



Sadeq Hedayat



Hedayat was born in Tehran on February 17, 1903, to a northern Iranian aristocratic family. He was named Sadeq after his paternal grandfather (Nayyer al-Mulk). According to his brother, Mahmud, Sadeq was the center of the family's attention:

"Throughout his childhood, my brother Sadeq was loved by all the members of the family, the children as well as the adults. His childish antics and his sweet and pleasant speech amused us all. Around the age of five or six, well before the expected time, he became calm and collected. He no longer displayed any desire for childish pranks. Rather he became an introvert avoiding the company of other children."

At the age of six, Hedayat was sent to the Elmiyeh school where he studied until the end of his elementary school years. Then, about 1915, He joined the Dar al-Fonun where he began to receive a Western education under the supervision of European teachers. Soon, however, he lost the desire to pursue a rigorous course of study. Mathematics and its allied subjects bored him. He opted for learning French instead. His family then registered him at the Saint Louis Academy.

In his late teens, Hedayat broke with his family; although he occupied a room in his ancestral home for most of the rest of his life in Iran, he did not participate in his family's social life. Nor did he seek, during his school days or later, to use his family's great influence to secure himself a lucrative position.

His "new" life at the Saint Louis Academy consisted of studying the lives of great men of the past and learning French and English. In order to receive current and pertinent Western literary materials, he began corresponding with relevant European literary circles. They, in turn, supplied Hedayat with the titles that he needed. "Knowledge of the Unknown" seems to have been his main interest at the time--the books he read were on the astrolabe, on the art of divining and about the occult (ruh shenasi). He also wrote. For example, he alone wrote the entire school newspaper, published and distributed it. To this paper he contributed such pieces as "Zaban-i Hal-i yek Olaq dar Vaqt-i Marg" ("The Silent Language of a Donkey at the Time of Death"). Some of these early writings which now exist only in the newspapers and journals of the time must be included in the new editions of Neveshteha-i Parakandeh (Scattered Notes). He graduated from the Saint Louis Academy in 1925-26.

Hedayat completed research on and published his first study of Umar Khayyam, entitled "Ruba'iyat-i Hakim Umar Khayyam" ("The Quatrains of the Philosopher Umar Khayyam"), in 1923 when he was twenty years of age. This was during the final years of the Qajar dynasty, the dynasty in which his family held high offices close to the court.

Hedayat's study of Khayyam led him to examine the philosophies of two other Aryans, Zoroaster and the Buddha. In 1924, he published his first impressions in a brief study entitled "Ensan va Heyvan," ("Man and Animal"). Like Zoroaster's "Gatha of the Ox Soul," "Ensan va Heyvan" is primarily a defense of the animal kingdom against the ravages of man. And as do the dictates of the Buddha, it condemns the killing of animals for any purpose. Personally convinced, later on Hedayat became a vegetarian himself and remained a vegetarian to the end of his life (see below).

Neither this study nor the piece on Khayyam has any claim to stylistic achievement or uniqueness. "Man and Animal" does, however, show promise. Sometime in 1925-26, Hedayat traveled as one of a group of students whom Reza Shah had ordered to study in Europe and to return as teachers. He was to study engineering in Belgium but soon gave it up. He was then sent to Paris to study architecture. This he gave up for dentistry. It did not take long before it was clear that none of these profession-oriented courses could stimulate him as much as the study of the arts. Consequently, he abandoned all such studies to spend his time traveling and

sightseeing. For the next four years Hedayat committed himself to artistic and literary studies and to writing. While in Paris in 1926 he published an article entitled "La Magie en Perse" in *Le Voile d'Isis*. Using an analysis similar to the 1923 piece on Umar Khayyam, Hedayat investigated the origins of magic in ancient Iran and included a somewhat detailed account of the Zoroastrian pantheon, principles, beliefs, and eschatology.

After a brief stay in Paris, Hedayat traveled to Besançon and roomed at a boarding house for a while. Upon his return to Paris in 1927 he tried to commit suicide by throwing himself into the river Marne; he was rescued. The reason for this attempt at self-destruction is not known. In a letter dated May 3, 1928, to his brother he explains the incident cryptically: "I did something really crazy, but luckily it did not do me in!"



