



JA'FAR KĀN AZ FARANG ĀMADA

JA'FAR KĀN AZ FARANG ĀMADA (Ja'far Khan has returned from the West, Tehran, 1922), acclaimed satirical drama in one act by 'Ali Nowruz, a pen name of the playwright Ḥasan Moqaddam (1895-1925).

Modern Persian [drama](#) had its beginnings in the 19th century, when educated Persians became acquainted with, and tried to introduce, Western theater in Iran. One of the earliest and most noted modern Persian plays (Ḥoquqi, p. 37) *Ja'far Kān az farang āmada* focuses on the comic confusion arising from encounters between Persian and European cultures (Ghanoonparvar, 1996, P. 530). It was published almost at the same year as [Yeki bud, yeki nabud](#), the first collection of Persian short story by [Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh](#); *Afsāna*, the first collection of modern Persian poetry by Nimā Yušij; and *Tehrān-e maḳuf*, the first social novel by [Moshfeq-e Kazemi](#) (Mir'ābedini, 2001, p. 78), the pioneering works heralding a major turning point in the history and development of modern Persian literature.

Ja'far Kān az farang āmada is set in 1922 in [Tehran](#) and revolves around the return from Europe, after eight years early in the play, of Ja'far Khan Abjad, a twenty-year-old petit aristocrat Iranian who apes Western ways of dressing, gestures, and demeanors. The other characters of the play are: Ja'far Khan's maternal uncle, a traditional man who is resistant to the spread of Western manners and customs; Ja'far Khan's tutor, who has served the family for many



years; Ja'far Khan's illiterate, caring mother, who dreams about her son marrying his cousin Zinat, who embodies a traditional Iranian housewife, ready to be in the service of her husband; and Ja'far Khan's dog, which is regarded as 'najes' (unclean) and is not welcomed into the family.

Ja'far Khan, contemptuous of his native culture with its 'absurd' rituals and primordial values (Borujerdi, 2003, p. 11), reminiscent of Farangi-maāb in "Fārsi šekar ast," the first story in the collection *Yeki bud, yeki nabud*, never forgets to imitate Europeans by merely sprinkling his language with French words and expressions, carrying his "unclean" dog around, and wearing modern European clothes—manners which are resisted by his family members, who regard Westerners as people who eat bears and monkeys and make liquor from the skin of their dead priests. The play is set into motion by his mother's insistence in persuading Ja'far Khan to marry Zinat, and it ends when he packs his suitcase and plans to go back to "modern" Europe against his family's will.

Ḥasan Moqaddam, was a member of [Anjoman-e Iran-e Javān](#) (The Society of Young Iran), founded in 1921, and along with many contemporary intellectuals queried the appropriation of foreign loanwords and their influence on the Persian language. Through exposing and ridiculing on the stage both Ja'far Khan's French-smattered Persian and his family's strict adherence to the traditional norms and customs (Ghanoonparvar, 2001, p. 93; Mir'ābedini, 2011, p. 102), he integrates the tale of Ja'far Khan's return to Iran in the grand narrative of Iran's modernization and the conflicted encounter between inherited values and infiltrated culture in the Persian society of the early decades of the 20th century (Nafisi, p. 40-41)—a mirror at which the split-in-two society of the period looks and recognizes itself (Yusofi, II, p. 305).

Ja'far Kān az farang āmada was first staged by the Society of Young Iran in Tehran's Grand Hotel in 1922, with Moqaddam himself as Ja'far Khan, and attracted huge audience. It became so popular that the title turned into a proverb representing those who, with little knowledge of Persian language, literature, and culture, had traveled to Europe and, learning little about the continent's culture and civilization, had only mimicked European clothing and manners (Yusofi, II, p. 293). Moqaddam's vivid depiction of the Europe-stricken Ja'far Khan as a 'fokoli' (a rendition of the French term *faux col*, meaning detachable collar, a necktie, or a bow tie), turns him into a highly popular comic figure in Reza Shah's era (1925-1941; Khosravi, pp. 78-79; Borujerdi, 1996, p. 57).



The play has been regarded as an illustration of the nationalist tendency to reject and resist the hegemony of Western culture (Zarrinkub, p. 52; Osku'i, p. 140) and as one of the best plays in the history of the Iranian theater (Yusofi, II, p.301), dealing with the discord between indigenous values and imported manners (Borujerdi, 2006, p. 396; Mir'ābedini, 2008, p. 97; Siāsi, pp. 75-76; Eslāmi Nodušan, p. 533; Gaffary, p. 377). Many critics have commended Moqaddam for his skillful depiction of characters (Yusofi, pp. 302-03), for his employment of a language intelligible to ordinary folk and at the same time entertaining to the intellectual elite (Āryanpur, II, p. 306; Jannati 'Aṭā'i, I, p. 53), and for his ability to lay bare that introduction to other cultures and languages should not morph into an outward reliance on borrowed styles and foreign loan words (Amjad, p. 70).

