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## Sociological Approach to Sadeq Hedayat's "Don Juan of Karaj"

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### ABSTRACT

Sadeq Hedayat's works in general, and his "Don Juan of Karaj" in specific, have been almost neglected in literary criticism. This study is concerned with the latter, and aims to approach it sociologically. In all literature of the world, Don Juan has shown its presence as a type character, so it has become part of all societies because a type character has its origin in human communities and is a part and parcel of a society. Sociological criticism is a good means to understand a type character and the society he lives in. What sociological criticism highlights is the reciprocal relationship between an individual and his own society. In this short story, Hedayat is concerned with this reciprocal function. Through this approach it is revealed that in Hedayat's era, the transitional era of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Iran, the ruling class attempts to introduce subjects like Don Juan and Hassan's mistress to create a new kind of identity for individuals, both male and female, in order to replace the traditional men and women. In this process both society and individuals try to affect each other, and the result is the loss of the essence of the traditional culture, and a mixture of new ideas and behaviors with the traditional ones, while this mixture itself is leading the society to nowhere.

**KEYWORDS:** Sociological Criticism; Sadeq Hedayat; Don Juan of Karaj; Short Story

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The legend of Don Juan, undoubtedly, originated from Spain. Although historians have not found any evidence of a man called Don Juan, Waxman (1908) believes that "for the most part, critics have sided with the popular Spanish belief, and affirm that Don Juan was really an historical character (185)." That is, "Es un Tenorio" expression frequently found in Spanish literature, meaning "He is a lady-killer" or "He's a devil with women", refers to a historical figure which has found its existence in Spanish literature, then in Europe, and finally in universal literature. Yet all other critics reject the historical truth of the character, and believe he has developed in the Spanish folklore. The significance of Don Juan is that it has remained in literature as a type character. This fact itself is revealing the point that he is part of all societies because a type character has its origin in individuals' communities. Actually, a type character is a social being, a member of man's society. As such, such a type character is important in the sense that he reveals some aspects of social issues of his own age, and Hedayat's Don Juan has the same importance. Literature of a particular nation and civilization generally reflects all the essential characteristics which are typical of the existing culture, and a type character is inherent in the culture of a nation. In other words, since every nation has its own myths and types as well as archetypes, literature of a particular nation reflects those forms and their understanding becomes easier because of their recurrence in literature.

Besides, Harry Levin looks at literature as an institution. He grants literature "a creative role in relation to society, namely in being able to affect social consequences" (quoted by Rudnick, 1973, 272). Hartman also believes that "the arts cannot cut themselves off from life. What they are in their essence, they can only be in the framework of the historical reality which gave them birth, and not in some shadow realm outside it" (quoted by Bruford, 1973, 10). The connection between literature and social life are numerous; therefore, a literary work reveals its own social period as well as the individuals' certain ideas and attitudes. Actually,

A man's most intimate desires and beliefs are very largely molded by what he has been taught and what he has unconsciously absorbed from his fellows. . . . The most original of geniuses is invariably seen, after enough time has elapsed, to be very much a man of his period and country, to share more with his contemporaries than he or his contemporaries realized. (Bruford, 1973, 18)

Stets and Burke (2005) believe that "the self influences society through the actions of individuals thereby creating groups, organizations, networks, and institutions. And reciprocally, society influences the self through its shared language and meanings that enable a person to take the role of the other, engage in social interaction, and reflect upon oneself as an object" (128). An individual lives in a society, not in vacuum, and acts within its context where others exist; therefore, the study of man cannot be achieved only through the study of his actions and behaviors. As a matter of fact, what man does depends on the society within which he acts. There are patterns of actions observed in certain groups, and since these actions are given emphasis by society and that group, they become norms. This way they are privileged over the other actions, and if an individual inclines to be accepted in that group, he has to act likewise, else he becomes the other. Boundaries are always the result of social norms attached to specific groups. Moreover, the experiences one performs are reflections of what is performed in society. Therefore, "no experience, of whatever order it may be, does not take place in a social vacuum. The life of the individual who has the experience is not a separate, self-sufficient entity" (Abercrombie quoted by Witte, 1941, 87).