In Europe, Hedayat became extremely self-conscious, devoting a good part of his time to the resolution of the problem of life and death. To this end he studied the works of Rainer Maria Rilke, especially *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*. Rilke's adoration of death so intrigued Hedayat that the latter wrote his own commentary entitled "Marg" ("Death") in 1927. This two-page commentary was published in Berlin in the journal *Iranshahr*. Here Hedayat extolled death as if he were inexorably attracted to it. In the same year he also published *Favayed-i Giyah-khari* (*The Advantages of Vegetarianism*) in Berlin, again in *Iranshahr*. This longer study is considered by some to be merely a revised edition of the earlier "Man and Animal" but by others, including Hassan Qa'emian, who later collected and, in 1955, published Hedayat's *Neveshteha-i Parakandeh* (*Scattered Notes*), to be entirely new. Whether a revision or a new piece, the volume indicates that Hedayat sustained his interest in the subject.

Little is known about Hedayat's life and activities in France before 1930, the year he returned to Tehran. We know, however, that he was on government scholarship, did not have to work to sustain himself, and had a good deal of time to think and possibly to write.

Upon his return to Tehran in 1930, Hedayat published his first collection of short stories, entitled *Zinda be-Gur* (*Buried Alive*). Four of the stories in this collection had been completed while Hedayat was still in Europe; the rest were completed in Tehran (see bibliography).

It was now that Hedayat's government scholarship was cut. He had free residence at his family's home, but he had to find a job to sustain himself. At the time, writing was not a profession whereby one could earn a living. Hedayat, therefore, sought employment outside the government in the National Bank of Iran. Here he worked until 1933.

In Tehran, Hedayat joined the ranks of the students who had returned from Europe and who were facing repression, censorship, and threats of incarceration for their criticism of the regime. Among these returnees there were many who shared and supported Hedayat's antimonarchical, progressive, and isolationist views on the course that Iran should take. Indeed, three such young men, Mojtaba Minovi, Mas'ud Farzad and Bozorg Alavi, convinced Hedayat to organize a group to reflect their opinions. Hedayat agreed and soon a group called the Rab'a (Foursome) was ridiculing such conservative literati as Taqizadeh, Hekmat, Qazvini, and Eqbal-i Ashtiyani. This latter group clung steadfastly to the Iranian traditional literary staple, poetry, and their main contributions to literature were annotated editions of medieval manuscripts. As expected, no sooner had the new group begun its activities than it was denounced by the conservatives as "extremist" and was duly shunned by the majority. Gradually, however, the Rab'a furthered a body of fresh talent consisting of those musicians, writers, and painters who did not wish to be identified with the conservatives. Many politicians who had been searching for a forum for self-expression also joined the group. Among these new members mention can be made of Mas'ud Razavi, Parviz Natel Khanlari, Sadeq Chubak, Abol Qasem Anjavi Shirazi, and Hassan Qa'emian.

After becoming acquainted with these talented individuals, Hedayat set about educating those who needed his help to improve their social standing. For instance, he assisted many in polishing their manuscripts for publication. At times he went as far as rewriting sections of their works to make them acceptable to certain editors. Thus, in Tehran, two rival literary groups came into existence. One was the traditional group, the members of which worked from desks and offices. The other was the Rab'a whose members gathered in downtown teahouses and cafes. About the activities of the Rab'a, Minovi says:

Each of us had his own, distinct personality Normally we gathered in teahouses and restaurants and, if drinking is not considered a deviation from righteousness, at times we even consumed liquids harder than water! One could even hear us debate issues critically and with utmost vigor. Often people blamed us--some even hated us--but their opposition could do us no more harm than to prevent us from playing chess We

fought for freedom and we fought with zeal. Hedayat was the hub of our operation. At first we thought that by recognizing Hedayat's value as a literary figure, we were encouraging him, but soon it was obvious that he encouraged us. He was the center and we were the satellites revolving around him."

The works that Hedayat produced between 1930 and 1937 fall into three categories: (a) reformist literature, in which the activities of the Rab'a are clearly discernible; (b) works of fiction, primarily short stories, novelettes, and a novella; and (c) research dealing with Iranian history and men of letters.

