



SE QAṬRA KUN

“SE QAṬRA KUN” (1932, translated by Brian Spooner as “Three Drops of Blood,” 1979), a highly acclaimed short story by Şādeq Hedāyat ([HEDAYAT](#), [SADEQ](#), 1903-1951), first appeared in a collection of the same title.

In contrast with the linear timeline often found in Hedayat’s stories of social realism the boundaries between past and present in “Se qaṭra kun,” are often blurred, and reality and dream mirror each other in a variety of scenes, images, and events. The story is often considered a precursor to *Buf-e Kur* (Hillmann, pp. 127-28; Mir’ābedini, pp. 98-100), and as an exercise with the discontinuous narrative style and modern western literary techniques (Yarshter, p. 21), that culminated in *The Blind Owl* (see [BŪF-E KŪR](#)), Hedayat’s highly acclaimed novella. (Beard, p. 28; Katouzian, pp. 144-47).

The three drops of blood in the title are a recurrent leitmotif throughout the story which is set in an asylum and is told by a first-person narrator who keeps imploring the asylum authorities for pen and paper, though he knows there is nothing he will write. He complains, in a breathless stream of disjointed observations that every night until the break of dawn he hears the frightening moans and heartrending cries of a cat killed by a revolver. As proof he points to three drops of blood that have dripped from the cat’s throat to the base of a pine tree at the end of the asylum’s garden. While he asserts that he has witnessed the warden, in many ways a mirror image of the narrator, order the shooting of the cat, as the narrative progresses, the narrator reveals himself as the agent of the violence; a violence in which, in a vague and symbolic way everyone is complicit, extending the calamity to a



human crisis in which all hands are stained with blood (Nafisi, p. 25).

‘Abbās, is yet another of the narrator’s doubles and a tar player who has been held in the asylum just because he has composed a “queer poem”; a poem that he sings eight times a day:

Dariḡā ke bār-e degar šām šod

Sarāpā-ye giti siah-fām šod

Hama kalq rā gāh-e ārām šod

Magar man ke ranj o ḡamam šod fozun

Jahān rā nabāšad koši dar mezāj

Bejoz marg nabvad ḡamam rā ‘alāj

Valikan dar ān guša dar pā-ye kāj

Čekidast bar kāk se qaṭra kun

Alas, once more it is evening.

The whole of the world has turned black.

For all of God’s creatures it’s now time to rest,

Except me whose trials and sorrow increase.

The World has no joy in its makeup,

Except death there’s no cure for woe,

But there, in the corner under the pine tree,

Three drops of blood have dripped on the ground.

(“Three Drops of Blood”, p. 101)

The first part of the story comes to a close when a man, a woman and a girl come to visit ‘Abbās and he pulls the girl aside and kisses her to the chagrin of the narrator who is sure the she is in love with him. (“Three Drops of Blood,” pp. 95-96)

This scene reminds the narrator of the days when he and Siyavosh (Siyāvoš), the narrator's best friend, neighbor, and mirror image in the second part of the story, were engaged to two sisters with confused identities. One day, the narrator hears a gunshot. Siyavosh takes him to the pine tree in the garden, shows him the three drops of fresh blood which have dripped at the tree's base, explains how he shot his she-cat's mate, because they made loud noises while mating, and tells him that he has been hearing the dead cat's cry of anguish ever since. Each time he hears the cat's cry, he shoots in its direction, and each time three drops of fresh blood drip down to the base of the pine tree.

At this point, Rok̄sāra, Siyavosh's cousin, who is engaged to the narrator, comes into the room together with her mother. Siyavosh asks the narrator to confirm that he himself had seen the blood at the base of the pine. He does, and then takes the tar and sings a song that he has composed; the very same song that 'Abbās, the narrator's mirror image in the first part of the story, sings eight times a day. In the final scene of the story, Rok̄sāra leaves the room, and while the narrator watches her through the window, she embraces and kisses Siyavosh, echoing the scene with 'Abbās and further adding to the ambiguities.

The she-cat, that "combines less extreme versions of the qualities which are attributed to the ethereal woman and the harlot in *The Blind Owl*" (Katouzian, p. 147), is described in great detail in both sections. The cat, as the narrator believes, used to lick his forehead with her rough tongue, and insist that the narrator kiss her ("Three Drops of Blood," p. 97).

Her courtship with a male tabby, in which "her delicate slender body ripple[s] voluptuously, while the body of her mate arch[es] like a bow, and they moan for joy" ("Three Drops of Blood", pp. 97-99), adds a layer of obsessive craving for and revulsion of sexual expression to this complex short story ('Enāyat, pp. 568-79; Ṣan'ati, p. 18). It is their lovemaking that finally drives Siyavosh, the mirror image of the narrator, mad to the point where he shoots the she-cat's mate with a revolver. "You see, at a distance of three paces I aimed and fired....I think it broke his back." ("Three Drops of Blood", p. 99) This act of murder is another motif that *Se qaṭre kun* shares with *Buḡ-e Kur*, in the latter the protagonist kills his wife who he suspects of sleeping with the odds-and-ends man (For a detailed description of the similarities between the two stories, see Homa Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Literature of an Iranian Writer*, London, 1992, pp. 143-48).



Considered the first symbolic story in the history of contemporary Iranian storytelling, “Se qaṭra kun” combines elements of lyrical poetry with an economy of words to create a metaphoric suggestiveness, and reveal ideas through images and symbols which blur the boundaries between poem and prose narrative; a technique not explicitly employed in conventional prose narratives (Nafisi, pp. 22-25; Bahārlu, pp. 27-28).

The parallel structures, allusions, and repetitions in both parts of the story present the readers with floating events and the interchangeability of the fictive characters that serve as variant reflections of the one invariant image they ultimately portray: the image of the narrator whose solitary voice raises only to convict himself (Golširi, pp. 285-89). Edgar Allan Poe’s (1809-1849) “The Black Cat” (1843), in which a murderer’s attempts to conceal his crime eventually reveal him as the perpetrator, has been mentioned as a possible source of inspiration for the story (Āryanpur, p. 410, Etteḥād, p. 171; For a detailed analysis of Hedayat’s communication with modern western literary tradition see Michael Beard, *Hedayat’s Blind Owl as a Western Novel*, Princeton, 1990).

“Se qaṭra kun” is translated into English by Brian Spooner as “Three Drops of Blood” (Ehsan Yarshater, ed. *Sadeq Hedayt: An Anthology*, 1979, pp. 93-102), and also by Thomas R. Ricks as “Three Drops of Blood” (*Iranian Studies*. 3, 1970, pp. 104-14); into French by F. Razavi as “Trois gouttes de sang,” in *Trois gouttes de sang et six autre nouvelles* (Tehran, 1959), and also by Gilbert Lazard as “Trois gouttes de sang,” in *Trois gouttes de sang* (Paris, 1988, pp. 19-33); and into Italian by Resi Gheissarieh and Mario Garresi as *Tre gocce di sangue* (Milan, 1979).

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