Hedayat and his literary works – short stories and novels- in general, and his "Don Juan of Karaj" specifically deal with social issues and his contemporary people of the society. Undoubtedly, his aim is to affect his own society, while he himself is affected by his society because the relationship between every individual and society is reciprocal; that is, one's identity is shaped by the society as the society is shaped by its individuals. His life is a "particular thread in the larger fabric of the society in which he happens to live." Even if he does not approve the values of his own society, and he looks like a rebel, "he remains part of the pattern" of the society (Witte, 1941, 87). Fadai (2009) believes that "regarding to Hedayat, according to some researchers, the existence of the disease, decadence, or death in the Hedayat's works is due to the presence of these elements in that period" (20). As such, sociological criticism seems a proper approach in understanding him and his short story because sociological criticism is the kind of literary criticism that attempts to understand or place literature in its social context. Actually, it tries to analyze how society is present in literature and how literature is present in social life of people.

## 2. DISCUSSION

Since the first literary work that introduced Don Juan and his legend is Tirso de Molina's *El burlador de Sevilla el convidado de Piedra*, any discussion of Don Juanism necessitates that of its origin, too. Don Juan has been for nearly four centuries the material of a great mass of literature throughout Europe, and that of the legends of other continents. Don Juan exercising his will on the women and his survival in exile is the motif that gives shape to all Don Juan legends. Don Juan empties his victims of their own substances so that they will focus on him instead. Yakota-Murakami (1998) provides a vast range of Don Juan's characteristics. In most of literary works up to Byron's *Don Juan* and even still in some others after Byron's, Don Juan has been regarded as a woman chaser, an untiring and incorrigible lover, a seducer, a man who embodies inconsistency, betrayal, insincerity, passion, desire, sensuality, lust, and finally masculinity; that is, Don Juan is a man. "Don Juan is the man who before the women is nothing but man, neither father, nor husband, nor brother, nor son (Yakota-Murakami, 1998, 12)." Of course, the similarities continue, but the important point is that Don Juan becomes a type, a mythical figure who appears in literature of the world from Tirso's onward.

Through Moliere Don Juan was introduced to the rest of Europe. Moliere makes Don Juan a hypocrite and a coward. Many of the writers have viewed Juan as an evolution. He has been viewed by origin as an enemy of women, a seducer, a vicious person, but through different generations and cultures he has been proved to have gone through a process of change and evolution. That why, Byron's Don Juan "does not conquer women by promises of marriage and subterfuge, as in the case of Tirso's Don Juan, but by his handsome bearing, ready wit, and magnetic personality (Waxman, 1908, 196)." As such, Don Juan becomes a means in Hedayat's hand to reveal his own era's features. In Byron, Don Juan goes to many places to reveal the weaknesses of the age, and the reader takes side

with him, but in Hedayat, Don Juan is presented as a character who reveals his own weaknesses, those of the others, and of course, of the society. Therefore, Hedayat's decision to write about the misunderstandings between people in respect to their mutual relationships gives form to his presentation of Don Juan, Hassan, Hassan's mistress, as well as the narrator.

In Hedayat's "Don Juan of Karaj", the narrator is involved in the events and affairs and judges from his personal point of view. On a gloomy but spring day, at the time of holiday, he goes to a cafe and encounters Hassan after a long period of time. On his informing Hassan of his decision of going to Karaj for the holiday to get rid of visitors, Hassan decides to take his mistress to Karaj, too. And thus the frame of the story is shaped, and of course, with the appearance of Don Juan, it is developed. One can sympathize with Hassan, but all other characters are pale and overshadowed by Don Juan; therefore, Hassan is gradually pushed out of sight and becomes a miserable, emotional, and thoughtless person. He finally becomes the victim of his destiny; and therefore, has to leave his mistress in the hands of Don Juan, only to leave Karaj for Tehran during the night.