In the present study we shall not address the activities of the Rab'a. Works such as Vagh Vagh-i Sahab (Mr. Bow Wow), produced to disdain the handling of contemporary issues, need separate attention as satire and humor rather than as fiction per se. Besides, these are co-authored works and the other contributors, such as Mas'ud Farzad (in the case of Vagh Vagh-i Sahab), will have to be studied before the works can be justly assessed.

In the genre of fiction Hedayat published his second volume of short stories, entitled *Se Qatreh Khun* (Three Drops of Blood), in 1932, followed by his third collection *Sayeh Rowshan* (Chiaroscuro) in 1933. Both volumes must have been received casually: there is no mention of them or of Hedayat in the journals of the time. After *Sayeh Rowshan*, Hedayat published a novelette entitled "Alaviyeh Khanum" ("Madame Alaviyeh") in 1934. This piece gained some prominence, not so much as a story but as an example of Hedayat's dexterity in handling language. This positive development, deriving from almost half a decade of writing and experimenting with styles, boosted Hedayat's career.'

Hedayat's contributions to a better recognition of Iran's past and of her men of learning, like his contributions to the Rab'a materials, deserve a separate study. Suffice it to mention here that Hedayat spent a good deal of his time in 1934-35 re-examining the works of Umar Khayyam, especially the philosophy that the sage had incorporated into his Quatrains. The result of these investigations appeared in print in 1934-35 as a most concise, well-organized, and informative introduction to the Quatrains entitled *Taraniha-i Khayyam* (Khayyam's Quatrains) and illustrated by the painter Darvish. In the same study Hedayat also examined Khayyam's link to Iran's Aryan past on the one hand and to the philosophy of the Buddha on the other. This latter occupied a good deal of Hedayat's time during this period. He even incorporated an entire story about a Buddhist commander into the *Sayeh Rowshan* or *Chiaroscuro* collection.



While re-examining the philosophy of Khayyam, Hedayat worked at the Chamber of Commerce in Tehran. Office work he found tedious, repetitive, and unproductive. He preferred the more relaxed life of learning and investigation. He sums up his nonliterary career, saying:

"I was not well-known in places where I worked. My bosses were always dissatisfied with my performance, and when I left them, they were always happy to see the back of me!"

Hedayat had many friends, both Iranian and European. He corresponded quite regularly and entertained his friends and associates either in his residence or in a nearby cafe. Among his associates, one who kept up with him almost to the last days is Jan Rypka. Their association began in Tehran in 1934-35 when the Czech writer was there learning about Persian literature. While discussing the current literary trends in the country, Parviz Natel Khanlari, Rypka's teacher at the time, had mentioned the works of Sadeq Hedayat. Rypka later examined one of Hedayat's stories and decided he should see the author. He records his first impressions as follows:

"Hedayat was a slender kind of chap. He was of medium height and had an intelligent face. I shall always remember his simplicity, warm smile, polite wit as well as his pervasive and vivacious disposition. Whenever we met thereafter, my feelings towards him remained the same. He had an unchanging personality, one quite in tune with his works."

At the time of this meeting Hedayat was working with the Rab'a and was, as mentioned earlier, studying the works of Khayyam. This effort completed, Hedayat had once again to seek a new place of employment. He joined the General Department of Constructions and remained there until 1936.

The gradual rise of the Rab'a and their fame as a staunch antimonarchical, anti-Islamic group frightened the government. In 1936, as the world faced the threat of another war, the Rab'a became a target for annihilation. So, in the same year, for purely political reasons, it was officially disbanded; some members were jailed and some went into hiding. Hedayat chose to seek a new forum in India. There, he hoped, he would polish his Pahlavi (Middle Persian), examine first hand some of the Middle Persian documents and gain a better understanding of Iran's past. More than anything, he wanted to delineate what is Persian and what is Arabic in the cultural mix usually known as Islamic. He also hoped that in India he could publish some of his works held back for fear of censorship and, more importantly, that he could write down some of his thoughts--thoughts that

he had not dared put down in Iran for fear of search and seizure by the government.

Hedayat stayed in India until sometime in 1938-39. There he published *Buf-i Kur* (The Blind Owl) in mimeograph form and marked it "Not for sale in Iran." This work, Vincent Monteil believes, had already been completed by 1930 but withheld from publication because of Hedayat's fear of censorship and retaliation against himself and his family. Monteil's contention cannot be refuted, given the political context. But would Hedayat have been able to write his masterpiece so early in his career?