The play, despite long decades of developments in Persian drama has not lost its relevance and appeal. It was adapted in 1984 as a screenplay for a film directed by [Ali Ḥātami](#). The clash of modernity and tradition in the movie, however, is depicted not from the perspective of the pseudo-European son, but from the counter-perspective of the traditional father, who is absolutely unable to cope with his son's behavior after his return from Europe. The father, played by 'Ezzat-Allāh Entezāmi, loses his sanity after hearing that Ja'far Khan has married a European girl. Ḥātami was not able to finish making this movie due to the censors' disapproval and was forced to leave his work incomplete. Yet, with the change of director, and the elimination of certain sequences, a mutilated version of the ill-fated film (Akrami, p. 54) was finally screened without the name of the director in 1988 and failed to conjure up the success and popularity of the original play (Golmakāni).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Jamshid Akrami, "Ḥātami, 'Ali," in *EIr* XI, 1996, pp. 53-54.

Yaḥyā Āryanpur, *Az Ṣabā tā Nimā*, 3 vols., Tehran, 1995.



Mehrzad Borujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism*, Syracuse, 1996, p. 57.

Idem, "The Ambivalent Modernity of Iranian Intellectuals," in Negin Nabavi, ed., *Intellectual Trends in Twentieth-Century Iran: A Critical Survey*, Gainesville, 2003, pp. 11-12.

Idem, "The 'West' in the Eyes of the Iranian Intellectuals of the Interwar Years (1919-1939)," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 26/3, 2006, pp. 391-401.

Moḥammad 'Ali Eslāmi-Nodušan, "The Influence of Europe on Literary Modernization in Iran," *Middle East Journal* 23/4, autumn 1969, pp. 529-34.

Farrokh Gaffary, "Evolution of Rituals and Theater in Iran," *Iranian Studies* 17/4, 1984, pp. 361-89.

Mohammad Reza Ghanoonparvar, "Persian Plays and the Iranian Theater," in Sherifa Zuhur, ed., *Colors of Enchantment: Theater, Dance, Music, and the Visual Arts of the Middle East*, Cairo, 2001, pp. 92-93.

Idem, "Drama," in *EIr*. VII, 1996, pp. 529-34.

Hušang Golmakāni, "Ezzatolah Entezami: The Gentleman Actor," <http://www.farhangsara.com/entezami.htm> (accessed 12/21/2011).

Moḥammad Ḥoquqi, *Moruri bar tāriḳ-e adab va adabiyāt-e emruz-e Irān*, Tehran, 1998.

Abu'l-Qāsem Jannati-e 'Aṭā'i, *Bonyād-e namāyeš dar Irān*, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1356 Š./1977.

Shahram Khosravi, *Young and Defiant in Tehran*, Philadelphia, 2008.

Ḥasan Mir'ābedini, *Šad sāl dāstān nevisi dar Irān*, 3 vols., Tehran, 1366-77 Š./1998.

Idem, *Seyr-e taḥavvol-e adabiyāt-e dāstāni dar Irān: az āgāz tā 1320*, Tehran, 1387 Š./2008.

Idem, "Ja'far Kān az farang āmada," in *Farhang-e Āṭār-e Eslāmi-Irāni* III, ed. Aḥmad Sami'i Tehran, 2011, p. 102.



Ḥasan Moqaddam, *Ja'far Kān az farang āmada*, Tehran, 1922.

Azar Nafisi, "Shaping a Nation: Secular and Religious Intellectuals in Iran," in *SAISPHERE* (publ. of the School of Advanced International Studies, John Hopkins University, Washington, D.C.), 2009, pp. 40-41

Moṣṭafā Oskū'i, *Pažuheši dar tāriḳ-e te'ātr-e Irān*, Moscow, 1991.

'Ali-Akbar Siāsi, *Gozāreš-e yak zendagi I*, London, 1987.

Ġolām-Ḥosayn Yusofī, *Didāri bā ahl-e qalam*, 2 vols., 2nd ed., Tehran, 1988.

'Abd-al-Ḥosayn Zarrinkub, "Etiquette in Persia in Islamic Times," in *EIr IX*, 1999, pp. 48-53.