Hedayat's deep understanding of his own society along with his analytical mind helps him create a social satire. Dast-Qeyb, too, considers "Don Juan of Karaj" as Hedayat's most eminent social satirical work. This work is dealing with the terrifying reality of Hedayat's age; that is, a class conscious society filled with cultural ignorance. To deal with this reality, Hedayat introduces two types of characters: extroverts and introverts. These two types of characters seem necessary for Hedayat to reveal how the society is and how it shapes its own individuals' lives and how individuals become ignorant means in achieving the goals of society while they themselves lead the society toward their own goals.

The most remarkable introversive person is the narrator. It is worth to mention that Hedayat "rather . . . became an introvert avoiding the company of other children" around the age of six (Bashiri, 2013, 1). The narrator is first person who is left unknown to the reader to suggest that he is like the writer who either is unknown or prefers to be unknown to a society whose inhabitants live in ignorance. The narrator, like Hedayat, is honest and simple. He, like Hedayat, is an observer who tries to report what is observed in the society without direct and explicit judgments. He is much like a god, observing whatever happens and aware of everything. Undoubtedly, there is criticism in his report but no direct one. His entrance into the story is at the evening of the New Year, called Nourouz – meaning new day. In Nourouz, most Iranians have a fourteen days holiday, and according to their financial possibilities, they prepare themselves for the feast and its pleasure as well as visiting and reunion with families' members. However, the narrator decides to escape to a calm and quiet place far away from the crowded and noisy city because he hates these "artificial and boring visits and reunions" (Hedayat, 284). This kind of isolation and alienation in the narrator suggest that there is a superficial and thoughtless atmosphere dominant in the society; therefore, the prevailing happiness, sadness, visits and reunions, as well as feasts are all artificial, superficial and only to push the people to passivity and servitude; while in the depth of cultural and social tradition of the ancient times, these visits aim was to respect the elders, to mark and grant individuals' social stance, and to help those in need. Traditionally, it was reminded that refreshment and rebirth of nature were an excuse for the rebirth and refreshment of humanity and its values as well as the society which was under the pressure of repetition and boredom. It is the domination of this superficiality on the society that makes the narrator condemn the society which establishes it. He prefers to be introversive than to follow blindly the converted conventions of the society.

The narrator realizes that the society requires the domination of this artificiality as well as superficiality because this domination helps the society to have ignorant and enslaved subjects who become means of reinforcement of society's values. Actually, Hedayat's age is the one when the country approaches the West, which is scientifically, economically, socially and culturally developed. Initiations are taken to familiarize the talented Iranians with the progresses achieved by the West. Yet, cultural confrontations are created in the process of their education in the West. These cultural confrontations create contradictions in the society, and the society is not enough prepared to remove the tension originated from these contradictions. Actually, the statesmen find their own benefit in propagandizing the West culture and establishing it in the society while the notions inherent in this new culture are far from those underlying the attitudes of the Eastern Islamic people of the society. However, the society establishes and dominates only those aspects of this Western culture which are beneficial in creating good subjects by mixing them

with the traditional values and customs. As such, the essence of traditional values is extracted and only their superficial aspects remain. Some of the educated and talented individuals, like Hedayat and the narrator, realize the situation and thus are pushed to introversion. It is this introversion in Hedayat which leads him to create works of art in which characters reveal the dominant ideas the society demands to establish. Yet, through his works, he tries to reveal the superficiality of some of these notions and hence provide insights for the individuals to enlighten them. Hedayat was indeed a suffering soul, yet those factors in his life which tormented him, his sense of sexual guilt, the bleak view of human destiny, and the revolutionary zeal for the freedom of oppressed peoples were the same factors which made "Don Juan of Karaj" an exploration of the human condition.

The first extrovert is Hassan who is needed in the story to reveal the patriarchal dominant ideas of the society. Actually, he is here to be contrasted with the new notions the society is trying to establish in the society; that is, the qualities observed in Don Juan. Hassan is the traditional patriarch, the one the society is going to replace with the superficial man, represented by Don Juan. Hassan is sociologically simple, naïve, and even foolish who is tempted with any sign of affection or semi-love because of social oppressions and failures he has undergone. In his childhood, his simplicity caused him to be ridiculed by other children, as in his youth, his figure and physical power were means of being abused by bullies and blackmailers. Now he tries to compensate his repressed personality through accompanying the seemingly distinguished and modern individuals, such as his mistress whom he has recently acquainted with, in order to find a new identity as well as status.