From Hedayat's letters to Jan Rypka it can be gathered that his stay in India was not happy. Impecunious as always, he had to live with a friend. He writes:

"About six months ago I turned all my worldly possessions, valued at less than a grain of barley, into banknotes. Now, after suffering much hardship and overcoming many obstacles, I have succeeded in reaching far-off India where I may be able to earn a morsel of food and pray for the well-being of my friends. My monetary situation is not noteworthy. For the present I am sponging off one of my friends..."

It was in India that Hedayat began seriously to question the merit of a literary career in Iranian circumstances. He felt that his career as a writer had gained him nothing but enemies. He even considered breaking away and entering a new venture. In a letter to Rypka he says:

"For some time now I have been taking lessons in Pahlavi from Mr. Bahram Angalsaria. [He means T. D. Anklesaria, the famous Pahlavi teacher. By playing on the first part of Anklesaria's name, i.e., writing Angal--parasite--instead of Ankle, he ridicules his own future status were he to become a learned Pahlavi teacher.] But I believe that this will benefit me neither here below nor in the hereafter ... Now I realize that all that I have done and do has been and is futile... Recently I have been entertaining the thought of going into business with some partner and opening a small shop. But we lack sufficient capital ... I sent you a copy of a story entitled "'Alaviyeh Khanum" ("Madame Alaviyeh") some time ago. Now I have a novella, several travelogues, and about twenty stories ready for publication. As of now, however, there seems to be no prospect of their being published at any time soon."

This letter was posted (Bombay, January 29, 1937) about six months after Hedayat's departure from Iran. In it he refers to *The Blind Owl* as a manuscript. We do not hear much from Hedayat until he writes Rypka again (September 5, 1939). In this letter, posted in Tehran, he tells Rypka of his own situation and expresses concern at the takeover of the Czech writer's homeland and for the writer's well-being.

With the help of Master Anklesaria, Hedayat made a number of translations from the Pahlavi into modern Persian. Of these *Zand-i Human Yasht* (Commentary on the Vohuman Hymn) and *Karnama-i Ardashir-i Babakan* (The Deeds of Ardeshir of the House of Babak) were published in Tehran in 1944 and 1945, respectively.

In India, Hedayat traveled far and wide, especially after meeting Mirza Esma'il-i Shirazi, Vazir of the maharajah of Mysore. At the maharajah's request, the Vazir invited Hedayat to his palace where Hedayat stayed for a fortnight. During this time he met many prominent Indian personalities, interviewed the maharajah himself and attended many parties. When palace formalities eventually caught up with Hedayat and he decided to leave, the maharajah even offered to pay his train ticket to Delhi. This Hedayat refused, even though he was in need of money.

Hedayat fled to India to prevent the government from incarcerating him along with Bozorg Alavi and many others. But he also hoped, while there, to find a way to commit to writing some of the works that he had held in his mind waiting an opportune moment. In India, where he could write freely, without fear of censors or government confiscators, Hedayat poured out his frustrations, not so much for others to read as to free himself from their pressure. The result, of course, is *The Blind Owl*, a work noteworthy for its author's confession of his inadequacies and for his eulogy of figures who have shown perseverance and self-motivation--not to mention compassion, sensitivity, and humanity.

Upon his return from India, Hedayat found to his dismay that the situation in Iran had gone from bad to worse. Of the repressive rule and the stifling of the intellectuals in the early 1940s Parviz Natel Khanlari says:

"For a three to four year period--until after the events of Shahrivar 1320 [August 1941]--there existed no literary magazine throughout Persia, except the official magazine *Iran-i Imruz* whose editor was held in trust by the police ..."

Nevertheless, Hedayat set about living as he had lived before his trip to India. Again he worked in the National Bank of Iran. Then in 1943 he joined the *Journal of Music* and, a year later, moved to the Faculty of Fine Arts. He worked in various capacities in the latter organization till the end of his stay in Iran.

By 1942, the shock waves of the Second World War had reached Iran. Reza Shah had abdicated in favor of his son and crown prince, Mohammad Reza. The change, which allowed a temporary relaxation of censorship, gave the artists and writers in the capital an opportunity to regroup and to assert their views on the socio-political

and literary trends of the day. Hedayat seized this opportunity and published his *Blind Owl* piecemeal in the daily *Iran*.

