

As Hedayat was a fully fledged vegetarian before leaving Iran for Europe, could it be argued that his vegetarianism was "indigenous"? Since a vegetarian tendency is a constituent part of modernity, and since modernity had already begun in Iran, vegetarianism could develop there indigenously. In this chapter I have mentioned no less than eight Iranians other than Hedayat who also showed interest in vegetarian diets or the welfare of animals before and after him. However, the modernity in Iran being itself new, and the traditional culture, unlike that of India, being unreceptive to the idea of vegetarianism, there was not much chance at that time to take the idea seriously and put it into practice. Hedayat became a practising vegetarian and a strong advocate of vegetarianism, first, because of certain factors in his personal life and character, mentioned above and further discussed below; and second, because of the presence and influence of a non-indigenous, namely French, culture in Iran and in his life

there. Having partly a French education, he was, as Michael Beard puts it, “virtually bicultural”.<sup>54</sup>

It is unlikely that St Louis, being a Catholic school, encouraged Hedayat to become a vegetarian. But he learnt French there, a European language through which he came to know that vegetarianism has a long history in the East and the West, that it is believed by many to be scientifically and morally justifiable, and that a significant number of educated and respectable people throughout the world practise it. This strengthened his propensity to vegetarianism. Moreover, his important experience of a personal and educationally fruitful relationship with French-speaking people happened *not* in Europe, but in Iran with Father Righer. As far as we know, in Europe, apart from his seemingly limited experience with one or two girlfriends, he lived as a lonely foreigner and a student who left his studies unfinished and did not make friends with his teachers or non-Iranian fellow students. Unlike Gandhi in London, he does not seem to have joined any vegetarian society or established a personal relationship with fellow vegetarians in Paris and wherever else he lived, although he would sometimes eat in vegetarian restaurants.<sup>55</sup> What he did a great deal of in Europe was reading and writing.<sup>56</sup>

### **Altruism, physical imperfection and Hedayat’s fiction**

We have seen that Hedayat was protective of animals, that his aggression was self-directed, and that for him bloodshed was, even physically, intolerable. But his protectiveness of animals seems to be a striking aspect of a far-reaching altruism in him, an altruism which applied to humans as well as animals, and which, having begun as something spontaneous when he was a child, was non-ideological and humanitarian, and remained so throughout his life. Since Hedayat’s behaviour towards animals was very unusual, those close to him had many reminiscences of it later. This is not so with regard to his behaviour towards human beings. There is, however, one incident, recalled by one of his sisters, which seems to leave no doubt that for him violence against human beings, too, was intolerable. In their family home Isa, his eldest brother and an army officer, slapped his batman in the face. (No further details are available.) Although this does not seem to be a great degree of violence by the standards of the time, it had such an effect on Hedayat that he left the house and returned, after being asked to, a few days later. It is significant that he reacted similarly on a few other occasions in which, following a religious tradition, his family had a sheep slaughtered inside their house as a sacrifice, after which the meat was distributed among the poor.<sup>57</sup>

That Hedayat had sympathy for suffering is acceptable to many of his readers and critics, although, as will be seen, some strongly disagree. Here we wish to try to find the nature and features of his altruism, and we do so by analysing the characteristics of suffering in animals, and their possible counterparts in humans, as portrayed in his short stories and novels. This will also give some insight into the influence of vegetarianism on his works. The deepest and most

interesting influence is on his masterpiece, *The Blind Owl* (1938), which requires an article of its own. The analysis of his fiction is kept short.

### ***Being a victim of violence or showing physical imperfection***

Being a victim of violence is the most striking characteristic of animal characters in Hedayat's works. In his first, relatively unknown short story, "The Thoughts of a Donkey at the Time of Death", the victim of violence, a donkey, is the narrator. In his daily work he is beaten, insulted, and forced to carry unbearable loads. Moreover, as a result of the "carelessness" of his owner, his legs are crushed in a car accident and blood is pouring from his wounds. In Hedayat's first translation, "The Last Bullet of My Gun", a roebuck is wounded by the hunter's first bullet and later killed by the second. In another translation, "The Abyssinian Marsh", a pregnant antelope or gazelle is brutally crushed and swallowed by a large snake, though somehow the fawn gets out and survives.<sup>58</sup> In "The Stray Dog", after losing his master in a town near Tehran, a Scottish dog "earned nothing but kicks, stones, and beatings" from the local people for more than a year.<sup>59</sup> In *The Blind Owl*, there is a butcher's shop to which two sheep carcasses are carried every day by a pair of "gaunt, consumptive-looking" horses. The carcasses are hung from the hooks in front of the shop, with "their gashed throats and their staring, blood-laden eyes bulging from the bluish skulls".<sup>60</sup>

There are also incidental references to animals in Hedayat's stories. For instance, In *Hajji Aqa*, children are chasing a mouse which they have set aflame. *Hajji Aqa* is angry only because paraffin is being wasted and that if the mouse had gone into the basement it would have set the house on fire.<sup>61</sup> Also in *Hajji Aqa* a moving incident is described about a carelessly wounded kitten left alone to die:

I remember, when I was a child, in front of our house a cart ran over a kitten, breaking her backbone. She was bleeding and whining and with her claws pulling herself in the muddy lane. She was badly in pain, but it was not clear whom she was begging for help. It seemed that she wanted to flee from herself, from her body, which was glued to her, and change her fate. But she wanted to survive too. She didn't know what life is, but her body wouldn't let her go; her pain chasing her and she, not wanting to die.<sup>62</sup>

Cases of violence between human beings, which are better known, are chiefly associated with a loving relationship, as in *The Blind Owl*, "Dash Akol" (protagonist's name), and "Masks" (*Suratak-ha*). This complex issue will be dealt with in another publication examining the ascetic and sexual aspects of Hedayat's vegetarianism.<sup>63</sup> There are also cases associated with war, as in *Parvin, The Sasanian Girl* (*Parvin, Dokhtar-e Sasan*), *Mazyar* (protagonist's name) and "The Mongol's Shadow" (*Sayeh-ye Moghol*). However, Hedayat does not always sympathize with victims of violence between human beings, as is explained later.

A significant number of Hedayat's human fictional characters show physical imperfection, and this is, as clarified below, a pertinent issue. In "Davud the Hunchback", the protagonist, being a hunchback, is without companions and is rejected by women.<sup>64</sup> In "Abji Khanom", in contrast to her younger sister, Abji Khanom, is plain and unsociable, and remains unmarried. Sometimes within her hearing her mother would say to others: "Woe is my lot! What should I do? Who will marry such an ugly girl? I am afraid she will remain a burden to me forever."<sup>65</sup> In "Dash Akol", the protagonist is a man who falls in love with a much younger woman. In a sense, his age difference is a physical defect, though not an intrinsic but a *relational* one. Furthermore, although he had been handsome, he had now an "ugly face", because, being involved in many fights, "scars had spoiled his features."<sup>66</sup> In "Dead End", we come to know that Sharif, the main character, "feared his ugliness more than anything else. Unconsciously, he hated himself because of it. He was afraid to show affection to anyone lest he be made to feel ridiculous."<sup>67</sup> In *The Blind Owl*, the protagonist's wife is attracted to men other than him. With reference to her and himself he says, "I am certain that there was something lacking in the make-up of one of us."<sup>68</sup> Later, one night in the bath, he says, "I looked down at my body. There was something lascivious and yet hopeless in the look of my thighs, calves and loins."<sup>69</sup> In "Buried Alive", the narrator, who finally commits suicide, feels he is psychologically and totally imperfect. He repeatedly makes statements such as "I was born selfish, conceited, awkward and helpless", "Then I say to myself ... No, just kill yourself... You weren't made for life; give up philosophizing; your existence is not worth a thing. There's no job you're suited for."<sup>70</sup>

Note that here being "ugly" is regarded as a *relational* physical imperfection, because the person is so described, or imagined to be so described, by almost everyone in his environment. The term "physical imperfection" has a wider sense here than "disability".

A person showing physical imperfection may be considered to be, sometimes consciously by himself, a victim of violence by nature, fate and so forth. In "Dead End", after the protagonist saw his own plain face in the mirror, "a dumb anger against the injustice of the Creator, the world, and all men flared within him". Then his mind turned to his parents: "He felt a vague sense of hatred toward his father and mother for having cast him forth into life with such a face and figure. What difference would it have made had he never been born."<sup>71</sup> In "Davud the Hunchback", we are told that Davud "knew that all his defects came from his father: his sallow face, bony cheeks, the lower part of his eyes sunken and dark, his half-opened mouth. ... His father had been old and syphilitic when he married a young woman; all their children had been born blind or crippled."<sup>72</sup> In "Buried Alive", the narrator explains his supposed psychological and total imperfection in terms of "fate" and the belief that "a blind and terrible power controls us all". He also says: "Now I believe that with some people there is some despicable wild power, some angel of misfortune."<sup>73</sup>

### ***Not receiving love or attention***

This characteristic, which is better known, is found in human as well as animal characters.

We have just seen that a number of such characters, showing physical imperfection, fail to receive love and attention. This failure is seen particularly in *The Blind Owl*, where, for instance, the protagonist says about his own wife: "I shall probably not be believed – and indeed the thing passes belief – when I say that she did not once allow me to kiss her on the lips"; and later: "I longed to spend one night with her and to die together with her, locked in her arms. I felt that this would be the sublime culmination of my existence."<sup>74</sup> With regard to animals, in Hedayat's first short story, after the wounded body of the donkey is dragged to the roadside, he is left there to die in pain, hunger and loneliness. In "The Stray Dog", the dog feels deeply neglected, especially because he used to be so much loved and looked after by his master and his family. Since he had lost his master, "he had not come across a single person who would stroke his head or look into his eyes".<sup>75</sup> He remembered many good things from the past, particularly "when his master used to stroke him and the lumps of sugar he had eaten from his hands. He would never forget these things. But he loved his master's son more, for he was a playmate and never hit him".<sup>76</sup>

### ***Being taken advantage of***

This human characteristic is also found in animal characters. I do not know any Iranian who has read "The Stray Dog" and does not vividly remember the following paragraph:

[Pat, the stray dog] went in front of the baker's, which had just opened. The smell of freshly baked dough wafted on the air. A man with an armful of bread called to him, "Here ... here!" How strange this new voice seemed to his ears! The man threw a piece of warm bread in front of him. After a brief hesitation Pat ate it and wagged his tail for him. The man put his bread down on the step in front of the shop and started very cautiously to stroke Pat's head. Then with both hands he undid his collar. What a restful feeling, as though all responsibility and obligation were being lifted from him. But as soon as he set his tail wagging again and went up to the shopkeeper, he got a firm kick in the ribs and ran away howling. The shopkeeper went and washed his hands carefully in the *jub* [water channel]. Pat saw his collar, now hanging in front of the shop.<sup>77</sup>

But this is not the only case of its kind. In Hedayat's first short story, after the donkey is injured and is no longer useful, he receives no further food and attention. Hedayat lets the donkey say the same thing, but sarcastically and with reference to the fact that people are only interested in the donkey for their own benefit: "After beating me and using foul language, they dragged me to the

roadside and left me there alone. Perhaps they have forgotten that they could still use my horseshoes and hide! ... Will they bring me food in time? No ... I am no longer of any use to them.”<sup>78</sup> In “Davud the Hunchback”, it is said that sometimes at school Davud “worked exceptionally hard at his studies... For this reason, one or two of his lazier classmates tried to strike up a friendship with him so they could copy his answers to sums and exercises. But, of course, he knew that their friendship was put on for the sake of what they could get out of it.”<sup>79</sup> In “The Don Juan of Karaj”, being non-assertive and dishevelled, Hasan is taken advantage of by Don Juan who flirts openly with Hasan’s girlfriend and, without ever asking him to see if he does not mind, continues to dance with her.

