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Homa Katouzian
University of Oxford
and
Mohamad Tavakoli
University of Toronto

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His work and his wondrous world
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Sadeq Hedayat

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To the memory of Firoozeh Khazrai (1959–2005)

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Contributors

Michael Beard is the co-editor of the series Middle East Literature in Translation for Syracuse University Press, and co-editor of the journal *Middle Eastern Literatures: Incorporating Edebiyat*. He is the author of *Hedayat's Blind Owl and the West*. He teaches in the English Department at the University of North Dakota.

Jahangir Hedayat, Sadeq Hedayat's nephew, is a writer and literary critic based in Tehran, with numerous short stories and critical reviews published in Persian. He is the director of Hedayat Heritage, editor of the Sadeq Hedayat website, and director of the annual competition for the Sadeq Hedayat Literary Award. His most recent works include *Sadeq Hedayat's Centenary in the World* (in Persian), the English and Armenian translations of Hedayat's *Buried Alive* and the English, French and Turkish translations of his *Stray Dog*.

Ramin Jahanbegloo has a PhD in Philosophy from the Sorbonne University. In 1993 he taught at the Academy of Philosophy in Tehran. He was an adjunct professor in political philosophy at the University of Toronto, 1991–2001, director of the Department for Contemporary Thought at the Cultural Research Bureau, Tehran, 2002–2006, a Rajni Kothari Chair in Democracy at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi, 2005–2007, and a Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Central European University in Budapest. His numerous publications in English, French and Persian include *Thinking India* (with Ashis Nandy), *Iran: Between Tradition and Modernity*, *Penser la Nonviolence* and *Gandhi: Aux Sources de La Nonviolence*.

Homa Katouzian is the Iran Heritage Foundation Research Fellow, St Antony's College and Member, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford. He is the editor of *Iranian Studies*, journal of the International Society for Iranian Studies, and a member of the editorial board of *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*. He has published widely on Iranian history, literature, politics and economics and is the author of *Sadeq Hedayat, the Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer*. His recent publications include *Iranian History and Politics, the Dialectic of State and Society*, and *Sa'di, the Poet of Life, Love and Compassion*.

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 Balaÿ in his *La Genèse du roman persan moderne*[1] and *Aux Sources de la nouvelle persane*.[2] 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.[3]

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.[4]

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."[5]

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.[6]

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."[7] 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."[8] 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."[9] 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.[10]

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.[11]

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."[12] 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* Deterritorialiozed: 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."[13] 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."[14] 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."[15] 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,"[16] 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 se sa soeur pour la mordre."[17] 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"[18] which translates as: "Before the law stands a doorkeeper," the Persian text is: "Jolo-e qanun pasebani dam-e dar qad afrashteh bud."[19] 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."[20] 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."[21] 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.[22]

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.[23]

Katouzian suggests the sudden turn might be "due to a well-intentioned editorial intervention in the later editions of the book."[24] 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."[25]

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.[26]

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."[27] 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."[28] 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."[29] 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."[30] Ritchie Robertson goes further and points to evidence that in 1917 Kafka might have contemplated emigrating to Palestine.[31] 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."[32] 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.[33]

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 literary 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.' "[34] 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.[35]

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."[36]

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).
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