Another major change on the socio-political and, eventually, literary scene at this time was the emergence of the Tudeh party. Beginning among the youth who had been imprisoned with veteran Communists, the Tudeh party emerged from Reza Shah's prisons with a set of plans and goals for the future of Iran. Supported by prominent men such as Ehsan Tabari and Bozorg Alavi, it soon found numerous followers in Tehran and spread to the northern cities. Hedayat, it seems, did not join the party officially but kept close contact with its upper echelon through Alavi and others. His major concern now was to redirect his own writing in a way that, rather than emphasizing philosophy, would concentrate on mirroring the realities of the time. He wanted for every Iranian an opportunity to read his material, but more than that, as with the Rab'a members, an opportunity to identify with his concerns. The more he delved into the insurmountable social problems of Iran, however, the more he became depressed and dejected. The atrocities of the monarchy, the clergy, the landed gentry, the nobility, and the intelligentsia were such that one could not see where even to begin to reform the society. To ward off the depression of genuine helplessness, Hedayat turned to drugs and alcohol. And to expose corruption he turned to a less symbolic, nevertheless allegorical mode, of writing. Hedayat the realist was born.

His last volume of short stories was entitled *Sag-e Velgard* (*The Stray Dog*). This collection, published in 1942, contained eight stories, written mostly before his trip to India. Later in 1944 he published a volume of humor and satire entitled *Velengar-i* (*Tittle-Tattle*). This volume, like *Mr. Bow Wow*, must be analyzed by a critic of satire. In the same year he paid a two-month visit to Tashkent in Soviet Uzbekistan, where he was intrigued by the abundance of manuscripts dealing with aspects of Persian literature, life, and culture. That year, he also published a rather simplistic but scathing story entitled "*Ab-i Zendegi*" ("*The Water of Life*"). The trip to Tashkent and the proletarian piece "*The Water of Life*" could be related to a possible affiliation with the Tudeh party. Bozorg Alavi, an ex-Rab'a member, was now a prominent figure in the party, but Hedayat's actual relation to the Tudeh remains unknown. "*The Water of Life*" was followed in 1945 by another direct attack on the top. This work, entitled *Haji Aqa* (*Haji Aqa*), surpassed "*The Water of Life*" in political daring. In it, Reza Shah was portrayed as a peddler, selling Iranian resources to foreign and domestic "customers" alike.

With the loosely constructed *Haji Aqa*, Hedayat's career as a short-story writer had come full circle. It had started with mild criticism in *Buried Alive*; reached the height of self-analysis and artistic criticism in *The Blind Owl*, and had ended with abusive criticism in *Haji Aqa*. There now remained very little of the artistry and the creative force that had produced *The Blind Owl* and, more than anyone else, Hedayat himself was aware of that. Indeed as early as *The Blind Owl* Hedayat laments his lack of talent for the task. Now, however, he was caught on the horns of a dilemma. On one hand, the translation of *The Blind Owl* into French had brought him international fame; on the other hand, drug addiction and alcohol had sapped his ability to present works comparable to *The Blind Owl* or even "*The Stray Dog*." The end of a creative career was in sight.

In the 1930s he was happy to work with the Rab'a and to create a forum for self-expression of the youth of that time. In the forties he apparently channeled the same kind of enthusiasm into the direction of the Tudeh party. He hoped that the party would eventually set the Iranians free both from the bondage of the Pahlavis and of their Western overlords as well as from the snare of Islam. His last piece of fiction, "*Farda*" ("*Tomorrow*"), published in 1946, reveals an unusual degree of sympathy for the rank and file of the party.

In 1947 Hedayat participated in the first Congress of Iranian Writers. The Congress, which was sponsored by the Iranian and Russian cultural centers, was dominated by conservative writers; as the proceedings show, the ex-Rab'a members like Alavi and Hedayat had little room to assert themselves even though the latter was on the board of directors of the Congress.