In “Dash Akol”, which is set in Shiraz, the protagonist, Dash Akol, is surprised to be informed one day that a recently deceased wealthy Hajji, in his will, has made him the guardian of his family and his executor. Initially, Dash Akol is not pleased to think of the enormity of the task. Then, being a chivalrous character, for which he is widely known in Shiraz, he accepts it and spends the next seven years of his life chiefly in managing Hajji’s business and looking after his estate and family, with all the expenses being paid out of his own pocket. Hajji, who, five years before his death, had met Dash Akol only in a short trip to a nearby town, certainly knew how to rely on the latter’s generosity of spirit for his own advantage.

### ***Being, or fearing to be, ridiculed***

This is another striking human characteristic also found in animals. Anyone who has read *The Blind Owl* would know of the haunting recurrence of this theme and would recall a number of similar-looking old men who, at critical points in the life of the protagonist, burst into such a hollow and grating laughter that it makes “one’s hairs stand on end”. In “Davud the Hunchback”, Davud is exposed to ridicule to an extreme degree. He proposed to two women through an intermediary, both of whom not only said no, but also ridiculed him. Whenever people laughed, he feared that they might be laughing at him. In “Dead End”, we have already seen that, being plain, the protagonist would not express affection to others for fear that he would lay himself open to ridicule. But on his wedding night he had further problems because, as soon as he and his wife were alone together, she “began to giggle – a grating, mocking laugh which shattered” his nerves.<sup>80</sup> In both “Buried Alive” and *The Blind Owl*, the narrator says that there are feelings one cannot talk about, people are likely to make fun of one. In “The Don Juan of Karaj”, Because of his physical appearance, the way he dressed, and the way he behaved, Hasan was an object of amusement and aggression by others at school. In “Revelation”, at night when the main character, a lonely violinist, approached a streetwalker with heavy make-up, she “turned and shouted ‘Get lost! You should be ashamed of yourself. You are not a man. That time I came with you was more than enough ...’ Then she ... bel-lowed in hoarse derisive laughter”<sup>81</sup>

Hedayat’s first short story, being concerned with a donkey, is of course about

an object of ridicule *par excellence*, although the idea of ridicule is not explicitly mentioned in the story. In his narration the donkey takes it for granted that when he refers to people's insults and foul language (*doshnam*, *shatm*), ridicule is included. In the Persian language not only the equivalent of "ass" (*khar*), but also, though to a lesser degree, that of "donkey" (*olagh*) can be a vulgar and abusive term, despite the fact that neither of these Persian words denotes or connotes "buttocks". The very title of Hedayat's first story can cause schoolchildren to burst into spontaneous laughter. The stray dog is laughed at too:

For every howl he raised, a well-aimed stone hit him in the small of the back, and a burst of laughter broke through the noise of his howling. The man who had thrown the stone swore, and the others joined him in the laughter as though they were in league with him and slyly encouraging him.<sup>82</sup>

In *Hajji Aqa*, the children who chase and set aflame a mouse do so for fun.

### ***Not being violent towards others***

This is a striking characteristic of animals and most of the human protagonists, whose aggression, if they have any, is self-directed. It is widely known that in Hedayat's fiction many of the human protagonists commit suicide, as in "Abji Khanom", "Whirlpool", and "Buried Alive". In "Whirlpool", before committing suicide, the man who falls in love with his friend's wife, leaves a letter to his friend in which he says: "... I confess I loved your wife Badri. For four years I struggled with myself. In the end I won and the demon which had awoken inside me I killed to stop betraying you."<sup>83</sup> Human characters show their lack of aggression towards others in other ways too. In "Dead End", on his wedding night the protagonist does not become aggressive towards his giggling bride. He sleeps apart and later ends the marriage. In "Abji Khanom", when her younger and pretty sister is about to marry, in an argument with their mother Abji Khanom says: "Don't make me say that Mahrokh [younger sister] has been pregnant for the past two months ...", but practically she avoids spreading this or any other rumours about her sister.<sup>84</sup> In "The Don Juan of Karaj", after being humiliated by his girlfriend and Don Juan, Hasan bursts into tears and goes away alone rather than firmly confronting the other two.<sup>85</sup>

The injured donkey welcomes his own death: "After having lived a life full of hardship, suffering and trouble ... thank God that I am bidding farewell to this dreadful life."<sup>86</sup> The stray dog, whose only reaction to physical abuse and hunger is occasional howling, finally collapses, after chasing a car in search of a new master, under the watchful eyes of three crows, who are waiting to take out his "two big brown eyes" after his death.

It is noteworthy that as far as other-directed violence is concerned, in Sadeq Chubak (1916–1998), who began his writing career in the 1940s and was a vegetarian for some years, animals and their situations are sometimes strikingly different. In "The Baboon Whose Buffoon was Dead", a shepherd boy hits a

baboon with his stick. The baboon reacts violently and the boy falls down in horror and with a bleeding face.<sup>87</sup> In "Mouse", the adults of a village do to a mouse what the children did, as mentioned above, in a Tehran street in Hedayat's novel *Hajji Aqa*; that is, they set the mouse aflame with paraffin. But here the mouse happens to run towards the petrol tank and store, both of which blow up, harming the people and destroying the village.<sup>88</sup>

So much for the comparable human and animal characteristics in Hedayat's fiction. Thus, his altruism is concerned with suffering animals and humans who have specific characteristics. Some of these characteristics in relation to some of his stories were already known, but the above analysis reveals extensive patterns which are sometimes new and which, unexpectedly, apply to animals as well as to humans. The question is now why Hedayat does not sympathize unconditionally with human victims of violence caused by fellow humans. First, human-to-human relationships are far more complex than the relationships between humans and animals. Animals are usually, at least nowadays or in a vegetarian's view, innocent victims of violence, whereas humans may well be murderers, warmongers and so forth; that is, perpetrators of violence, in which case violence towards them may be justifiable as self-defence or as part of a just war. Second, Hedayat does not say, or try to show, anywhere in his fiction or elsewhere that killing is wrong irrespective of whether the victim is animal or human, a view held by Buddhists and by Tolstoy, a pacifist vegetarian. Nor does he ever raise the issue of capital punishment and express his disapproval of it, as do some vegetarians, such as Henry Stephens Salt.

However, Hedayat regards war as something undesirable and, like many other vegetarians, he makes it clear that one of the advantages of vegetarianism is that it greatly contributes to the eradication of crime and war, an idea also expressed by him in the above-mentioned reminiscence of one of his classmates in St Louis school. In his first short story there is a quotation from Michel de Montaigne: "Mothers think their boys are playing when they see them wring the neck of a chicken or find sport in wounding a dog or a cat. . . . Yet those are the true seeds by which cruelty, tyranny and treachery take root."<sup>89</sup> In "S.G.L.L." [The serum of sterility], a science fiction story set two thousand years in the future, humankind has conquered nature and obtained what it has long wished for, such as the elimination of old age, disease, war and homicide (though life is still meaningless).<sup>90</sup>

It should also be noted that Hedayat's sympathy for the suffering is not extended to those who are not in such conditions or who may contribute to the suffering of others. Furthermore, although his fictional characters do not usually become violent towards others, they frequently resort to self-inflicted violence to escape from, or protest against, their suffering conditions.

Hedayat's character undoubtedly has a protesting and aggressive aspect. This can be seen not only in his suicide and his suicide attempt, but also in his satire, a prominent characteristic of his writing and his daily interaction with others. And his satire is known to be sometimes vehement and, towards the end of his life, scurrilous. It is significant that he does not employ his satirical skills against

the suffering. Indeed this could not have been otherwise because, as we have seen, one of the reasons why he sympathizes with such people is that they are, or fear to be, victims of others' ridicule. It could therefore be said that what chiefly motivates him to write is either sympathizing with those who suffer or satirizing those who do not. Those being satirized do not come exclusively from certain strata of society, as seen in the main characters in *Madame Alaviyeh* [Alaviyeh khanom], "The Patriot" [Mihanparast] and *Hajji Aqa*. The same is also true of the suffering. Among the above-mentioned short stories regarding physical imperfection, the protagonists of "Davud the Hunchback" and "Abji Khanom" are born into poor families, while those of "Dash Akol" and "Dead End" are the sons of rich landlords.

Let us turn to another aspect of Hedayat's altruism. It may be argued that Hedayat's sympathy for the suffering animals and human characters is not altruism; he is simply talking of himself in different disguises. For example, Carter Bryant observes: "Hedayat imposed his tortured aristocratic selfhood upon all the characters he treated."<sup>91</sup> It is indeed true that his above-mentioned stories do tell us something about him, because certain types of characters and situations recur in them. There must be a reason for this recurrence. Freud points out rightly that Dostoevsky's own personality has something to do with crime, because of "his choice of material, which singles out from all others violent, murderous and egoistic characters."<sup>92</sup>

But exactly what the stories tell us about Hedayat is not always a simple matter. Sometimes it is simple; for example, that his fictional characters are not physically violent towards others clearly corresponds to a characteristic of his own. Sometimes it is a matter of opinion requiring reasoned discussion. That his fictional characters show physical imperfections does not, at least seemingly, apply to him, but one may argue that given that he sympathizes with the suffering, that he himself was unusual since childhood, and that he gives the impression that he has a deeply felt negative view of himself, it is not surprising that he expresses sympathy for those with physical imperfections too, irrespective of whether he had, or imagined to have, any physical imperfection. Sometimes his fictional characters have a characteristic which is the exact opposite of his. They are ridiculed by others, whereas in his satire he ridicules others. It may arguably be said that, apart from the fact that he does not ridicule the suffering, unconsciously he sees himself as, or fears to be, a victim of others' ridicule, and that his satire is his reaction to it. In "Buried Alive", which is known to be somewhat autobiographical, the protagonist says that people "laugh at me, they don't know that I laugh at them even more".<sup>93</sup>

The fact that Hedayat's above fictional characters tell us something about him does not, however, damage the case for his altruism. First, this fact is more or less true of many writers, but it is noticeable in Hedayat because his psychological tendencies are often extreme or obsessive. Second, a person may have an unselfish regard for those of whose sufferings he has some experience. A man who has been a cancer patient can make a heartfelt altruistic contribution to cancer charities. As human beings can act out of malice towards others, so can they out of compassion.