As a matter of fact, it is the society that makes Hassan to act in contrast to what he has already been. Since he realizes he is abused in his traditional role and cannot gain anything, he attempts to show interest in those whom the society tries to dominate. But he cannot be formed as the society demands. That is why he cannot be in love with his mistress. He desires to murder her soul. He is willing to change her vivacious spirit to something dead and dull. He, in fact, hates her because she wants freedom. She wants money to spend on a cheerful life; she likes to be lovely as well as lively; therefore, she uses cosmetics. She reveals her spirited internal desires in the harmonious movements of her dance. Hassan knows very well that his life is dull and he is in isolation. He feels he is obliged to express his deceitful love to her to make her desire to live with him and put an end to his isolation. That is to say, his desires are for her body, not her soul. He likes to have a woman who asks him no money and no clothing, who is not of a caviling nature, and above all, who has no desire in expressing herself, especially in the presence of men. These characteristics are found in all patriarchal societies of all eras in which women are considered as tools and commodity in the possession of men. Hassan's psychological problems push him to isolation forever. A dynamic wife becomes out of the realm of his control, as his subconscious tells him that his wife should be cool, "static, under control and always available" at his service (Jorkesh, 1998, 71)." At the beginning, Hedayat creates a kind of sympathy for Hassan in the reader because Hassan's thoughts in respect to women are the concerns as well as the ideas of the entire society. Thus doing, it is much probable that the reader identifies himself with Hassan. However, in the middle, Hedayat leaves this sympathetic method, and goes to satire and irony in order to warn that society sometimes cannot change the spirit of its individuals as it requires.

Much emphasis on the weaknesses of Hassan puts more value in Don Juan and his special way of treating women in general and Hassan's mistress in particular, and of course, it is what the dominant class-conscious society is after. The society tries to degrade simple-hearted traditional individuals and to humiliate them in order to be able to put more value on the individuals like Don Juan and Hassan's mistress. This substitution helps the dominant class rule over them more easily because these new individuals, ignorant of the basic culture derived from the West, are acted upon by the society while they seem thoughtless. On the other hand, it seems as if, in Hedayat, as duplicity, trick, and cheat dominate the age, especially in Iran, Don Juan becomes the symbol of these characteristics. Now, it is the flirtations which have become the source of seduction. Being a man, attracting a woman, or even seducing her is achieved through these features, not even through force imposed on a woman. As Don Juan starts flirting Hassan's mistress by telling lies and falsified tales, the mistress leaves her lover for the flatterer and the cheater. It is as if Don Juan has been changed to a revengeful figure who tries to revenge human beings. Don Juan, here, has nothing to do with having an affair with the woman. It seems as if he is only here to separate the lover and the beloved. Hedayat's work is basically a new presentation and a new interpretation of an old material. Through this material, he tries to evoke and create an atmosphere which, to him, seems poisonous. This original satirical material becomes a means

to Hedayat to satirize the new existing and dominant atmosphere. Dast-Qeyb believes, in this story, "we see how vividly love stories are parodied" (67). It is not only Don Juan, but even Hassan, who is so much fascinated with, as well as in the bondage of, women. Actually, Don Juan seems to appear in his traditional role by stealing the bride from the bridegroom. Hassan intends, although one surely doubts his words, to marry his mistress, and he has taken her to Karaj to prepare her for a common life in near future. However, Don Juan's presence destroys all his plans, and his mistress is robbed off his hands. This treacherous figure is provoked by the new culture to be considered as an enlightened man, and it is this point that Hedayat is satirizing. Bashiri (2013) believes that 'characters like Haji Murad, Don Juan of Karaj, and Dash Akol uniquely portray Iran's transition from a traditional society into a brave new 20th century Iran" (13). This brave new world is actually hostile to traditional simple characters like Hassan. It creates the ground for oppressive, frivolous, rude and treacherous individuals who know how to manipulate the others, especially women, to satisfy their own lust. Their main function in the society is to propagandize the values of the modernity without themselves being familiar with these values. They try to gain an identity which has been imposed on them and the society from the places where they have not been to. It is this ignorance which leads them to kill the spirit in traditional individuals like Hassan, and to push them toward insignificance and loss of identity. That is why Hassan is pushed to insignificance by Don Juan; he loses his identity because of the presence of Don Juan. As such, Don Juan becomes a means, a subject, in the hands of the ruling class to oppose the previous traditional culture and its values.

