

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
The Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations
and the Department of History
in cooperation with

Iranian Association at the University of Toronto (IAUT)
present

MIDDLE EAST HISTORY AND THEORY WORKSHOP

Sadeq Hedayat Centenary Symposium

Sunday, November 2, 2003, 1:00-6:00 p.m.

Claude Bissell Building, Room 205

140 St. George Street

Program

1:00-1:05 **Opening Remarks**
Mohamad Tavakoli, University of Toronto

1:05-3:05 p.m. **Sadiq Hedayat and His Discursive Universe**
Chair: **Rivanne Sandler, University of Toronto**

Mohamad Tavakoli, University of Toronto
"Pertinent Contexts"

Nasrin Rahimieh, McMaster University
"Hedayat's Translations of Kafka"

Homa Katouzian, University of Oxford
"The Wondrous World of Sadeq Hedayat"

3:05-3:30 Coffee/Tea Break

3:30-5:30 **Interpreting the *The Blind Owl***
Chair: **Nasrin Rahimieh, McMaster University**

Michael Beard, University of North Dakota
"Influence as Debt: Hedayat's European Reading"

Marta Simidchieva, York University
"Modernity and the Persian Classics: *The Blind Owl* as a Blueprint for Literary Reform"

Reza Baraheni, University of Toronto
"*The Blind Owl*: From Manuscript to Print"

5:30-6:00 **Open Discussion**

University of Toronto

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Introduction

Sadeq Hedayat was born in February 1903 in Tehran and committed suicide in Paris in 1951. He is the author of *The Blind Owl*, the most famous Persian novel both in Iran and in Europe and North America. Many of his short stories are in a critical realist style and are regarded as amongst some of the best written in 20th 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 as well.

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.

The symposium will serve several purposes, the most obvious being to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Hedayat's birth. It will bring together leading critics and scholars of Persian literature from Canada, Great Britain, and the United States to discuss different aspects of Hedayat's life, work and legacy.

Paper Abstracts

PERTINENT CONTEXTS

Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, History and Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, University of Toronto

Informed by European fascism, racial and linguist purity were the key elements of the Iranian national and cultural revivalism of the 1920s and the 1930s. The enthusiasm for the "renewal of ancient glory" (*tajdid-i 'azimat-i bastani*) was coupled with anti-Arab zealotry, a distinctly Iranian form of anti-Semitism. The nostalgia for a pure pre-Islamic/pre-Arab past informed the literary, historical, and political imaginaries of those decades. The early works of Sadeq Hedayat were exemplars of such nostalgic romanticism that sought to recover Iran's assumed "Aryan purity" by attributing all impurities to the Semite Arabs.

WOMEN IN HEDAYAT'S FICTION

Homa Katouzian, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford

Women appear in two extreme forms in Hedayat's psycho-fiction, headed by *The Blind Owl*: 'fereshteh' and 'lakkateh'. 'Fereshteh' is the perfect woman who is beyond the realm of reality, such as 'the ethereal woman' in *The Blind Owl*, and merely an object, e.g. the soulless manikin in 'Puppet behind The Curtain'. The anti-heroes long for the angel who is beyond their reach, and detest the harlot, who seems to be the only available alternative. Thus there is no successful love or love-making in the psycho-fictions. In Hedayat's critical realist fiction, on the other hand, the portrayal of both men and women is normal and realistic. The critical realist works are about the lives of ordinary traditional townfolk, whereas the psycho-fictions portray people of the author's own class and culture, the modern middle classes and above.

SADEQ HEDAYAT'S TRANSLATIONS OF KAFKA

Nasrin Rahimieh, Comparative Literature and English, McMaster University

Among the European writers to whom Sadeq Hedayat was drawn was Franz Kafka. This attraction to Kafka led Hedayat to translate his *Die Verwandlung (Metamorphosis)* into Persian, albeit through a French translation of the original German. Building on the work that she has already done on the nature of Hedayat's translation, his inadvertent distortions of the German text, and his essay on Kafka, this paper explores the roots of Hedayat's fascination with the German writer. The analysis aims at shedding more light on Hedayat's image of Kafka and the significance of this image for the Persian writer's own literary imagination.

"Influence as Debt: Hedayat's European Reading"

Michael Beard, English and Peace Studies, University of North Dakota

The term 'literary influence' has been a sensitive one for generations. (If we are members of the culture undergoing influence, does the process undermine our identity? If we are from the influencing culture has our identity transgressed natural boundaries? Are readers from both cultures exempt from this anxiety or more subject to it?) Sadeq Hedayat's masterpiece, his novella *The Blind Owl*, is an appropriate text for examining this question: it is a major work of world fiction, itself influential in translated forms, often perceived as an expression of peculiarly Iranian ideas. In it there is a series of allusions to western works - phrases from Poe which are so close as to constitute a kind of pastiche, close paraphrases of passages from Rilke, and a more generalized network of links with Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* - a close reading of which will allow us to work out tentative redefinitions.

"Modernity and the Persian Classics: *The Blind Owl* as a Blueprint for Literary Reform"

Marta Simidchieva, Humanities, York University

One of the distinctive features of *The Blind Owl* (pub. 1937) is its kinship with European Modernist prose of the early twentieth century - a body of literature which bears witness to the fascination of innovative writers from that period with psychoanalysis. The paper proposes that the author of *The Blind Owl* does not merely 'borrow' from his Western counterparts ready-made motifs and allusions pertaining to sexual angst and the unconscious. It suggests, instead, that Hedayat attempts a radical 'recasting' of Persian tradition itself, channeling recurrent conventional images and themes of the classical legacy into the paradigms of psychological affliction, shared by modernist writings from the first half of the twentieth century.

The Middle East History and Theory Workshop is an interdisciplinary and multiperspectival seminar series devoted to the exploration of modern Middle Eastern history, culture, and politics. The workshop seeks to promote collaboration and intellectual interaction amongst students and scholars of modern Middle East at the University of Toronto and other educational institutions in Toronto and its vicinity. To promote public education and to provide informed and analytical perspectives, the workshop occasionally facilitates panel discussions and public lectures on issues of public concern on the Middle East. For further information, please contact Mohamad Tavakoli <mtavakol@ilstu.edu>.

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Sadeq Hedayat Links:

<http://www.golnoosh.org/hedayat/>

http://www.tehranavenue.com/at_city_hedayat.htm

<http://www.geocities.com/Paris/Tower/2943/>

http://www.iranian.com/Arts/April98/Hedayat/s_hedayat.html

<http://www.iranian.com/Arts/Oct97/DastQazaa/p1.html>

http://www.iranchamber.com/literature/shedayat/sadeq_hedayat.php

http://www.iranchamber.com/literature/shedayat/blind_owl/blind_owl_01.php

<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/heday.htm>

<http://www.vohuman.org/Author/Hedayat,Sadeq.htm>

<http://www.caroun.com/Literature/Iran/Writers/SadeqHedayat/SadeqHedayatContents.html>

<http://www.iles.umn.edu/faculty/bashiri/hedlife.html>

<http://faculty.quinnipiac.edu/libarts/monshipouri/cira/news/archive/hedayat.htm>

<http://www.studentbookworld.com/AllBooks/1992/2/1850433615.html>