Heartfelt altruism is based on sympathy/empathy or a sense of identification. A person identifies with someone else when they have something in common. The thing in common may in fact be two similar things, just an experience, or something the person imagines he has or wishes he had. There is a kind of identification which may be called *complementary identification*, such as an adult identifying with a suffering child, or a man with a woman who is suffering as a woman. Hedayat identifies with the plain elder sister in “Abji Khanom”, with the kitten run over by a cart in *Hajji Aqa*, and with the stray dog, who is portrayed as a lost and hungry child. Finally, I wish to stress that it is difficult to speak of altruism in modernity, where individualism is supreme and people tend to conceive of themselves as imaginary and autonomous Leibnizian monads. The truth is, however, that, whether in modernity or before modernity, one of the characteristics of human beings is that they live not only with each other, but also in each other. In other words, the human mind is as much between individuals as in them.

### **Freud, oral aggression and Leonardo da Vinci**

We have discussed Hedayat’s vegetarianism in terms of altruism. The discussion would be incomplete without reference to the celebrated psychoanalytical theory by Freud, and developed by K.R. Eissler, in which vegetarianism is understood to be entirely different; that is, non-altruistic and based on aggression.<sup>94</sup> What makes the theory more pertinent is that it deals with Leonardo da Vinci, whose character has, as is seen below, many striking similarities with that of Hedayat and who, like Hedayat, was brought up in a society at an early stage of modernity. Freud and Eissler explain Leonardo’s vegetarianism in terms of the psychological mechanism of “reaction-formation”. Leonardo is argued to have oral-sadistic (aggressive) feelings which are repressed and which, by way of reaction, reappear in their opposite and acceptable form; that is, compassion for animals and vegetarianism.

This theory is not persuasive in relation to Hedayat. As we have seen, his pro-animal and vegetarian stance seems to be part of his wider altruism and makes better sense in that context. The idea of oral aggression has no bearing on his compassion for human beings, and relates only to animals, who may be consumed orally. It is true that Hedayat’s character had an aggressive side, but the main and physical form of his aggression was self-directed (suicide), and its non-physical and other-directed form (satire) was not aimed at those for whom he had compassion. Moreover, a suicidal tendency is not, of course, part of vegetarianism and Leonardo did not have it either. The idea of oral aggression has another limitation. It may make sense of vegetarianism or meat avoidance, but not of compassion for animals. There are many people, such as the majority of Buddhists, who eat meat but avoid harming and killing animals.

As the history of vegetarianism shows, from the Buddha to Mahatma Gandhi and from Pythagoras to Albert Schweitzer, vegetarians have usually had by character less than average aggression. It should also be noted that women, who

are generally less aggressive than men and less likely to have oral aggression, find vegetarianism easier to accept than do men. It is noteworthy that while considering Leonardo's pro-animal and anti-war tendencies, Freud speaks of "this feminine delicacy of feeling".<sup>95</sup> It is ironical that those who appear to have oral aggression are meat eaters, not vegetarians, but it is meat-eaters who accuse vegetarians of such aggression. It will equally be wrong to accuse a person of oral aggression simply because he eats meat, if he has been brought up in a culture in which eating meat is regarded as normal behaviour.

Freud, who has some great insights into human nature, does not sufficiently take into account socio-cultural factors. As we have seen, Leonardo is assumed to have repressed oral-sadistic feelings which are allowed to reappear only after they take an acceptable form; that is, compassion for animals and vegetarianism. But in Italy at the time of Leonardo, as in many other societies in the past, vegetarianism was not acceptable. It is significant that Vasari, Leonardo's biographer, who provides a positive and ideal image of the master, did not refer to Leonardo as a vegetarian in his biography of him in 1550.<sup>96</sup> Vasari, himself a painter, was eight years old when Leonardo died; he was in close contact with Leonardo's contemporaries, acquaintances and students; and his biography came out only thirty-one years after the master's death. In 1568, in the second edition of his work, Vasari made some alterations, but still remained silent about Leonardo's vegetarianism. In the medieval history of Europe vegetarianism was associated with paganism, Manichaeism and heresy. In the early stage of modernity it attracted a few who had a nonconformist tendency, or tended to rely on their own reason rather than authority, and who were not sufficiently motivated to seek general approval. Leonardo writes: "Whoever in discussion adduces authority uses not intellect but rather memory."<sup>97</sup>

Hedayat is known to have had a nonconformist tendency. Moreover, his vegetarianism was not acceptable to his family. His brother states that they did try to persuade him to give it up, and that it did make their mother anxious for Hedayat's health.<sup>98</sup> We have seen that at least two other people at his school were sympathetic to animals or interested in vegetarianism, but they did not go as far as practising meat avoidance in their daily life. Throughout his life Hedayat must have encountered many people who expressed their disapproval of his vegetarianism in one form or another. Only a couple of cases are accidentally recorded. When he was a government-sponsored student in Paris, one of the high-ranking Iranian officials there found his vegetarian diet unacceptable. In August 1932, more than three years later, Hedayat resigned his junior post in the National Bank of Iran in Tehran because the same official was due to become his boss. Later he wrote to a friend in Paris: "I think I've already written that I have resigned from Bank Melli... To be honest, I was afraid that if [Hosain] Ala becomes governor of the Bank, he would order me to eat meat."<sup>99</sup>

Traditionally in Iran, in contrast to India, vegetarianism was not widely known, and even people who rejected the pleasures of the world, such as the Sufis, were not, and were not expected to be, vegetarians. Sometimes asceticism included what may be called *short-term vegetarianism*. In the illuminationist

(*eshraqi*) philosophy of Sohrawardi (1154–1187), in the first and preparatory stage of the path to knowledge the mystic/philosopher has to “abandon the world”, and this includes retreating and abstaining from meat for forty days.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, in contrast to medieval Europe, in Iran vegetarianism was not strongly opposed by religious and political authorities, because it was scarcely an aspect of heretical activities and protest movements. To an Iranian mind, vegetarianism was unthinkable before being unacceptable.

While in many cultures meat avoidance and consequently the avoidance of animal slaughter for food are unacceptable, some degree of kindness or lack of cruelty to animals is in many situations acceptable and indeed welcome, although the required standard differs from one culture to another. Thus, in spite of the fact that Vasari refuses to say that Leonardo was a vegetarian, he speaks of Leonardo’s kindness to animals with admiration: “. . . he always kept . . . horses, in which . . . he took much delight, and particularly in all other animals, which he managed with the greatest love and patience; and this he showed when often passing by the places where birds were sold, for, taking them with his own hand out of their cages, and having paid to those who sold them the price that was asked, he let them fly away into the air, restoring to them their lost liberty.”<sup>101</sup> As seen earlier, Hedayat’s brother fondly remembered Hedayat’s compassion for animals as a child. In his book *Humans and Animals*, Hedayat quotes the Persian philosopher Khajeh Nasir al-Din Tusi (1201–1274), who observes: “God’s worst creature is he/she who is cruel first to himself and then to other people and different kinds of animals.”<sup>102</sup>

The psychoanalytic theory does not seem to be persuasive in relation to Leonardo either. Freud himself observes: “Leonardo was notable for his quiet peaceableness and his avoidance of all antagonism and controversy. He was gentle and kindly to everyone. . . . He condemned war and bloodshed.”<sup>103</sup> However, Freud believes that some of Leonardo’s activities reveal that he had an aggressive side to his character. A detailed critique of Freud’s view of Leonardo and his life is beyond the scope of this article; suffice it here to make some comments on those activities, which have bearings on Iran and Hedayat, without wishing to imply that Leonardo’s character had no aggressive aspect at all.

Leonardo would accompany “condemned criminals on their way to execution in order to study their features distorted by fear and to sketch them in his notebook”.<sup>104</sup> This is another example of Freud overlooking socio-cultural factors. Sometimes a person’s acts tell us far less about him than the culture to which he belongs. Leonardo belonged to a culture in which condemned criminals were executed publicly and the public had been brought up to feel that it was normal and natural to watch the executions. This is true of many traditional and early modern cultures. In Tehran there is a square, Mohammadiyyeh Square, which was better known as “Execution Square” (*Meidan-e E’dam*) until recently. This square and its public executions are referred to in *The Blind Owl*.<sup>105</sup> It is noteworthy that in Theravada Buddhism it is an offence for a monk to watch armies fighting. Being born into a traditional culture, despite his peace-loving character,

a monk might well acquire the desire to watch such events; otherwise, there would have been no point in considering the act and regarding it as an offence in the moral code of monasteries.<sup>106</sup> What can be said in favour of Leonardo is that he did not follow the criminals for the sake of watching their executions.

It is not surprising that Leonardo takes so much trouble to study the effects of fear on the features of criminals. With regard to painting, he “repeats over and over again the importance of showing the emotions and the ideas in a person’s mind by means of his gestures and facial expression, and . . . his chief advice is that the painter should study people as they argue, or grow angry or look sad, or show other emotions”.<sup>107</sup> It is said that “in order to paint the image of laughing peasants he gathered a number of peasants and entertained them until they broke out into vehement laughter”.<sup>108</sup> There is indeed a sketch by Leonardo depicting a hanged man, Bernardo Baroncelli, dated 1478. Leonardo also made significant observations on the anatomy of hanged men.<sup>109</sup>

There is another activity of Leonardo which, in Freud’s view, reveals aggressiveness, and that is his devising weapons of war and working for Cesare Borgia, the Duke of the Romagna, as his military engineer. But because Leonardo, like Hedayat, has an aggressive side, it does not necessarily mean that his vegetarianism is based on repressed aggression. Besides, he was not, and did not claim to be, a pacifist or a saint. As noted above, war and violence in human society are complex issues. His following statement may have a bearing on his association with Cesare Borgia: “When besieged by ambitious tyrants I find a means of offence and defence in order to preserve the chief gift of Nature, which is liberty.”<sup>110</sup>

Leonardo seems to have been against war and bloodshed (he spoke of war as “*bestialissima pazzia*” [most bestial madness]),<sup>111</sup> but not unconditionally. Hedayat and Leonardo have such a pessimistic and unfavourable view of human nature that it is unlikely that they would have had a totally non-punitive attitude towards people’s wrongdoing and would have rejected war and violence in all conditions. They regard people as being cruel, and this has, of course, something to do with their concern for animals. And both, being unmarried, strongly condemn people’s attitude towards food and the physical aspect of love. Suffice it to give a few of their statements which are at the same time strikingly similar:

*Leonardo*

1 Man [should be described] as not so much the king of the animal world, but rather the worst of the wild beasts.<sup>112</sup>

2 Some there are who are nothing else than a passage for food and augmenters of excrement and fillers of privies, because through them no other things in the world, nor any good effects, are produced.<sup>114</sup>

*Hedayat*

1 Man is not the king of creatures, but only the oppressor . . . and the executer of animals.<sup>113</sup>

2 Each and every one of them [the rabble men] consisted only of a mouth and a wad of guts hanging from it, the whole terminating in a set of genitals.<sup>115</sup>

3 The act of procreation and the members employed therein are so repulsive, that if it were not for the beauty of the faces and the adornments of the actors and the pent-up impulse, nature would lose the human species.<sup>116</sup>

3 For the rabble-men love is an obscenity, a carnal, ephemeral thing. [They] . . . express their love in lascivious songs . . . and in the foul phrases . . . – “shoving the donkey’s hoof into the mud” . . . Love for her meant something different to me.<sup>117</sup>

Hedayat’s affinity with, or his being influenced by, renowned figures such as Omar Khayyam, Gerard de Nerval, Edgar Allan Poe and Rainer Maria Rilke has been the subject of detailed studies and controversies.<sup>118</sup> However, Leonardo and his notebooks have never been considered in any context in relation to Hedayat. This may be partly because Hedayat’s vegetarianism was never studied, and partly because Leonardo was neither a writer nor a poet.