Don Juan has a counterpart in females of the society. Hassan's mistress is exactly like Don Juan. She is valued by Don Juan because she acts and treats Hassan in the same way that Don Juan does. Dast-Qeyb views Hassan's mistress as an uncontrollable whore who "puts the youth to burn in desire (67)." Of course, she is much more than a whore. She is the source of temptation, as Sheyda (1993) considers her as a demolisher figure. Sheyda (1993) believes that "beyond the background of a man's shattering, the voice of the breaking of an image is heard (197)." Hassan is broken down because of the breaking of the image he had created in his fantasies. As Sheyda (1993) claims, "it is a different era, an era in which isolation, like fear, is not healed in any imaginative mirror. The whore woman is lost forever" and the shattered man never finds her (197). The role of this new woman is propagandizing new values which are in complete contrast to females' traditional role. She considers herself to belong to a higher social class than Hassan's, but there is no evidence in the story to reveal the point. Since the ruling class is trying to replace individuals like her for the traditional females who were seen only as a part of homes - whether their parent's or their husband's - without any social activity or interaction with the stranger men, Hassan's mistress thinks she is socially higher than not only Hassan but Hassan's mother, who represents the traditional women of the society. It is the society that shapes these new individuals' personality by promoting a kind of false pride in them and emphasis on their equality to men, while at the end, when she is manipulated by Don Juan and is shown at his control, it becomes clear that nothing has really changed in essence. Such people are only revelers manipulated by the society in order to shape the society because for the ruling class, the traditional culture, attitudes, behaviors and religion are its enemy, as the house, where Hassan and his mother live, is not a suitable place for her to live in, but suitable for her enemy (Hedayat, 285).

The point is that the ruling class is afraid of the strengthened and profound attitudes dominant in established Islamic notions. So whatever is associated with those notions seem hostile to the dominant ruling class. This society finds the solution in promoting shallow notions in women through evoking the desire for equality of opposing sexes. However, since this equality is based on shallow notions, these new individuals, who are tools to develop it, are shallow themselves. As such, Hassan's mistress has only one responsibility and function. Her function, like that of Don Juan, is to humiliate traditional people of the society and their beliefs. According to Abdolmaleki, (2013), obviously the ultimate function of a female gaze should have been the alleviation of the patriarchal imbalance of power and creation of gender equality in cultural representations. However, since feminist theory has failed to offer a clear definition of the 'female gaze', the concept only signifies its denotation. As a result, instead of alleviating the imbalance of power, it creates a reversal of roles with women as the gazers and men as the objects of the gaze. It is this reversal of roles that helps Hassan's mistress to lead Hassan to her trap. She needs him to be trapped, and then to be humiliated; and hence, to lose his identity. This is her duty, defined by the dominant class, to shape the individuals' attitudes. The point clarifies the reciprocal relationship between the society and its people. The society

influences Hassan's mistress, and shapes her identity, and then she leads characters like Hassan in the society. Therefore, she shapes the society through her developing its values.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly, the era Hedayat lived in and wrote was a transitional one. In any transitional era, new ideas and beliefs are introduced by the dominant class to replace the previous ones. However, this replacement and transition cannot be achieved overnight. The same situation is present in Hedayat's era. However, transition seems not simple because the established old ideas have their root in Islam, the religion which has so deeply rooted that cannot be easily substituted in the society. As a matter of fact, sociological approach has proved a good method in understanding the characteristics of Hedayat's era and how he has attempted to point out those features in his own society. Through this approach, it is revealed how previous traditional values are going to lose their essence while their substitutions are shallow and loose. Therefore, those representing them seem to be empty of something worthy although they are supposed to develop the Western progressive values as well as notions in the society.

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