



MALAKUT

MALAKUT (Heavenly Kingdom, 1961), the highly acclaimed and the only published novella by the noted modernist fiction writer [Bahram Sadeqi](#) (Bahrām Šādeqi, 1937-1984)

Malakut was first published in the periodical *Kayhān-e hafta* in 1961 (No.12, pp. 7-101). Nine years later it was reissued along with several short stories in a collection entitled *Sangar o qomqomahā-ye k̄āli* (1970, Tehran). A second edition of the novella was published in a separate volume in 1971.

The story begins at eleven p.m. on a Wednesday and ends around dawn the next morning. It is narrated in the third person and consists of six chapters, which follow each other chronologically. The first chapter unfolds in a garden in the outskirts of an unknown town, where four men are enjoying an alfresco spread: Mr. Maveddat, a cultured man with a refined taste for wine and women; an obese merchant, who is indifferent to all or anything except food and sleep; a young government employee, who loves books, sunshine, and basic pleasures of life, and who has recently married a beautiful woman, also named Malakut; and finally a fourth man who is called Nāšenās (Anonymous) and remains so throughout.

The plot is set in motion when Mr. Maveddat suddenly feels ill and requires treatment. Prompted by a suggestion from Nāšenās they drive him to Dr. Ḥātām's clinic which is also in a garden where four people are in attendance: Dr. Ḥātām and Sāqi, his young wife; a strange man introduced as M. L., who has had parts of his anatomy cut off in the course of several years, and has



now come to Dr. Ḥātām's clinic to remove his last remaining limb, his right hand; and finally M. L.'s mute servant, Šaku.

Sadeghi's description of the garden, where Dr. Ḥātām runs his clinic, adds a murky ethereal layer to the otherwise earthly plot of the first chapter of the narrative, and enhances the mysterious spell of the opening sentence of the novella "At eleven, on the Wednesday evening of that week, Mr. Maveddat was possessed by the jinn." The jinn, as it turns out later, is sent by Dr. Ḥātām who is portrayed as a strange man with a young body and a wrinkled and wizened face and neck. As he exorcises the Jinn out of Mr. Maveddat's stomach, Dr. Ḥātām convinces Maveddat's friends to submit to a miraculous injection that would ensure a prolonged life filled with sensual pleasures; an injection that, as we subsequently learn, will kill them all in over a week, just like everybody else in the town. The fat man and the young man take the injection, while Nāšenās, who is apparently Dr. Ḥātām's agent, is exempted. Mr. Maveddat, is already inflicted by terminal cancer, and has only few days to live.

In the three subsequent chapters of the novella M. L., conceivably an alter ego of the novelist himself, while waiting for the fatal removal of his last limb, is busy writing. His account of his tormented life, presented in flashback, adds a sullen, otherworldly layer to the narrative. Torn between the forces of good and evil and tempted by Dr. Ḥātām, he has killed his own son, and has cut off the tongue of his servant who had witnessed the crime.

Through the final pages of the story, Dr. Ḥātām, reminiscent of both Satan and the Angel of Death (Golširi, 1999, pp. 234-35), and bent on sweeping all life from Earth (Miršādeqi, 1987, p. 651), has a morbid conversation with his wife, and learning that she has been involved in an affair with M.L.'s servant Šaku, enters her bed, and mutilates her. Šaku, once again, has to witness the crime. Then Dr. Ḥātām goes to M.L.'s room to talk to him about his final surgery. M. L., who resembling God has killed his son (Jesus), and like the fallen Adam is laden with the unbearable weight of sin (Golširi, 1999, pp. 229-30), tells him that he has undergone an epiphany, that death is the last thing he looks forward to, and that instead he desires to live, to fall in love and to have another son. This provides Dr. Ḥātām with an opportune moment to offer him the miraculous injection; an offer that M. L. immediately accepts. The mute servant lives to witness another crime, his master's imminent death.

In the very last scene of the novella Mr. Maveddat and his friends are talking, this time in an open space outside his garden, when Dr. Ḥātām arrives to tell

them that they have only a week left to live. The fat man dies immediately. The desire for life and happiness drives the young man to try to get the best out his remaining days on earth.

Adherence to biblical themes and symbolism of the Garden of Eden, a recurrent motif in the literature of the period, appears at its best in *Yakoliā va tanhā'i-e u* (Yakolya and her loneliness, 1955), by Taqi Modarresi (1932-1997), and a few years later in *Malakut* (Mir'ābedini, 2004, vol. 1, p. 342). It should be noted, however, that while Modarresi's story unfolds in a remote biblical time, the lines between past and present, and by extension, between paradise and earth are blurred in *Malakut* (Golširi, p. 237), and the residents of a more earthly garden drive a car to reach a clinic which is located in a more heavenly site. Interestingly enough, Dr. Hātam not only has read *Yakoliā va tanhā'i-e u*, but also refers to it while trying to urge the young man to take the miraculous injection (*Malkut*, p. 16).

By including no lesser beings than God, Satan, Adam, and their modern incarnations among his characters, by crossing the age-old boundaries by which they are demarcated, by paralleling the two parts of the narrative, and by depicting similar characters in different settings, Sadeqi not only creates a sense of bewilderment in the reader, which is never quite resolved or dissipated, but also dramatizes his core concerns with the themes of death and calamities that befall human beings, regardless of their condition and outlook. All his characters, "chain-bound victims to an approaching and untimely death," (*Malakut*, p. 44) are caught in the nightmarish horror of a purposeless life.

Sadeqi's preoccupation with universal themes and existential questions, rather than with contemporary issues and problems, is also reflected in his choice of *Malakut* as the title of the story; a name shared by two female characters of the novella, the wife of the young man, who seemingly represents the modern incarnation of the fallen Adam in the story, as well as one of Dr. Hatam's many wives, all murdered by him through long years of his engagement with his deadly mission.

Like in his short stories, appellations and the usage of titles as 'Mr.' and 'Dr.' in *Malakut* play a primary role in Sadeqi's intended effects on his readers. The mysterious physician of the novella is engaged in an endless process of bestowing death upon people; M.L. has not only lost most parts of his body, but also most letters of his name; and Dr. Hatam's agent, who acts as a connecting



thread between the two gardens and two sets of characters in the two parts of the narrative, is only named ‘Anonymous’.

Sadeqi, who had already achieved eminence for his short stories, enjoyed more critical acclaim with the publication of *Malakut*. It was praised as an outstanding example of succinct style of story telling (Sā’edi, pp. 160-61); as a mirror in which the betrayed hopes of a generation were uniquely reflected (Sepānlu, 1992, p. 115; Qāsemzāda, 2004, pp. 315-17), and as a novella, which is well informed by psychoanalytical theories both directly and through the influence of Hedayat, and at the same time remains strikingly original (Şan’ati, 1985, pp. 35-38). Golširi, both in his affectionate memorial address for Şādeqi, where he evokes Şādeqi’s sardonic humor and eccentric ways (“Nevisanda-ye *Malakut* hamčenān bā māst,” in Ḥasan Maḥmudi, *Ḳun-e ābi bar zamin-e namnāk: dar naqd o mo’arrefi-e Bahrām Şādeqi*, Tehran, 1998, pp. 19-26), and in scattered references in his critical essays acknowledges Şādeqi’s considerable impact on him, particularly in the early years of his writing (Mir’ābedini, 1995, p. 115).

Malakut was made into a film script, directed by Ḳosrow Haritāš (Nafisi, 1985, p. 233).

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