There are many significant similarities between Hedayat and Leonardo in character and interests, though not of course in the degree of achievement. Here we wish to briefly mention some further examples. Hedayat, too, was a “renaissance man”, but in the context of Iran, in which modernization and the revival of certain aspects of its past began more than a century ago. He is known to have been more versatile than other Iranian writers in his works as a writer. He was also a scholar and a literary critic, and pioneered modern Omar Khayyam scholarship in Iran. He translated into Persian a number of works from French and Pahlavi, an ancient Iranian language. He was, as noted earlier, the chief pioneer of the study of folklore and anthropology in Iran. He painted (like his father and two brothers), and had wished to become a painter before turning to writing. A collection of more than twenty of his paintings and drawings was published in Tehran recently.<sup>119</sup>

Furthermore, Hedayat, too, was interested in the sciences, though not creative in them himself. His friends and fellow-writers have reminisced about his exceptional knowledge of the sciences. For instance, Professor Khanlari, a polymath himself, who knew Hedayat for eighteen years, observes: “His interest was not confined to literature. He showed interest in all the sciences and forms of knowledge. In this respect, he was extremely rare in the contemporary world . . . Frequently I witnessed his extensive knowledge of many natural phenomena with amazement and admiration.”<sup>120</sup> As mentioned above, in his early teens, he and his cousin produced a newspaper in which he wrote on health matters, and in his early twenties he grew interested in the occult sciences. In the Berlin-based Persian periodical *Iranshahr*, which may well have influenced him, some of these sciences were introduced as new frontiers of knowledge.<sup>121</sup> In Hedayat’s book on vegetarianism, the knowledge of the biological sciences displayed was extraordinary for an artistic youth at that time. When he was in Europe for further education, one of the subjects he wished to study was dentistry. The study of medicine was presumably out of the question, because his government-sponsored scholarship was only for four years. His “S.G.L.L.” [The Serum of Sterility], a science fiction story, was noted earlier. He also wrote a number of

short satires, entitled “cases” [*qaziyyeh-ha*], some of which deal with scientific matters, such as “The Case of Freudism”, “The Case of Vitamins” and “The Case of the Scientific Novel”.<sup>122</sup> He did not, however, satirize Freudism itself. It is known that he was somewhat sympathetic towards psychoanalysis, which has clearly exercised some influence on his works.

Leonardo and Hedayat were both interested in the biological sciences, but they differed in that Leonardo’s other main interest was the sciences of nature, whereas Hedayat’s main interest was the mind, or psychological and philosophical issues. As mentioned earlier, Hedayat left his academic studies in Paris unfinished. However, he did finish a one-year course in philosophy and obtained a certificate for it. Since this course was not related to his studies, he seems to have chosen it out of pure interest. In *The Blind Owl*, the protagonist says: “One glance from her would have been sufficient to make plain [for me] all the problems of philosophy and the riddles of theology.”<sup>123</sup>

In his personal life Hedayat, like Leonardo, valued orderliness and cleanliness, as reported by his close friends, despite the carefree impression he gave to some people.<sup>124</sup> In his adult life, like Leonardo, he would play pranks on others. Examples can be found in his close friends’ reminiscences of him.<sup>125</sup> As a child, like Leonardo, he would sometimes try to frighten others, as one of his sisters reminisces.<sup>126</sup> Hedayat specialists might well think the following statement refers to him, but it is actually Freud speaking of Leonardo: he “remained like a child for the whole of his life in more than one way”.<sup>127</sup> Leonardo and Hedayat are both known to have been deeply interested in maternal love. “The favoured theme of his [Leonardo’s] painting was, after all, the Madonna and the child, that is, a presentation (and glorification) of unambivalent maternal love.”<sup>128</sup> The theme of Hedayat’s first painting is explicitly the defence of animals, but implicitly it also deals with maternal love.<sup>129</sup> His short story “Dark Room” is known to be a clear expression of the wish to return to the womb (the dark room).

One of Leonardo’s childhood memories is central to Freud’s book, entitled in English *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*. Describing the memory, Leonardo writes: “. . . in the earliest recollections of my infancy it seemed to me when I was in the cradle that a kite came and opened my mouth with its tail, and struck me within upon the lips with its tail many times.”<sup>130</sup> “Buried Alive” and *The Blind Owl*, which have bearings on Hedayat himself, are worth considering here. In “Buried Alive”, while being half asleep, the protagonist faces some distressing images, as if in a nightmare. He says about one of the images: “a bat was striking my face with its cold wings”.<sup>131</sup> Hedayat may have had similar experiences earlier in life too. As we have seen, as a child he was extremely interested in animals, including birds. In *The Blind Owl*, recollecting childhood days the protagonist says that at night “She [my nanny], with her bad breath and her coarse black hair [rubbing (*ke malideh mishod*)] against my face, would hold me close to her.”<sup>132</sup> Here the coarse black hair is similar to a bird’s or a bat’s wings. It should be noted that, as Freud says, Leonardo’s memory may not be an actual recollection of early infancy, when Leonardo was still in the cradle, but a ‘phantasy’ developed later.

In *The Blind Owl*, a number of times similar experiences of distressing images are described, without as much detail or reference to the bat.<sup>133</sup> Elsewhere in the book death seems to be conceived as a bat: “. . . the rabble-people who . . . had never experienced a particle of my sufferings or felt the wings of death every minute brushing against their faces.”<sup>134</sup> In Iran and elsewhere the bat sometimes frightens a person at night by flying past his face too closely. The bat is also explicitly mentioned in the book: “My thoughts were freed from the weight of material reality . . . I felt as though I was borne on the wings of a golden bat ranged through a radiant, empty world with no obstacle to block my progress.”<sup>135</sup> Leonardo, whose interest in birds and their flight is well-known, was especially interested in bats scientifically and otherwise. His ornithological inquiry was focused on two winged creatures, the kite and the bat.<sup>136</sup>

Hedayat does not mention Leonardo in any of his writings or in his conversations as reported by others. He seems to have known Leonardo merely as a painter and, perhaps, an inventor. Had he known more about Leonardo, particularly his vegetarianism, he would have shown interest in him. That Leonardo was a vegetarian was not widely known or accepted as a fact then. In Howard Williams’ book, a major work on the history of vegetarianism published in 1883, no mention is made of Leonardo.<sup>137</sup> Even until a decade or two ago, “in the sixty or so biographies in the London Library on his life and work, only one book bothers to discuss his vegetarianism”.<sup>138</sup> In his own two books on vegetarianism Hedayat mentions and quotes numerous great men and women of the past who supported vegetarian diets or were against harming and killing animals. He does so partly to show how well and widely accepted vegetarianism is. If Hedayat knew that Leonardo, a genius of such high reputation, was a vegetarian, he would have certainly referred to him.

### **Cultural desublimation, erotic shame and La Mascotte**

The general theoretical conclusion of this chapter is as follows. In the course of modernity or industrialization, there has been an excessive tendency to explain the “higher” side of human life in terms of its “lower” side, a tendency well reflected in the theories of influential modern thinkers such as Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. In Freud’s view, for instance, human psychology can be explained in terms of sexuality and aggression (life and death instincts), an assumption which may be good enough for understanding birds, or rather birds as we, being prejudiced against animals, see them. Higher human activities such as art, science and philosophy are, for Freud, derivatives; that is, they are the result of the “sublimation” of the instincts, and have no biological roots of their own. In his theory, the incest prohibition – for him, the moral rule *par excellence* – has a phylogenetic aspect (the primal-horde story), but more recent research in ethology and anthropology has put far more stress on the biological basis of this prohibition. The same research has also found that avoidance of incest or inbreeding is not unique to humans; it occurs, to a lesser or greater degree, among a number of animals, especially primates.<sup>139</sup>

Even from the psychoanalytic stance, sublimation by itself cannot account for art, because we still need to know why it results in artistic creativity in only a small number of individuals. To answer this question, Freud turns to the biological make-up of the artist, saying that “we are obliged to look for the source of . . . the capacity for sublimation in the organic foundation of the character”. In his view, this capacity is not the same in everyone, and in an artist, such as Leonardo da Vinci, it is “extraordinary”.<sup>140</sup>

But this is only one step in the right direction. It is common sense that an artist or a genius is a constitutionally gifted individual. A basic problem is that what Freud, like many others, deals with is not in fact artistic creativity, but its extraordinary form as found in professional or great artists. Artistic creativity is, to a lesser or greater degree, an innate universal characteristic of human beings; that is, given the right environment, people in any culture are capable of expressing themselves in dancing, singing, painting and so forth with some success. Freud, like others, also overlooks the significance of artistic consumption, such as the ability to appreciate music, which does require some degree of creativity and which has, apart from being universal, an innate basis. Thus, the issue is not only the production of great art by an extraordinarily capable few, but also the production and consumption of art as a universal human capability. The process of sublimation, when necessary, cannot be effective, or take place, without such capabilities, which are biologically rooted and which are not derivatives of sexual and aggressive instincts.

It is now generally accepted that linguistic ability is basically an innate characteristic of the human mind. What is true of language seems to be true not only of art, but also of morality. Even the most depraved persons have a conscience and the need to make moral sense of things, especially their own behaviour. Teaching moral rules to a child is sometimes not easy, not because morality has no innate basis, but because, among other things, the rules are not in harmony with the child’s level of development. A child may be expected, for instance, to have a sense of shame or sexual modesty with regard to its genitals too early in its life. But this sense, unlike linguistic ability, does not, and does not need to, emerge in early childhood. After all, apart from its mild and gradually developing form in later childhood, it is a feature of puberty.

In his book on Leonardo da Vinci, Freud speaks of shame:

People . . . cling to the attitude taken up by our civilization of depreciating the genitals and the sexual functions. . . . Through a long series of generations the genitals have been for us the “*pudenda*”, objects of shame. . . . In the primaeval days of the human race it was a different story.<sup>141</sup>

But, first, the experience of shame is universal; it is found not only in non-Western major civilizations, but also, as anthropological research shows,<sup>142</sup> in early or non-literate cultures. In my fieldwork among the Au-speaking people of the rainforests of the Sepik, in Papua New Guinea, I could not avoid learning two local words in the first few weeks, as they were used frequently in daily life:

*yink anuk* (shame; literal sense: “bad skin”) and *qan anuk* (anger; literal sense: “bad heart”). Everywhere people are well aware that, in striking contrast to human beings, animals do not appear to have sexual modesty. Children come to know this contrast sooner or later. I vividly recall a group of Au-speaking children laughing with amazement at two domesticated pigs trying to copulate in the middle of the village plaza in the presence of many people.

