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ḴĀNA-YE EDRISIHĀ

ḴĀNA-YE EDRISIHĀ (The house of the Edrisis,Tehran, 1991; Ghazaleh ʻAlizadeh, noted novelist and short story writer (Figure 2). It was the recipient of the "Twenty Years of Fiction Writing," award of the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance in 1999.

A novel in two volumes, *Ḵāna-ye Edrisihā* is set in 1910s, and takes place in a house in Ashkhabad (ʿEšqābād), the capital city of the Republic of Turkmenistan. The revolving of the novel around the tale of a house brings it in line with a recurrent motif in modern Persian fiction, featured in such novels as Suvašun, by Simin Daneshvar (Simin Dānešvar; b. 1921), *Ṭubā va maʿnā-ye šab* (Tehran, 1988), by Shahrnush Parsipur (Šahrnuš Pārsipur, b. 1945) and Jen-nāma (Sweden, 1998), by Hušang Golširi (Mirʿābedini, 2001, p. 1109-12). The house is, nevertheless, as large as the world the novel depicts.

Ḵāna-ye Edrisihā consists of four sections and is mostly told by an omniscient narrator from the alternating perspectives of the four people who live in solitude in the house: Mrs. Edrisi, symbol of a lost aristocracy who dwells in her past; her daughter Laqā, who is trapped in a tangled web of old beliefs, traditions, and customs; her intellectual grandson Vahhāb, who lives a miserable life in an ocean of books; and Yāvar, the faithful servant of the family, who lives deep in the memories of bygone days.

A fictitious revolution disrupts the dreamy solitude of the mansion. A group of revolutionaries occupy the mansion and, proud with victory, clear away everything they see: statues, antique objects, the inhabitants' personal

belongings, and even books (Šarifi, p. 570). They address one another as 'hero' and take orders from a Central Authority (Ātaš-ḵāna-ye markazi). They are instructed to allow the occupants of the confiscated mansion to remain, and the clash between the two groups sets the novel into motion.

The leader of the rebels is Šowkat, a furious aggressive woman despised and yet admired by the rebels. Among the rebels are also Yunes, a poet and writer, and Qobād, who turns out to be Mrs. Edrisi's lost love of many years. They are soon joined by Roxānā, a popular actress, whose presence not only takes the clash between the rebels and the house inhabitants to a new level, but also that between the rebels and the Central Authority; a clash that drives the plot of the story to an inevitable end.

With the progression of the story, the despotic nature of the revolution acquires more visible dimensions, and the animosity between the 'heroes' who have occupied the house, and the Edrisis, who have lived there for generations, gives way to an ever-increasing tension between the 'heroes' and the commanders in the Central Authority, who once had fought to bring to an end the cruelty of the previous regime but were now well on the path to depraved brutality. Mrs. Edrisi joins the plot and volunteers to send the family fortune to the combatants in the mountains who are going to battle the government. In an effort to contain the protests, Central Authority surrounds the house. No one knows what has become of Mrs. Edrisi, Qobād, Šowkat, and Roxānā. Yāvar believes they are in the mountains trying to keep the fire of revolution burning, but Yunes the poet and the clairvoyant chronicler of his time, has written another story; the tale of a bygone period in the history of a house and a nation; the tragic tale of the Edrisi family, or rather, the novel *Ḵana-ye Edrisihā* (Mirʿābedini, 2011, p. 307).

Ḵana-ye Edrisihā, written in exquisite detail in the tradition of 19th-century European realism, smoothly traverses between the real and surreal, and not only weaves the tales of two different generations of women in a symbolically coded language (ʿAlāʾi, P. 245), but also takes a critical stand, with mythological overtones, against totalitarianism and the social and economical gaps that have remained unbridgeable throughout centuries (Sattāri, p 142; Moḵtāri, 1993, p. 75). The novel's name, reminding one of Edris/Idris the prophet of mystical alchemy, as well as the interplay of geometrical forms, the circle, the square, and the number four in the novel (Yavari, p. 589) have inspired some critics to trace alchemical components in this complexly structured work of fiction (Sattāri, p 138; Ānāhi pp. 17-18).

Reviews of the novel have been mostly favorable. Dismissive comments such as the abundance of unrelated passages and sideline narratives in the second volume of the novel (Mirʿābedini, 2011, p. 307) and the occasional yielding of the language to excessive musicality and sentimentalism (Mahvizāni, pp. 249-50) are rare exceptions. It has earned the praise of critics for its "lavishly poetical language" (Šarifi, p. 570; ʿAlāʾi, p. 243), often sprinkled with innovative imagery and personification of natural elements that heighten the novel's emotional texture, and more importantly with slang words and vernacular expressions. Alizadeh is also credited for her skillful depiction of the novel's characters (Sayyed-Ḥosayni, p. 248) and for unveiling their minds and showcasing their hopes and dreams, all lost to the sweeping winds of a revolution (Mirʿābedini, 2001, p. 1417). The novel leaves little ambiguity in the symbolic resemblance of the fictitious revolution and the course of events that have swept Iran in the last three decades, and establishes Alizadeh as a chronicler of the present predicaments of her nation (Moḵtāri, 1999, pp. 568-71).

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