



ḤĀJĪ ĀQĀ

ḤĀJĪ ĀQĀ, a satirical novella by Šādeq Hedāyat, published for the first time in the journal *Soḵan* in 1945 under the pen name “Hādi Šadāqat,” followed by a second edition in 1952. One of Hedāyat’s most popular works in Persia, *Ḥāji Āqā* lacks a substantial plot, being instead a sardonic composite portrait of an ambitious, ill-educated, falsely pious, unscrupulous and self-important merchant, and is thus comparable with “Rajol-e siāsi” (a “Political figure”) described by Moḥammad-‘Alī Jamāl-zāda in his *Yak-i bud o yak-i nabud*. Although it is focused on one character, *Ḥāji Āqā* also introduces a few dozen other typecast characters through suggestive names, such as Dawām-al-wezāra (Permanently in the ministry) for a high-ranking civil servant, and Monādi-al-ḥaqq (Proclaimer of the truth) for the poet who verbally lambasts Ḥāji Āqā (see below). Hedāyat makes use of diverse aspects of Persian language and culture in the course of this novella: the Tehran dialect, colloquial as well as formal expressions, local traditions of various social classes, superstitions, excessive compliments (*ta‘ārof*) and even the culinary habits of Persians are all represented with meticulous attention to detail and a biting sense of humor.

Ḥāji Āqā, the uneducated son of a tobacco-seller, has managed to amass considerable wealth and social status through several thoroughly corrupt business enterprises. He manages to exert influence on members of the political administration, even though he is an opportunist without any loyalties or convictions, and always ready to play to the gallery. He expresses much admiration for Reżā Shah (and Hitler), but, after having initially fled the



Allied occupation of Persia, Ḥāji Āqā soon decides that it would be personally advantageous to return to Tehran and become a staunch supporter of the new regime. He even declares his candidacy for membership of parliament and approaches a poet to compose a poem for his campaign. The climax of the novella is reached when this poet, “Monādi-al-ḥaqq,” who may be seen as expressing Hedāyat’s own sentiments, tells Ḥāji Āqā his honest opinion of him, as in the following extract: “You’re lower than a worm or even a pig. You sucked in baseness with your mother’s milk. What pig ever took the life and property of its own kind as a plaything, or hoarded their money, or monopolized the medicines they need? But you, from morning to night, you suck the blood of thousands of innocent people like a leech; you enjoy it all immensely, and yet you call yourself a statesman and a man of eminence” (Wickens, p. 100).

Hedāyat’s previous writings had all been privately published in small editions, and *Ḥāji Āqā* was his first work to be presented by a professional publisher (Amir Kabir Press, 1952) in as many as a thousand copies. *Ḥāji Āqā* was written during the Allied occupation of Persia, a time of relative press and publishing freedom, but most literary critics and members of the establishment at the time failed to appreciate its value, declaring that such a caricature could not be considered as a work of art (Kamshad, p. 196). In post-Revolutionary Iran, *Ḥāji Āqā* has struck a chord with a new generation of readers, owing to the rise in status of the traditional merchant class which the main character represents. *Ḥāji Āqā* has been translated into German (Sundermann, 1963), English (Wickens, 1979) and French (Lazard, 1996).

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