Second, in many languages, one of the words used for the genitals means “shame” or the parts, objects or place of shame, such as *vergonha* (Portuguese), *aidoia* (Greek), *parties-honteuses* (French), *scham/schamteile* (German), and *sharm/sharmgah* (Persian). But this does *not* indicate that the genitals are depreciated or felt to be something to be morally ashamed of. It is important to note that, before modernity, shame is not necessarily of negative value, and that such words for the genitals are not, and are not intended to be, perjorative and abusive. They are formal and hardly ever used in daily life. It is also important to distinguish between two types of shame. Sometimes the experience of shame is concerned with the exposure of wrongdoing or failure, and sometimes, with mere exposure, as in what may be called *erotic shame*. In erotic shame, the feeling of shame is caused merely by the exposure of the erotic parts of the body, particularly the genitals, or the erotic movements of the body, especially in intercourse. A married couple engaged in the act of intercourse may feel embarrassed if observed by their parents or children, although there is nothing wrong or degrading about what they are doing. Intercourse is universally associated not only with erotic shame, but also with privacy. Sometimes erotic shame combines with the moral degradation of the genitals and sexuality. But this is not universal and is especially found in cultures that tend to have a world-rejecting orientation. Sometimes erotic shame is made far more intense and sexual purity greatly stressed, as in societies with complex social stratification, in which marriage between social strata is unwelcome.<sup>143</sup> But such social stratification, like other-worldly morality, does not create erotic shame, it merely intensifies it or gives it other dimensions.

Erotic shame is diminished in situations in which individuals are unknown, indifferent, and somewhat an “object”, rather than a “person”, to each other. Such situations are frequently found, not in small, traditional communities, but in industrial societies with their expanded urbanization, large and mobile populations, impersonal social relationships, and faceless crowds. It is noteworthy that, as an extreme form of sexual immodesty, prostitution is not, despite popular belief, the oldest profession, because, among other things, it requires anonymity. It is found not in early, small-scale societies based on personal and kinship relationships, but in civilizations, in the cities in which the woman and her clients can remain anonymous.

In the story of the Garden of Eden, when for the first time Adam and Eve realized that they were naked, they felt ashamed and made coverings for themselves. This seems to be a clear expression of the sense of erotic shame that simply and profoundly characterizes humans as against other species. But modern readers often misunderstand this part of the story, because, to them,

shame is merely a culturally imposed inhibition implying guilt and defect. Even a psychoanalyst of Erich Fromm's calibre maintains that here we should not take the idea of shame literally, because, otherwise we have to assume that such an old myth "has the prudish morals of the nineteenth-century outlook" and understand it "in a Victorian spirit".<sup>144</sup>

The "lower" side of human life is often taken to be merely low and qualitatively the same as it is believed to be, rightly or wrongly, in other species. The best example is sexuality. For Freud, love is the result of cultural influence, repression, and sublimation. But in the first place, love is universal. The A-speaking people, with Stone-Age economy, took love so seriously that its sorrows sometimes led them to suicide. The universality of erotic shame, privacy, and love is sufficient to indicate that in humans sexuality is of a different quality from the animal and has a complex nature. This is indeed not surprising, given the complexity of the human brain. After all, the sense of shame, relating to self-consciousness, cannot emerge until consciousness reaches a certain degree of development and complexity. Human sexuality by itself may not be much different from sexuality in some other species, but it is part of a body influenced by the human brain. Moreover, it is true that culture may sublimate sexuality, but this is like a second-order sublimation, because in a sense, sexuality is already and naturally sublimated. Furthermore, culture may also "desublimat" sexuality. *Cultural desublimation*, of sexuality, art, and so forth, deserves far more attention.

The excessive tendency to understand and explain the "higher" side of human life in terms of its "lower" side is a cultural desublimation of human life. In this chapter, a case in point is the theory that Leonardo da Vinci's vegetarianism was the result of repressed oral aggression. Another example is the view that Hedayat's sympathetic depiction of suffering was the egoistic projection of his own tortured self. In contrast to this tendency, the pre-modern or the medieval tendency overlooked the possibility of "lower" motives and reasons underlying the "higher" side. Modernity has challenged this tradition, but it has also gone to the other extreme. Not infrequently, the pendulum of history swings from one extreme to another, while sometimes settling somewhere in the middle. Let us hope that the time has come for the development of a more balanced and less one-sided understanding of humankind.

This was part of my study of Hedayat's vegetarianism, and vegetarianism in general. Despite its limitations, the information on Hedayat's vegetarianism found in his biography, fiction, other writings, and paintings, and in reminiscences and memoirs by his friends and relatives, is considerable and rare, compared with what is available on others in the history of vegetarianism. This fact will become clearer when we examine the ascetic aspect of his vegetarianism in another publication. As a result, the study of his vegetarianism may not only deepen our understanding of him and his works, but also serve as a basis for research on vegetarianism in general, its history, its rationale, and its significant changes in modernity.

I would like to end this chapter with an example of Hedayat's altruistic

behaviour in relation to fellow humans, which also sheds light on his attitude towards animals. Later in life, in the 1940s, he used to go to a café in Tehran called “La Mascotte” to have a vegetarian supper and meet friends. The café was owned by an Armenian or a Jew, who ran it with his Greek wife and their partly paralysed daughter. (In another account, the owner runs the café with his sister and her fatherless and partly paralysed daughter.) The daughter was fond of Hedayat for his kindness and his gift to her of a ceramic statue, probably of an animal. The statue was on show in the café.<sup>145</sup>

Such kindness to a stranger who belonged to a different faith and was most likely from a different country was out of the ordinary. As we have seen, Hedayat’s concern for human beings showing physical imperfections is expressed in a number of his stories written in the 1930s; that is, well before disability became a public issue in the West (and it has yet to do so in Iran). But did this concern of his have any bearing on his concern for animals? For him, who deeply felt that animals are like human beings, the two concerns may, unconsciously, have been variations on a theme. He may have felt that animals are human-like, but show physical imperfections. Animals are, for example, unable to speak; their limbs lack the dexterity of the human hand; and they are as helpless as children in some situations.

## Notes

- 1 See, for example, K. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500–1800* (London, 1983); Colin Spencer, *Vegetarianism: A History* (London, 2000); and Howard Williams, *The Ethics of Diet: A Catena of Authorities Deprecatory of the Practice of Flesh-eating* (London, 1883).
- 2 Michael C. Hillmann, “Afterword: Sadeq Hedayat and the ‘American’ School of Persian Studies”, *Iran Nameh* 10, 3 (1992): 9.
- 3 Soheila Shahshahani, (“*Payehgozar-e ensanshenasī*”), in *Yad-e Sadeq Hedayat*, ed. Ali Dehbashi (Tehran, 2001): 51–57.
- 4 Sadeq Hedayat, *Nayrangestan* (Persian folklore, 1933; repr. 1963): 11, 24. In his first two books, discussed below, one of his sources is physical anthropology and the term “anthropologie” [physical anthropology] is mentioned in the earlier book (sec. 3) published in 1924/1925.
- 5 Abram Kardiner and Edward Preble, *They Studied Man* (New York, 1963): 67.
- 6 In the 1940s, Hedayat encouraged M.F. Farzaneh, a young friend of his going to Paris for further education, to study “ethnologie” [social/cultural anthropology]. He also said that he was a self-made ethnographer. M.F. Farzaneh, *Ashna’i ba Sadeq Hedayat* (Tehran, 2002): 107–108 and 304–305.
- 7 H. Philsooph, “*Hedayat va Ensaniyyat-e Hayvanat (2): Nokhostin Dastan va Nokhostin Tarjomeh-ye U*”, *Cheshmandaz* (2004) 23: 121–123.
- 8 Paridokht Sepehri, *Sohrab, Morgh-e Mohajer*, 6th edn (Tehran, 2000): 50–51 and 75. Ali Razavi, a friend of Sohrab Sepehri, reminisces: “In Kashan a group of us, some forty people, went camping at Palang Chal [Leopard’s Den], outside the town, in November 1979. Sepehri finally decided not to join us on the ground that, as he told me, he had come to know that one of the participants intended to bring his rifle with him and go hunting.” (pers. comm.). For another incident in which Sepehri prevents others from harming an insect see *Bagh-e tanha’i: Yadbud-nameh-ye Sohrab Sepehri*, ed. Hamid Siyahpush, 4th edn (Tehran, 1996): 259.
- 9 Before sending this article to the publisher I saw the following two statements,

- requiring further inquiries: “Iran has at least one registered vegetarian society, the Sana and Shafa Vegetarians’ Association, based in Tehran” (Steve F. Sapontzis, ed., *Food for Thought* (New York, 2004): 210, 222). “A small vegetarian society does, however, exist in Tehran. It was founded in 1963 by Mr. Ermian Kharaabati who died this year (1963).” (Jon Gregerson, *Vegetarianism: A History*, California, 1994: 108). Hedayat had tried to found a vegetarian society, but without success. See for details Hasan Razavi, “Akher Bi’ensaf Nazan”, in *Shenakht-Nameh-ye Sadeq Hedayat*, ed. Shahram Baharlu’iyan and F. Esma’ili (Tehran, 2000): 588–589.
- 10 H. Philsooph, “*Hedayat va Ensaniyat-e Hayvanat (1): Tarjomeh-ye Nokhostin va Nashenakhteh-ye U*”, *Cheshmandaz* (2003), 22: 79–92. See note 7 above for the details of its part 2 ((2004), 23: 107–129).
  - 11 The most detailed description of the early life of Hedayat is found in the following book, chiefly based on the information provided by the members of his family, especially Mahmud Hedayat: Abolqasem Djannati-Ata’i, *Zendegani va Asar-e Sadeq Hedayat* (Tehran, 1978). But the book includes some factual errors. For Hedayat’s early biography and many other issues discussed in this chapter see also Homa Katuzian, *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer* (London and New York, 2002), and Michael Beard, *Hedayat’s Blind Owl as a Western Novel* (Princeton, NJ, 1999).
  - 12 Sadeq Chubak, “*Safar-e Mazandaran va Chand Yad-e Digar az Sadeq Hedayat*”, *Daftar-e Honar*, 6 (1996): 685.
  - 13 Bizhan Jalali, “*Hedayat taqdir-e khodash ra bazi kard*”, interview by Mohammad Baharlu, in *Shenakht-Nameh-ye Sadeq Hedayat*: 559.
  - 14 “*Zende beh gur*” (1930), trans. Brian Spooner, in *Sadeq Hedayat: An Anthology*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Colorado, 1979): 161.
  - 15 Jahangir Hedayat, ed. *Sadeq Hedayat: Ensan va Hayvan* (Tehran, 2002): 14–15.
  - 16 Mahmud Hedayat, “*Va Akmun Hedayat Sokhan Miguyad*”, interview by Parviz Lushani, *Sepid-o Siyah* (1967): 738, quoted in *Khodkoshi-ye Sadeq-e Hedayat*, Esma’il Jamshidi (Tehran, 1995): 40–41.
  - 17 Parviz Natel Khanlari, “*Khaterat-e Adabi Darbareh-ye Sadeq-e Hedayat*”, in *Yad-e Sadeq Hedayat*; Hasan Razavi, “*Akher Bi’ensaf Nazan*”: 587–588.
  - 18 “*Zaban-e Hal-e Yek Olagh dar Vaqt-e Marg*”, *Vafa* (1924) 5–6: 164–168. See also H. Philsooph, “*Hedayat va Ensaniyat-e Hayvanat (2)*”: 107–129.
  - 19 “*Akharin Tir-e Tofang-e Man*”, *Vafa* (1924) 8: 252–253. See also H. Philsooph, “*Hedayat va Ensaniyat-e Hayvanat (1)*”: 79–92.
  - 20 He also complained of eye problems in France, in 1927, where he had gone for further education. Jahangir Hedayat, ed., *Si-yo Shesh Ruz ba Sadeq Hedayat: Yadasht-ha-ye Ruzaneh-ye Isa Hedayat* (Tehran, 2002): 64, 88.
  - 21 Homa Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat, The Life and Legend*: 20.
  - 22 Djavad Hadidi, “French Schools in Persia”, *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 10: 178–181.
  - 23 Nezam Vafa, “*Ta’sir-e Yek Dast-e Jenaytkar*”, *Vafa* (1923) 1: 9–10.
  - 24 Abdollah Mas’udi, ed., *Majmu’eh-ye Asar-e Ostad Nezam Vafa*, 2 vols (Kashan, 2003).
  - 25 *Favayed-e Giyah-Khari* (Tehran, 1977): 54.
  - 26 Nezam Vafa, “*Gol-e Khayyam*”, *Vafa*, August–September, 1924, no. 7: 205–209.
  - 27 “*Madeline*”, in *Zende Be Gur* (Tehran, 1930), is dated 5 January 1930.
  - 28 Nima Yushij, “*Naql az Maktub-e Nima*”, *Vafa* (1923), 1: 2; “*Dust-e Man*”, (1923), 4: 123–126. The full text of the first, which is a letter addressed to Nima’s brother, and the text of the second, a letter addressed to Nezam Vafa, can be found, although with alterations, in *Majmu’eh-ye Kamel-e Namehha-ye Nima Yushij*, ed. Sirus Tahbaz (Tehran, 1997), 53–56, 92–95. These two contributions are unknown in Nima scholarship.
  - 29 M.F. Farzaneh, *Sadeq-e Hedayat dar Tar-e Ankabut*, (Cologne, 2004): 80, 123, 236.
  - 30 M.F. Farzaneh, *Ashna’i ba Sadeq Hedayat*: 108–109.