Tup-i Morvari (*The Pearl Cannon*) is Hedayat's last satire. It was written in 1947 but remained unpublished until the early days of the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Even when published then, it was immediately confiscated. In *The Pearl Cannon* Hedayat becomes even more abusive than in *Haji Aqa*. But Hedayat knew that mere abuse was not sufficient to impress his critics or his admirers. The frustration of loneliness, drugs, and his inability to produce the works his public expected drove him deeper and deeper into himself. Finally, in 1948, Hedayat exploded once more—but for the last time. In an Introduction written for his longtime friend and associate Hassan Qa'emian to *Goruh-i Mahkumin* (*In the Penal Colony*), a Persian translation of Franz Kafka's work, Hedayat examined man's role in the cosmos. He found man helpless against society, time, and other forces and as obedient to them as a dog. He lamented that man must die like a dog at their hand because, as he said, man does not have the ability to master these unknown forces. This is the last piece to be published during Hedayat's lifetime.

Hedayat, according to Vincent Monteil, loved music, especially the works of Beethoven and Tchaikovsky. Often he hummed the "*Pathetique*" as he went about his work. Hedayat also painted. There is not much left of his paintings, but what exists has been brought together by Hassan Qa'emian and published in *Dar Bare-i Zohur va 'Ala'em-i Zohur* (*About Occultation and its Signs*).

Hedayat was a recluse by nature. Rather than confront people and voice his opinion about contemporary socio-political issues, he tried to influence the public through his essays and stories. To this end, he organized his thoughts independently and on a high plane, avoiding the daily squabbles of his peers who jockeyed for better

and more lucrative social positions. Hedayat so valued his freedom from social bonds that, although he had a number of female friends, he did not marry. Moreover, he saw little merit in the institution of marriage." It comes as a surprise to learn this about a person as dedicated to the principles of the Zoroastrian faith as was Hedayat. But once we remember that Hedayat's interest in these religions was motivated more by art than by faith, his equivocation becomes less puzzling. For instance, along with the teachings of Zoroaster, Hedayat followed the precepts of the Buddha. According to Buddhist traditions, marriage leads to birth and rebirth, a process that necessarily perpetuates misery, old age, and death. Hedayat thought the individual capable of undertaking to end rebirth and he followed this line of thought to the end of his life.

Until 1974 when the author of this book took exception to the critics who, since the 1940s, had attributed Hedayat's creative genius to drug addiction and lunacy, little was known about Hedayat's life and craft. Kamshad's study, published in 1966, although quite comprehensive, revealed little of the depth of Hedayat's knowledge of the world outside Iran, especially India. Since then, many scholars have elaborated on the assertions in the 1974 study and have contributed to our understanding of Hedayat. 19 Moreover, it is now readily accepted that Hedayat was an excellent craftsman, dedicated equally to the craft of short-story writing and to the enhancement of Iranian culture and its liberation from foreign domination. The contention that his writings are hallucinations is encountering more and more resistance.

During the last years, Hedayat spent much of his time translating for pay the works of Kafka and other European writers. The dissolution of the Tudeh party, alleged to have made an attempt on the life of the Shah in 1948, further drove Hedayat to translations and to mute forbearance of his fate. Years went by: 1949, 1950, 1951. He did not produce anything substantial. Nor did circumstances change, and Hedayat became increasingly restless. In a letter to Jamalzadeh, another longtime friend, he wrote:

"The crux of the matter is that I am tired of it all. It has to do with my nerves. I pass the night in a situation much worse than that of a sentenced criminal. I am tired of life. Nothing gives me incentive or comfort and I cannot deceive myself any more. A gap has severed the line of communication between life, circumstances, etc., and me. We cannot understand each other any more."

Hedayat left Iran at the end of 1950. He went to Paris. There he visited some of his earlier haunts, an exercise that frustrated him further and drove him deeper into depression and self-destructiveness. His stay in Paris lasted four months. There, on April 4, 1951, he apparently gassed himself, ending a decade of misery, seclusion, addiction, fear, and loneliness.

Hedayat was a sensitive man. When leaving Iran, he could not bear to say goodbye to his aged parents at the airport. He carried a bag of soil as a token of his devotion to his motherland; he also wrote a rather chilling note as a consolation to his friends and admirers: "We left and broke your heart. See you on Doomsday. That's all!"

