



KHEYRKHAH, HOSEYN

KHEYRKHAH, HOSEYN (ḤOSAYN ḲAYRḲVĀH), the stage name of Ḥosayn Solṭāni (b. Tehran, 1288/1909; d. Berlin, 30 Bahman 1341/19 February 1963), a noted actor and director who played an important role in the formation of modern Persian theater.

Kheyrkhah had his first acting experience by playing in stage shows performed by students at Šaraf Moẓaffari High School in Tehran. He was only seventeen years old when, in 1926, along with his classmate, the future actor and stage director Šādeq Bahrāmi, he joined an ensemble called Komedi-e Irān, which had just been established by Sayyed ‘Ali Naṣr, the founder of the School of Theatrical Art (*Honarestān-e honarpišagi*). His membership in the ensemble provided him with the opportunity to be professionally involved in theater both as an actor and as stage manager for about eight years (1926-34; Oskuyi, p. 218). He acted in several plays in Tehran, notably *Amir Arsalān-e nāmdār*, *Mašhadi ‘Ebād*, *Nušāfarin*, *Malek Esmā‘il*, and *Botkada-ye hendi* (Āṣefi). As a professional actor, he first appeared in the productions of Aḳawān Theater and collaborated with Mir Sayf-al-Din Kermānšāhi (d. 1932), a pioneer in the development of theatrical art in Iran. His professional reputation soon spread, and he was appointed the artistic director of Markazi Theater (“Ḥosayn ḲayrḲvāh”). He then became interested in using theater for social activism and worked in a number of ensembles, including Komedi-e Irān, Komedi-e Aḳawān, Jāme‘a-ye Bārbod, Sirus, Nakisā, Markazi, Iran-e Javān, and Kānun-e Šan‘ati (Āṣefi).

Kheyrkhah was the main actor of Nakisā Theater, which had been established



by the Zoroastrian community and run by Arbāb Aflāṭun Šāhroḡ, who worked with Kheyrkhah in the production of the “Amir Arsalān” serial. Later on, the title of the theater was changed to the Zoroastrian Summer Theater (Tamāšā-kāna-ye tābestāni-e Zardoštiān). At Nakisā Theater, Kheyrkhah acted both in comedies and folkloric plays such as *Mašhadi ‘Ebād* and *Aršin Mālālān*, as well as in plays and operettas based on historical and literary sources, including *Yusof wa Zolayḡā*, *Nāder Šāh*, *Layli wa Majnun*, *Širin wa Farhād*, *Rostam wa Sohrāb*, and *Bižan wa Maniža* (Malekpur, p. 40).

Kheyrkhah was deeply devoted to the theatrical art, a fact reflected in his well-known statement: “as long as I can walk, I shall walk on stage, and I wish to perform on stage until my death, like Molière” (“Ḥosayn Kayrḡvāh”). He directed a controversial play titled *Šab-i dar Lālazār* (A night in Lālazār [Street]) written by Moḡammad Šabpara about Režā Shah’s edict banning women from wearing veils, a situation known as the unveiling (*kašf-e hejāb*). The play influenced many playwrights and directors to produce plays about the contentious social issue.

Joining Kānun-e Šan‘ati was a turning point in Kheyrkhah’s career, because he got the opportunity to work with ‘Abd-al-Ḥosayn Nušin (d. 1971), the most influential figure in the introduction of modern theater in Iran, and the actress Loreta Hayrapetean (Loretā Hāyrāpetiān, d. 1998; Oskuyi, p. 218). He performed in Molière’s *L’Avare* (tr. as *Ḳasis*) and an adaptation of *Tartuffe*, titled *Mirzā Kamāl-al-Din*. The advent of World War II and the fall of Režā Shah provided Iranian artists with a rare opportunity to criticize sociopolitical issues freely within their works. Thus, a number of stage artists including Kheyrkhah, Nušin, Loretā, Parkida, and Noṣrat-Allāh Mohtašam staged Marcel Pagnol’s *Topaze*, tr. as *Mardom*, to demonstrate the corruption of the government of Iran (PLATE 1). In 1944, Nušin founded a powerful theater ensemble, called Farhang Theater (*Te’ātr-e farhang*), which included Kheyrkhah as a star performer.

Kheyrkhah cooperated with Nušin in the establishment of the Farhang Theater and performed in Nušin’s production of *Tars az jarima* (“Fear of Penalty”). He also worked with the Sa’di Theater, the Ferdowsi Theater (both run by Nušin), the Sayyār Ensemble, and the Ḥezb Club as an actor and director. Since he was lively, warm, and affable, he became the resident actor and director of the Sa’di Theater in Tehran. He met Moṣṭafā Qarib, who knew French very well. Together they translated a few plays from French, which



were staged by Kheyrkhah (Oskuyi, p. 218), including Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Putain respectueuse* (tr. as *Rusbi-e bozorgvār*), directed by Kheyrkhah.

Kheyrkhah's most notable performances on stage include roles as Mirzā Kamāl-al-Din in the adaptation of Molière's *Tartuffe*, Dorostkār (Topaze) in Marcel Pagnol's *Topaze*, Shylock in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (tr. as *Tājer-e venizi*), and Eugénie Grandet in the dramatic adaptation of Honoré de Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet* ("Ḥosayn Kayrkvāh"). He also performed in the popular television series, *Amir Arsalān* (Āṣefi).

In 1936, Kheyrkhah traveled to Moscow as a student in the company of the delegate of the Soviet-Iranian Cultural Center (Anjoman-e rawābeṭ-e farhangī-e Irān wa etteḥād-e Šuravi), which included the actress Fāṭema Bozorgmehri Ra'd (stage name: Turān Mehrzād) and Ḥasan Kāše'. He stayed in Moscow for a short time concentrating on his studies. He made another trip to Moscow for a cultural event in 1952, this time as a member of an official cultural delegation that included the noted Iranian-Armenian actress Iren Zazyanc (Iren Zāziāns; d. 2012). He also translated and published a book (Tehran, 1941), titled *Teknik-e te'ātr*, composed of a number of essays about body movements in theatrical performance.

Kheyrkhah was actively involved in the operations of communist parties, in particular during the premiership of Moḥammad Moṣaddeq (1951-53). He was arrested several times and also jailed on a few occasions. When a mob burned Sa'di Theater after the Coup d'état of 1953 (q.v.), Kheyrkhah managed to escape with his life with the help of his fans. He secretly left the country in the same year and fled to East Germany, where he lived for the rest of his life. He died in Germany in 1963 and was buried there, although he had asked in his will to be buried in Iran (Oskuyi, p. 218; Āṣefi).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Sohayl Āṣefi, "Yād-e yārān: Ḥosayn Kayrkvāh, honarpiša-ye Mardom," <http://asre-nou.net/1385/mordad/23/m-asefi.html> (accessed November 13, 2014).

"Ḥosayn Kayrkvāh: Ba monāsabat-e panjomin sāl-e dargodašt-e u," *Kāva*, no.



46, 1972, pp. 255-60.

Jamšid Malekpur, *Adabiyāt-e nemāyeši dar Irān* III, Tehran, 2007.

Mošafā Oskuyi, *Pažuheš-i dar tāriḳ-e te'ātr-e Irān*, Tehran, 1991.

“Theatre in Iran, 1944-53,” at <http://www.safinehnooh.com> (accessed 13 November 2014).