- 31 “*Tajalli*”, in *Sag-e Velgard* (Tehran, 1942).
- 32 The painting is reproduced on the back cover of *Daftar-e Honar*, 3, 6 (1996).
- 33 Hasan Qa’emiyan, *Shayyadi-ha-ye Adabi va Asar-e Sadeq Hedayat* (Tehran, 1975): 253ff.
- 34 The French titles of these books are not known, and their Persian equivalents, which are found in the following book, may not be exact translations. Abolqasem Djannati-‘Ata’i, *Zendegani va Asar-e Sadeq-e Hedayat*: 33.
- 35 Hedayat, *Favayed-e Giyah-Khari*: 33.
- 36 *Ensan va Hayvan*, in *Majmu’eh-ye Neveshteh-ha-ye Parakandeh-ye Sadeq-e Hedayat*, ed. Hasan Qa’emiyan (Tehran, 1965): 288–289. See also 271, 283, 285–286.
- 37 *Ibid.*: 285.
- 38 See, for example, Marvin Harris and Eric B. Ross, eds, *Food and Evolution: Toward a Theory of Human Food Habits* (Philadelphia, 1987).
- 39 *Favayed-e Giyah-Khari*: 14.
- 40 Bentham’s well-known statement regarding animals is that “the question is not, can they reason? nor can they talk? but, can they suffer?”, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), ch. 17, sec. 1. Peter A. Singer (1946–) is a philosopher and a major writer on the moral status of animals. His pioneering book is *Animal Liberation* (New York, 1975; rev. edn 1990).
- 41 *Ensan va Hayvan*: 289.
- 42 Salt, who founded the Humanitarian League in 1891 has a book entitled *Animal Rights Considered in Relation to Social Progress* (London, 1892).
- 43 For an assessment of Hedayat’s two books see also H. Kamshad, *Modern Persian Prose Literature* (Cambridge, 1966): 142–143; Homa Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Legend*: 25–30.
- 44 Isa Hedayat, “*Sadeq Hedayat-e Gomshodeh-ye Ma*”, in *Shenakhat-Nameh-ye Sadeq Hedayat*: 580.
- 45 Mahmud Hedayat, “*Va Aknun Hedayat Sokhan Miguyad*”: 40. See also Esma’il Jamshidi, *Khodkoshi-ye Sadeq Hedayat*: 121.
- 46 Isa Hedayat, “*Sadeq Hedayat-e Gomshodeh-ye Ma*”: 580.
- 47 Michael Beard, *Hedayat’s Blind Owl*: 22.
- 48 See, for example, *Iranshahr* 1 (1922): 132–141; 1 (1923): 200–201, 3 (1925): 458–461.
- 49 See, for example, Habibollah Qezel-ayagh Pur Reza, “*Olum-e Makhfiiyeh*”, *Iranshahr* 2 (1924): 334–346; Ali Khan Tabrizi, “*Meghnatis-e Hayvani*”, 3 (1925): 630–640 and 662–667; H.K. *Iranshahr*, “*Arezu-ha-ye Ma*”, 4 (1926): 412–417.
- 50 Review by H.K. *Iranshahr* of *Ensan va Hayvan*, *Iranshahr* 3 (1925): 510–511. There is further evidence of H.K. *Iranshahr*’s interest in vegetarianism in his journal, such as his long article about “*Mazdasnan*” (an ascetic and vegetarian international society, said to be influenced by Zoroaster), “*Jam’iyyat-e Mazdasnan*”, 4 (1926): 248–253, 312–319, 375–383 and 438–448. Years later he became a vegetarian: M. Sadr-e Hashemi, *Tarikh-e Jarayed- va Majallat-e Iran*, (Tehran, 1984) 1: 399–340.
- 51 Hedayat, “*Marg*”, *Iranshahr* 4 (January 1927): 680–682.
- 52 Nasser Pakdaman, “The ‘*Comedie Dramatique*’ of Fontainebleau”, *Aftab* (2002), 55–56: 22.
- 53 Mirza Mahmud Khan-e Sheibani contributed to the publication of the book, as mentioned at its beginning. This is noteworthy because he seems to have done it out of interest in vegetarianism. *Iranshahr* journal used to ask its readers to send donations to its future publications for whichever book from the published list they were interested in. See also *Sadeq Hedayat, Vincent Monteil . . .*, trans. Hasan Qa’emiyan (Tehran, 2003): 157.
- 54 Michael Beard, *Hedayat’s Blind Owl*: 22.
- 55 *Ibid.*

- 56 The idea of “the early Hedayat” (1923/1924–1928) is introduced and characterized in H. Philsooph, “*Hedayat va Ensaniyat-e Hayvanat (2)*”. It will be further examined in relation to “the creative Hedayat” and “the later Hedayat” elsewhere.
- 57 Bizhan Jalali, “*Hedayat taqdir-e khodash ra bazi kard*”: 559.
- 58 “The Abyssinian Marsh”, trans. Sadeq Hedayat (“*Mordab-e Habasheh*”, 1930), repr. in *Majmu‘eh-ye Neveshteh-ha*, ed. Hasan Qa’emiyan: 45–51.
- 59 “The Stray Dog” (“Sag-e Velgard”), trans. Brian Spooner, in Yarshater: 124.
- 60 *The Blind Owl*, trans. D.P. Costello (Tehran, 2001): 67–68.
- 61 *Haji Aqa: Portrait of an Iranian Confidence Man*, trans. G.M. Wickens, Center for Middle Eastern Studies (Texas, 1979): 75.
- 62 For other examples see “*Mohallef*”, in *Seh Qatreh Khun* (Tehran, 1956): 130; “Whirlpool” (“*Gerdab*”), trans. Brian Spooner, in Yarshater: 71.
- 63 For the relationship between sexuality and violence in Hedayat see also Michael Beard, *Hedayat’s Blind Owl*: 32–33, and 175–176 passim.
- 64 “Davud the Hunchback,” (“*Davud-e Guzhposht*”), trans. S.H.G. Darke, in Yarshater: 173–177.
- 65 “The Spinster” [“*Abji Khanom*”], trans. Siyavosh Danesh in Yarshater: 137.
- 66 “*Dash Akol*”, trans. Richard Arndt and Mansur Ekhtiyar, in Yarshater: 45.
- 67 “Dead End”, (“*Bonbast*”), trans. Price C. Meade, in Yarshater: 71.
- 68 *The Blind Owl*: 89.
- 69 *Ibid.*, 126.
- 70 “Buried Alive”, 155, 161. See also “*Tajalli*”: 104.
- 71 “Dead End”: 107–108.
- 72 “Davud the Hunchback”: 173–174. See also “*Changal*”, in *Seh Qatreh Khun*.
- 73 “Buried Alive”: 161.
- 74 *The Blind Owl*: 79, 82. See also “*Don Zhuan-e Karaj*”, in *Sag-e Velgard*.
- 75 “The Stray Dog”: 121.
- 76 *Ibid.*: 122.
- 77 *Ibid.*: 124.
- 78 “*Zaban-e Hal-e Yek Olagh dar Hal-e Marg*”, trans. Farzan Yazdanfar as “The Silent Language of a Donkey at the Time of Death”, *Daftar-e Honar* 3, 6 (1996): 711.
- 79 “Davud the Hunchback”: 174.
- 80 “Dead End”: 111.
- 81 “*Tajalli*” translated as “The Mirage of the Shadow Incarnate” by Siavosh Danesh in Yarshater: 165.
- 82 “The Stray Dog”: 120.
- 83 “Whirlpool”: 73.
- 84 “Abji Khanom”: 141.
- 85 See also “*Tajalli*”: 104.
- 86 “The Silent Language of a Donkey at the Time of Death”: 711.
- 87 Sadeq Chubak, “*Antari keh Luti-yash Mordeh Bud*” in *Antari keh Luti-yash Mordeh Bud* (Tehran, 1949; repr. California, 1990): 94–99.
- 88 Sadeq Chubak, “*Pacheh-khizak*” in *Ruz-e Avval-e Qabr* (Tehran, 1965): 81–92.
- 89 Michel E. de Montaigne, *The Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, trans. M.A. Screech (London, 1991) 1, 23: 124.
- 90 “S.G.L.L.”, in *Sayeh Rawshan*, 1933; repr. Tehran, 1952), ch. 1.
- 91 Carter Bryant, “Hedayat and Psychoanalysis of a Nation”, in *Hedayat’s “The Blind Owl” Forty Years After*, ed. Michael C. Hillmann: 159–160.
- 92 Sigmund Freud, “Dostoevsky and Parricide”, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 21 (London, 1964): 178.
- 93 “Buried Alive”: 162.
- 94 Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood* [1910], in *The Standard Edition*, 11: 57–137; K.R. Eissler, *Leonardo da Vinci: Psychoanalytic Notes on the Enigma* (London, 1962).