The circumstances under which Hedayat lived his last years are not at all clear. For a number of reasons one could call his final days tragic. One tragedy is that although he had done his best to raise his readers' consciousness of their own plight, he had not succeeded even in familiarizing them with the major issues of the time. This realization, coming at a time when his physical and mental abilities could no longer support a new campaign (a short stint began with "The Water of Life" and ended with "Tomorrow"), distressed him more than anything else. Then, too, his critics were not treating him any better. Equally ignorant of the true issues before them, they were happy to question his sanity, to discredit his ability to write in Persian and, above all, to accuse him of creating a model of self-destruction for the youth of Iran. That the notes of a number of recent young suicides cited the influence of *The Blind Owl* further supported the critics. Moreover, the government and the court exerted a great deal of pressure. The latter could not ignore the tarnished image of the reigning monarch's father. Besides, in *The Pearl Cannon*, reproduced under the assumed name of Hadi Sidaqat, Hedayat had insulted the royal family not by merely insinuating but indeed by openly stating much that could not be tolerated about even an ordinary household. Together these forces first tried to push Hedayat into their camp. Here he was supposed to live a happy life rather than, like Khayyam, to write for the ignorant and to die in contempt; but Hedayat refused their offer. Then they decided to expel him from Iran.

And indeed life in Iran had become more and more unbearable, especially when many factions proclaimed their enmity, and first among them the court. Hedayat thus decided to go back to Paris. In Paris, however, he was beset by a totally different, though equally powerful, enemy. Old and irrepensible memories of his youth were returning and Hedayat had no option but to give them room to pass; but they would not leave. They became stronger and more telling. To this was added the fear of assassins who might have been engaged to forestall the return to Iran of someone who would spoil the delicate British machinations designed to secure the Shah's position and British interests. Thus, like Gholam and Zaghi, the insomniac characters in "Tomorrow," Hedayat could not sleep at night. In short he was being hounded by the very concerns from which he had tried to forge a solution for the misery of Iranians. Now, having failed to affect the situation, these intentions were coming back to settle on Hedayat's own threshold. By this time, however, they had grown into concrete fears such as persecution, execution, and extermination. "The Message of Kafka" clearly underscores the initial impact of these disturbing thoughts on the helpless author.

The circumstances in which Hedayat lived also obscure the cause of his death. Was it suicide or homicide? Here we shall discuss both possibilities but we shall not commit ourselves to either. Before an answer can be

given, we shall need to research more into the circumstances of Hedayat's death, especially his suicidal tendency on the one hand and his antimonarchical tendencies on the other.

Certain facts suggest that Hedayat had been an obstacle to the Pahlavi regime. And this despite his moralistic views opposing an actively political stand. But Hedayat had openly criticized foreign intervention in Iranian affairs, and he had criticized both the regime and those factions in Iran that condoned the protection of foreign interest. In that the regime prevented its malaise about Hedayat's works from filtering down to Hedayat's readers, it could also cloak any measures it wished to take to punish the writer. The Iranians having read and heard the official reception of Hedayat's works could hardly doubt the veracity of an allegation of suicide. This, however, is one side of the story. The other side has to do with Hedayat himself.

There is no doubt that Hedayat tried to take his own life in 1927 when he was in France. There is also no doubt that he was attracted to death, the afterlife, the existence of a soul and similar subjects. Furthermore, there is no question that in later life, whenever he was depressed, he thought of suicide; he even talks about it in his letters to his close friends.

Our examination of Hedayat's fiction shows that the author's life can be divided into two distinct periods. One, before *The Blind Owl*, is a hopeful and constructive period, though it began with an attempt at self-destruction. The other, post-Owl period is one in which he had already accepted his own uselessness. To subdue his frustration he has taken to drinking and drugs. Often he becomes depressed; to soothe his nerves he writes abusive pieces addressing issues which he had addressed earlier but had failed to influence. Hedayat's death then could well have been the result of a difficult moment, such as the 1927 incident, or a well-thought-out plan to leave this world before old age set in. Nevertheless, the circumstances of Hedayat's death, as far as his literary career is concerned, are academic. It is clear that in 1951 Hedayat had neither the inclination nor the ability to create works like *The Blind Owl*. And this must be considered a predominant factor in deciding whether Hedayat's death was a homicide or suicide.

By Iraj Bashiri



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