



TUP

TUP (tr. by Fariydoun Farrokh as *The Cannon*, Washington D. C., 2009), the first full-length novel by Gholam-Hosayn Sa'edi (Ġolām-Ĥosayn Sā'edi, 1936-1985; q.v.), noted dramatist and fiction writer. It was published originally as a serial in the literary magazine *Kuša*, later as a book in 1967, and republished in 1968, 1972, and 1977. Unauthorized reprints have since been disseminated by various concerns both in Iran and abroad.

Sa'edi pursued his literary activities and achieved national recognition as a dramatist and writer of fiction by the mid 1960s. In his works of drama, which he published and produced under the pen name *Gohar-e Morād*, Sa'edi portrays individuals, and at times communities, struggling against and more often than not succumbing to the forces of tyranny, corruption, and other socio-political ills. His plays rarely have heroes in the conventional sense of the word and viewers often come away with a heightened sense of right and wrong. As held by Minoo Southgate, "Sa'edi means to educate the public through his plays. To this end, he often reduces complex socio-political problems to simple situations, making the message and meaning accessible to the least sophisticated audiences" (p. xv).

In *Tup*, like Sa'edi's other works of fiction, the didactic overtone of his plays appears subdued, and his propensity to inculcate a critical view of the political and cultural status quo is more amplified. The novel is set against the backdrop of the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1910 (q.v.), and the attendant developments in the northwestern tribal regions of Iran as the support of the Tsarist Russia for the central government in Tehran and the



dispatch of some members of the Cossack Division to Tabriz and the surrounding area to restrain the tribes and prevent their alliance with the Constitutionalists. Resembling Sa'edi's other works of fiction, *Tup* is imbued with an air of mystery and impending doom (Miršādeqi, pp. 652-53).

The plot, like most of Sa'edi's works evolves around a sudden misfortune and calamity befallen on a village or group (Yavari, p. 601), and circles around the traditional tension and rivalry among the region's three major tribes for right of way and pastureland, as well as the hostility existing between sheep herding, nomadic tribes and the landowning farmers who are often at the mercy of the herdsman. The arrival of foreign troops in the area has further complicated the situation, necessitating a reconfiguration of relationships and formation of uneasy alliances. As the focus of this panoply of conflicts and contradictions Sa'edi introduces the character of Mullah Mir Hāšem, a cleric that for years has been fulfilling the spiritual and religious needs of both the farmers and tribal folks in the region and collecting alms in return, making himself a relatively wealthy man in the process. The Mullah, as depicted by Sa'edi, is a near-total solipsist, who nevertheless displays energy and ingenuity in the pursuit of his goals. Although he is far from a sympathetic figure, we cannot help but feel a dash of pity when his plans collapse around him.

The novel, in which history appears in literary attire (Šaydā, pp. 71-72), unfolds with the arrival of the Cossack regiment, armed with a huge, technically advanced cannon. Ironically as it turns out, far from intimidating the tribes into submission, the presence of a foreign force in their midst unites them. Rallying, in a single encounter, they inflict a decisive defeat on the Cossacks and capture the emblematic cannon (Mir'ābedini, pp. 513-15). More importantly, they also find the Mullah in the commanding general's tent.

Unanimously, the tribal chieftains declare the Mullah a traitor and ordain that the mullah should be tied to the muzzle of the captured cannon, which should then be loaded and fired. In the final scene, somewhat evocative of the ritual of the Stations of the Cross (Kiānuš, p. 531), the Mullah is given a burlap sack containing the massive artillery shell, to be used for his execution, to carry it on his back up the hill to the gun emplacement. Emaciated and weakened by his ordeal, the Mullah falls to his knees several times under the weight of his fateful load and is brutally forced to rise and continue his way. In the moments before his death, the Mullah is calm and peaceful and the novel ends poignantly when “[a]thick cloud of black smoke emitting from the muzzle of the gun momentarily darkened the sun, and then it was gone.” (*Tup*, p. 184)

Bibliography:

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Hassan Mir’abedini, *Šad sāl dāstān-nevisi dar Irān* (A hundred years of fiction writing in Iran), 3 vols., Tehran, 1987-98 (Sa’edi ’s life and work are treated extensively in several chapters of the book).

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Javād Mojābi, *Šenāḳtnāma-ye Ġolām-Ḥosayn Sā’edi* (A Survey of the Works of Ghلام-Hosayn Sa’edi), Tehran, 1999; No independent study of this novel, either in article or book form, exists. For incidental commentary and critique see Anonymous, *Yādnāma-ye doktor Ġolām-Ḥosayn Sā’edi* (Doctor Gholam-Hosayn Sa’edi’s Festschrift], Hamburg, 1996.

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