- 95 Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci*: 68.
- 96 Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, trans. Gaston DuC. DeVere (New York, 1959): 190–208.
- 97 Edward MacCurdy, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, vol. 95.
- 98 Mahmud Hedayat, “*Va Aknun Hedayat Sokhan Miguyad*”: 40.
- 99 Homa Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Legend*: 38; Jahangir Hedayat, *Nimeh-ye Penhan-e Sargozasht-e Sadeq Hedayat* (Tehran, 2003): 26–28 and 38.
- 100 Hossein Ziai, “Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi: Founder of the Illuminationist School”, in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London, 2001): 449–450.
- 101 Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters*: 193.
- 102 Hedayat, *Ensan va Hayvan*: 286.
- 103 Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci*: 68–69.
- 104 *Ibid.*: 69.
- 105 *The Blind Owl*: 99–100.
- 106 Peter Harvey, *An Introduction To Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge, 2000): 254.
- 107 Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy 1450–1600* (Oxford, 1970): 35.
- 108 Eissler, *Leonardo da Vinci*: 252.
- 109 *Ibid.*: 169.
- 110 Edward MacCurdy, ed., *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* (London, 1938), 1: 24.
- 111 *Ibid.*
- 112 Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci*: 69.
- 113 Ensan va Havan: 276.
- 114 Jean Paul Richter, ed., *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, 2 (New York, 1970): 295.
- 115 *The Blind Owl*: 91.
- 116 Eissler, *Leonardo da Vinci*: 115.
- 117 *The Blind Owl*: 141.
- 118 Michael C. Hillmann, ed., *Hedayat’s “The Blind Owl”*; Michael Beard, *Hedayat’s Blind Owl*; Sirus Shamisa, *Dastan-e Yek Ruh* (Tehran, 1993); Homa Katouzian, *Buf-e Kur-e Hedayat* (Tehran, 1994); Marta Simidchieva, “The River That Runs Through It: A Persian Paradigm of Frustrated Desire”, *Edebiyat*, 6 (1995): 203–222; Mahmud Kiyanush, *Zan va ‘Eshq dar Donya-ye Sadeq Hedayat* (Los Angeles, 2003).
- 119 Jahangir Hedayat, ed., *Ahu-ye Tanha: Majmu’eh-ye Naqqashi-ha-ye Sadeq Hedayat* (Tehran, 2003). This collection is incomplete. It does not, for example, include the male violinist in watercolours, mentioned earlier.
- 120 Khanlari, “*Marg-e Sadeq-e Hedayat*”, in Jamshidi, *Khodkoshi-ye Sadeq-e Hedayat*: 471–472; Feraydun Hovayda, “*Ba Sadeq-e Hedayat as Kaffeh-ye Ferdawsi ta Paris*”, in *Yad-e Sadeq Hedayat*: 587.
- 121 See note 49.
- 122 “*Qaziyyeh-ye Freudism*”, “*Qaziyyeh-ye Vitamin*” and “*Qaziyyeh-ye Roman-e Elmi*”, in Sadeq Hedayat and Mas’ud Farzad, *Vaq Vaq Sahab* (Tehran, 1934).
- 123 *The Blind Owl*, 22. For Hedayat’s relation to philosophy see the following article by his philosopher friend in the 1940s: Ahmad Fardid, “Sadeq Hedayat’s Thoughts”, in *Yad-e Sadeq Hedayat*, 617–629.
- 124 Khanlari, in *Yad-e Sadeq-e Hedayat*, 214–217; Turaj Farazmand, “Yad-e Hedayat”, *Daftar-e Honar* 3, 6 (1996): 637. Eissler, *Leonardo da Vinci*, 58, 112.
- 125 Sadeq Chubak, “*Safar-e Mazandaran*”, 685–686; Anvar Khamseh’i, “*Khaterat va Tafakkorat dar bareh-ye Sadeq-e Hedayat*”, in *Yad-e Sadeq-e Hedayat*, 404–406; M.A. Jamalzadeh, “*Nameh-ha-ye Jamalzadeh dar bareh-ye Sadeq-e Hedayat*”, in *Yad-e Sadeq-e Hedayat*, 471–474. Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci*, 127–128.
- 126 Bizhan Jalali, “*Dar jostoju-ye Hedayat*”, in *Nabegheh ya Divaneh*, ed. Mahmud Tolu’i (Tehran, 1999): 290. Eissler, *Leonardo da Vinci*, 155–156.

- 127 Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci*: 127.  
128 Eissler, *Leonardo da Vinci*: 339.  
129 H. Philsooph, “*Hedayat va Ensaniyat-e Hayvanat (1)*”: 85–86.  
130 Edward MacCurdy, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* (New York, 1956): 1122.  
131 “Buried Alive”: 160.  
132 *The Blind Owl*: 103.  
133 *Ibid.*: 112–113, 118, 140, 149.  
134 *Ibid.*: 102.  
135 *Ibid.*: 105.  
136 See, for example, Eissler, *Leonardo da Vinci*: 166–167.  
137 See note 1.  
138 Colin Spencer, *Vegetarianism: A History*: 177 (first published in 1993).  
139 See, for example, David H. Spain, “The Westermarck–Freud Incest–Theory Debate”, *Current Anthropology* 28 (1987): 623–645; Paul B. Roscoe, “Amity and Aggression: A Symbolic Theory of Incest”, *Man, The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 29 (1994): 49–76.  
140 Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci*: 134.  
141 Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci*, 96–97. See also his other works.  
142 See for instance A.L. Epstein, *The Experience of Shame in Melanesia* (London, 1984), Royal Anthropological Institute, Occasional Paper No. 40.  
143 See Jack Goody, *Production and Reproduction* (Cambridge, 1976).  
144 Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (London, Thorsons): 7.  
145 Mahmud Katira’i, *Ketab-e Sadeq-e Hedayat* (Tehran, 1971): 341; M.F. Farzaneh, *Ashna’i ba Sadeq Hedayat*, 63–64, 48; Naser Pakdaman, ed., *Sadeq-e Hedayat: Hashtad-o daw Nameh beh Hasan Shahid Nura’i* (Paris, 2001): 203–204.

# 13 Man and animal in Hedayat's "Stray Dog"

*Homa Katouzian*

"Stray Dog" is one of Hedayat's best psycho-fictions and one of the most moving pieces he ever wrote. It is tempting to say that it is a fictionalised version of his youthful essay, "Man and Animal". Its text and outer layer certainly represent an authentic and unmistakable fiction by the author of that essay and its sequel, *The Benefits of Vegetarianism*.<sup>1</sup> It is true that Hedayat never ceased to condemn cruelty and injustice to animals in every possible way: both by word of mouth and by the pen.<sup>2</sup> In his fictional works, these sentiments find strong expression especially in "Stray Dog", and in "Alaviyeh Khanom", here in the scene when the coach horses fall down. The difference however is that the latter short story is a comedy in the classical sense of this term whereas "Stray Dog" is a psycho-fiction.<sup>3</sup> Hence it cannot be regarded merely as the fictional expression of the sentiments expressed in "Man and Animal", since there is another and much deeper dimension to it as a metaphor for outsider, alienated, rejected and persecuted human beings who are treated in the same way by their fellow humans, an example of the anti-heroes of Hedayat's psycho-fictions from the animal world.

It is characteristic of Hedayat's psycho-fictions that the fictional elements – it would be stretching it a little to call it "the plot" – are relatively simple. Even in the case of *The Blind Owl*, the complexity and ambiguity, and hence wide interpretability, of the story is due to the quality of subjective cloudiness, intermingled with the barrage of judgemental narrative, rather than to an elaborate plot. This being the case in general, the story of "Stray Dog" is still one of the simplest of the psycho-fictions. It is about a pedigree dog that gets lost in Varamin, near Tehran, and wanders around while being kicked and cursed by virtually everyone it comes across. Only in one case does a man who happens to be stopping there for a few hours show him kindness and sympathy, an exception that enhances the story's sense of realism. But in the end he departs, leaving the dog even more lonely and desperate than he was before.

It is the description of the dog's psyche while going through the trauma of alienation, helplessness and physical torture, and his feelings, desires, hopes and sense of nostalgia that make up much of the story, as well as the subtext, the anthropomorphic characteristics of the dog's experience which make it accessible to human understanding as an instance of the tragedy of existence.

In front of the baker's shop, the assistant baker would beat up the dog; in front of the butchers the butcher-boy would throw bricks at it. Trying to hide underneath a motor-car, it would be greeted by the heavily nailed boots of the driver. And when all the others got tired of hurting it, it was the turn of the rice-pudding peddler boy who drew a special satisfaction from hurting him. He would keep throwing a brick at its back each time it moaned, and would then laugh aloud saying 'You bastard'.... They all beat the dog for God's sake.<sup>4</sup>

As noted above, this reminds the reader of the author's early essay, "Man and Animal", long before he became a fiction writer. He had said in that essay that humans are cruel to the weak and have shown themselves to animals as the worst arbitrary rulers and the basest agents of injustice. They capture animals, cage them and treat them in such a way that they would rather die than stay alive. Here the condemnation of humankind in its behaviour towards animals is universal, but in the concluding part of the essay, the young author reserves some especially harsh words for the attitude and behaviour of Iranians in particular towards animals, which directly anticipates the drama of "Stray Dog":

In Iran the donkey is born for toil and torture. The dog is killed for God's sake. The cat is thrown down deep wells alive, and the mouse is burned alive in the public thoroughfares.... Even if killing animals is useful to humans, what joy could there be in torturing them. Till when must we turn a blind eye to this veil of barbarism?<sup>5</sup>

And having condemned humans as the worst arbitrary rulers of animals, he goes on to express deep regret that, by the time he wrote the essay, no laws had been passed in Iran to protect animals from cruelty.

Hedayat's "Man and Animal" was published in 1925. In the same year Vita Sackville-West, the famous British writer, member of the Bloomsbury Group and one-time lover of Virginia Woolfe, visited Tehran where her husband Harold Nicolson was a counsellor in the British legation. By chance she also attended the coronation ceremonies of Reza Shah early in 1926. She had gone to Iran via Egypt, India and Iraq, and in her travelogue which she published on her return in 1926 she spared many a word of praise and admiration about people and nature in Iran. But what she had to say about the plight of animals in Iran might well have come straight out of Hedayat's essay, except that she expresses herself with greater circumspection. She wrote:

Heaven knows ... that Persia is no place for a lover of animals. Indeed I would rather witness a bullfight than some of the scenes I have been treated to in this country. To the skeletons one very rapidly grows accustomed; that is nothing; a skeleton is a clean thing. Even to the more recently dead one grows accustomed: to the mule or camel fallen by the wayside, still a recognizable object, with hairy coat and glazed eyes, the dogs from the nearest

village gorging themselves on its entrails, while the vultures hover, waiting for a nastier meal ... one is only glad that the beast should be at last dead, insentient.

It is the cruel fate of living animals, she goes on to say, that is particularly distressing to the sensitive observer:

It is the living that stir one's horror, one's indignation, and one's pity. The white horse limping along an endless road; the team that cannot drag the wagon up the hill, piteously willing but underfed, overloaded, straining, stumbling, sweating ... the donkey dying under its load by the roadside, still struggling to rise and carry on a mile or two further; why should they serve men as they do serve them, anxious, faithful, wistful. I remember things that I cannot bring myself to write.<sup>6</sup>

But unlike Hedayat she attributes her observations less to the cruelty of Iranians, than to their ignorance of the suffering they thus cause to animals:

It is not that these people are cruel, but that they are ignorant; this I do believe, for the Persians are gentle by inclination, fond of children, and easily moved to laughter in a simple way. But they seem to be ignorant of suffering... It is simply ignorance and lack of imagination, but the result is the same, and whoever is inclined to grumble against his lot would do well to remember that he was not born a beast of burden in Persia.<sup>7</sup>

In Hedayat's "Alavieh Khanom" – written nine years after "Man and Animal" and eight years before "Stray Dog" – the pilgrims' caravan is moving towards Mashad when a horse slips on the snow. The scene is highly reminiscent of Sackville-West's observation: "The team that cannot drag the wagon up the hill, piteously willing but underfed, overloaded, straining, stumbling, sweating":

They cut off the girth and whipped the horse so hard that it got up. He was shaking in agony. They had dyed the horses' manes and tails with henna, and put blue talismans round their necks to protect them from evil eyes. The necks of the thin and consumptive horses were bent under the weight of the collar, and a mixture of sweat and snow dripped down their bodies. The strong black whip cracked up in the air and came down on their buttocks, each time making their flesh jump up. But they were so old and weak that they had lost all energy to revolt and rebel. By every blow of the whip, they bit and kicked each other. Bloody foam came off their mouths every time they coughed.<sup>8</sup>

Pat is a Scottish pedigree dog whose master stops for a short break at Varamin, being on a long journey. Pat follows a bitch and ends up getting stuck in the drains which lead to the garden of the bitch's owners. By the time Pat

manages to pull itself out of the drains, wounded, hungry and exhausted, its master has given up hope of finding it and driven off:

It was midnight when the sound of its own moaning woke it up. Frightened, it roamed around a couple of alley ways, sniffed the walls, and ran around the streets for some time. In the end it felt very hungry. When it returned to the village square ... someone carrying a loaf of bread called it, saying 'come, come', and threw a piece of warm bread towards it. After a moment of hesitation, Pat ate the bread and wagged its tail for the man. The man put the loaf on the bakery's front bar, cautiously stroked Pat's head, and gently opened its leash with both his hands. ... But as soon as Pat wagged its tail again and got closer to the shop-keeper, its side was visited by a hard kick, and it ran off crying. ... From that day onwards Pat had not received anything from these people except kicks, bricks, blows by wooden clubs, as if they were all Pat's mortal enemies and took pleasure from torturing it.<sup>9</sup>

Sometimes they just hit the dog; at other times they threw something for it to eat, but as soon as it had eaten it, they would exact the price from it by kicks and bricks. It was only on one occasion that someone was kind and gentle to Pat: a man driving through the village just like Pat's master, clearly well-to-do or he would not have driven a private car at the time. "The man dipped pieces of bread in yoghurt and threw them to Pat. The dog was eating the pieces of bread while fixing its hazel eyes, which reflected a feeling of helplessness, on the man's face, wagging its tail to show its gratitude." For once "it had a hearty meal without the meal being interrupted by beating". Pat began to follow the man and he too stroked it from time to time. But in no time he got into his car and drove off.

Pat was devastated. It ran after the car with the whole of its existence; it ran and ran and ran until it fell down with total exhaustion. After "two winters" of wandering around, living with hunger, being beaten and, worst of all, loneliness and hopelessness, Pat had lost the will to live. It gave up, lying down in death agony, while three vultures hovered over its head waiting "to pull out its hazel eyes".

As noted, however, there is more to the story than a fictionalized account of the cruelty of humans to animals – in this case a stray and wandering dog which has lost its master. Pat's tragedy is not just what it experiences but also the fact that the experience is entirely new, one that it had not known before. It is not a stray dog as they were in Iran at the time, even though it has been lost and gone astray. Pat has been uprooted from its home and has to face the inhospitable nature and cruelty of humans at one and the same time. Stray cats and dogs (i.e. those whose parents and ancestors as far back as the primeval chaos have been running from roof to roof) belong to a different race. Not only are they used to being kicked, beaten and chased away, but from the moment of their birth they have been learning the technique of avoiding the worst and perfecting the art of managing to survive. They suffer nevertheless but they regard their fate as part of nature, of existence itself. They have no other criteria by which to judge their

miserable lot. They have not had a home to remember its peace and security. They have never been stroked with kindness to feel its absence. They are born aliens; they cannot feel alienated:

What tortured Pat most was its need for affection. It felt like a child that has been constantly pushed around and cursed but has not lost its sensibility. It was in need of affection especially in this new and painful existence. Its eyes were begging for it; it was ready to forfeit its life for anyone who would show it some kind of affection, who would care to stroke its back.<sup>10</sup>

Pat had seen love and affection all its life, yet all it faced now was hatred and hostility. It had both loved and had been loved. If life is painful without being loved, it is also painful without loving:

It needed to show its affection to someone; show him selfless devotion; show him faithfulness, adoration. But no-one was interested. Every eye it stirred at, it saw nothing in it but anger and evil. Everything it did to attract the attention of humans, it looked as if it added to their hostility.<sup>11</sup>

This is a Scottish pedigree dog with a golden past: good home, good food and kind owners. Pat remembers its childhood playfulness, first with its brother, whose soft ears it used to bite, and they would jump up and down, get up and run; then with its master's son "whom it would chase to the end of the garden, bark and pull his jacket by its teeth". Now times had changed, but there was dual suffering: once for hunger and persecution; twice for the nostalgia of the golden age.

The theme is familiar from other of Hedayat's psycho-fictions, except that in those other stories the stray and wandering being is not an animal but a human being. The narrator of "Buried Alive" says that while he was lying down contemplating suicide he wished he was a little child once again and his nurse was telling him the sweet tales which warmed up his eyes to sleep.<sup>12</sup> In *The Blind Owl*, the nostalgia for a carefree childhood reveals itself on several occasions. For example: "I wish I could go to sleep like when I was a little innocent child – well and trouble-free";<sup>13</sup> "eternity had no meaning for me except to be able to play with the harlot on the banks of River Soren [just like when we were children] and just for one moment to shut my eyes and put my head on her lap".<sup>14</sup>

But there was one nostalgic sense which for Pat outdid all the rest: the time when it was a suckling, when it was completely dependent, when it enjoyed the instinctive love of its mother:

Among the various smells which Pat was sensing the smell of the rice pudding in front of the peddler boy gave it the highest sense of intoxication – this white liquid which looked so much like its mother's milk. It suddenly felt a feeling of numbness. It remembered when as a child it would suck that warm and nourishing liquid from its mother's breasts, and the mother's soft

and strong tongue would lick its body. The strong smell which it sensed in the bosom of its mother, next to its brother. . . . As soon as it had had enough . . . a stream of warmth would run into its whole body. Its head would get heavy, its hands would let go of its mother's bosom, and a deep sleep would follow – *what more joy could it have than to naturally squeeze its mother's breasts for milk which would come out without any trouble, any struggle.*<sup>15</sup>

This is clearly a case of the wish to return to the safety and security of the womb. It is to be found, usually in tacit and allusive forms, in many if not most of Hedayat's psycho-fictions. His short story "Dark Room" contains its most explicit as well as most impressive expression. The narrator meets the recluse in a coach bound for a provincial city and he tells him that his "biggest problem is to be with others" and that he has always felt he is an outsider everywhere. He is of noble descent and explains that he has been born lazy. "Effort and enterprise" he goes on to assert "belong to empty people who try to fill their own vacuum in this way. They belong to the miserable little lot who don't know where they come from." Being born to a high society, one does not feel a vacuum to fill, and so one becomes lazy and does not struggle for life: "But my ancestors who themselves were empty people worked hard, thought hard and saw much, until they filled in their own vacuum and became lazy. And I have now inherited their laziness."<sup>16</sup>

He goes on to say that "in this environment" only a bunch of thievish, ignorant and shameless people have a right to live, reminding the reader of the *rajjaleh-ha* or rabble of *The Blind Owl* and other psycho-fictions, or, from the animal world, the tomcat of "The Three Drops of Blood", which attracts Nazi, Siyavosh's beloved she-cat. The recluse has built an oval room in his house which is decorated in red and is lit up by a red light, pretending that he has imitated the photographer's darkroom for printing photos. But its shape is oval and, although this is in the subtext, intended to be a replica of the mother's womb. The narrator spells it out:

What you're looking for is just like the condition of the foetus in its mother's womb who, without having to try hard and flatter others curls up in its soft and warm bed, and its needs are automatically seen to. *It is that same nostalgia for the lost paradise which, deep down, you can find in every human being.*

"That same nostalgia" now reveals itself in the story of a pedigree dog which has been uprooted from its origins, its paradise. It reminds the reader of Rumi's line: This homeland is not Egypt, not Iraq, not Syria/This homeland is nowhere but Nolandia (Utopia). And it is this third layer or second subtext of the story of "Stray Dog" which makes plain its allegorical nature, pointing to a psychological as well as an ontological problem that man and animal alike might come to face. It is not therefore accidental when in the description of Pat at the beginning of the story we read:

In the depths of its eyes one could see a human-like soul... An endless something waved in its eyes, carrying a message which was not possible to discern... Not only could one see a similarity between its eyes and those of human beings, but also a kind of equality.<sup>17</sup>

And all this – nobility of the soul, alienation from the environment and nostalgia for a golden past – makes up some of the most basic elements and recurring themes of Hedayat’s psycho-fictions.

## Notes

- 1 See further Hushang Philsooph, Chapter 12, this volume.
- 2 In his first encounter with his lifelong friend Taqi Razavi at St Louis school in Tehran he told him off for bringing a live lizard for demonstration to the natural history class. See Homa Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat, The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer* (London and New York, paperback edn, 2002), 2: 20.
- 3 For a definition and discussion of Hedayat’s psycho-fictions see the Introduction to this volume.
- 4 See “Sag-e Velgard”, in *Sag-e Velgard* (Tehran, 1968): 13–14.
- 5 See Sadeq Hedayat, *Ensan va Hayvan* (1925), Jahangir Hedayat (ed.) (Tehran, 2nd edn, 2002): 82.
- 6 Vita Sackville-West, *Passenger to Tehran* (London, 1991; 1st edn, 1926): 60.
- 7 *Ibid.*: 60–61.
- 8 See “Alaviyeh Khanom”, in *Alaviyeh Khanom va Velengari* (Tehran, 1963): 23.
- 9 *Sag-e Velgard*: 22–24.
- 10 *Ibid.*: 25–26.
- 11 *Ibid.*: 26.
- 12 “Zنده beh Gur”, in *Zنده beh Gur* (Tehran, 1963): 11.
- 13 See *Buf-e Kur* (Tehran, 1972): 64.
- 14 *Ibid.*: 110.
- 15 *Sag-e Velgard*: 17–18.
- 16 See H. Katouzian, “Bazgasht beh Zehdan dar Tarik-khaneh-ye Sadeq Hedayat”, in *idem.*, *Sadeq Hedayat va Marg-e Nevisandeh* (Tehran, 4th impression, 2005): 138; emphasis added.
- 17 *Sag-e Velgard*: 13.

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