ONCE UPON A TIME

A study of *Yekī Būd, Yekī Nabūd*, the first collection of short stories
by Sayyid Muḥammad 'Alī Jamāl-Zādeh

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Introductory Note.

The present article is based on a more extensive study of *Yekī Būd, Yekī Nabūd, Once Upon a Time*, which is to be the second chapter of a comprehensive biography on the life and works of Sayyid Muḥammad 'Alī Jamāl-Zādeh, now undertaken by the present author. When completed, the study will be larger in scope than any other existing study in the field of modern Persian literature in both European languages and Persian. The fact remains that at present it is difficult to point to works which are aimed at examining the life and literary endeavors of a single author in modern Persian prose or poetry. The studies thus far have had different aims, but, most of them fall into the category of general surveys—a distinct necessity due to the fact that modern Persian literature is so little known to the European reader and studied seriously so little by literary critics in Persia. Hence, the difference in approach in the present study. Because of the space which the author has made available to himself, it was possible to examine the stories from different points of view while paying special attention to their literary merits.

The literary evaluation is supplemented in this study with a short synopsis of every story and various translated passages for the sake of illustration.

The first chapter of the study, when completed, will consist of a sketch of Jamāl-Zādeh's life. The other chapters will deal with

his works and ideas and, at the end, an attempt will be made to examine Jamāl-Zādeh's literary work in relation to its historical background, namely, the indisputable position of Jamāl-Zādeh as the true founder of artistic modern Persian prose.

I.

Sayyid Muḥammad 'Alī Jamāl-Zādeh belongs to the group of writers who establish their reputation with their very first work. Neither their inventiveness nor the standard of their work serves as the decisive factor in the fame and honor they gain upon publication of their first book. Some additional factors are undoubtedly needed. The literary and social atmosphere of Persia at the beginning of the third decade of this century, due to the tensions and expectations, had the maturity to accept and absorb modern prose written in simple and idiomatic language and the willingness to finally march towards the Western achievements in this field. If it were not for this fact, it is doubtful whether *Once Upon a Time*, the first work of Jamāl-Zādeh, which appeared in 1921,¹ would have become a milestone in modern Persian prose. Furthermore, this small book immediately became a subject of imitation and a living model for many of the author's successors. On the foundations Jamāl-Zādeh laid, there grew a massive structure during the last fifty years and the fruits of this literature are now not only the possession of the Persian people, but also partly absorbed in Western literature² as outstanding examples of a new and unknown genre developed in a surprisingly short time.

From this point of view only, when considering his first work,

¹ Sayyid Muḥammad 'Alī Jamāl-Zādeh: *Yekī Būd, Yekī Nabūd* (Berlin, 1921). In this study references are made to the 7th edition (Tehran, 1965).

² See, for example, the following: Stella Corbin and Hassan Loffy (trans.): *Djamalzadeh: Choix De Nouvelles* (Paris, 1959); Rudolf Gelpke (trans.): *Persische Meistererzähler Der Gegenwart* (Zürich, 1961); Yaakov Mashiah (trans.): *Stories of Modern Persia* (Hebrew) (Tel-Aviv, 1967); Sadegh Hedayat: *The Blind Owl* (New York, 1957); the same in French: *La Chouette Aveugle* (Paris, 1953); and in German: *Die Blinde Eule* (Genf and Hamburg, 1960). One may also consult H. Kamshad's general survey on the subject, *Modern Persian Prose Literature* (Cambridge, 1966), and its vast and very useful bibliography.

is it possible to evaluate the entire works of Jamāl-Zādeh. The new way of writing is only a part of the whole concept. More important is the successful presentation of the new genre to the readers, at the right time and in the right social, literary, and personal circumstances. For, though an initiator, Jamāl-Zādeh is primarily appreciated for the high level of his writings and for the perfection of his form, and it is a fact that *Once Upon a Time* played the role of a milestone in modern Persian prose. Jamāl-Zādeh's Introduction to his book was recognized by both writers and critics as the manifesto of this prose and became a highly-ranked literary document.

Considering the importance of this Introduction, it is desirable to present some excerpt from it, thus leading to an understanding of some of Jamāl-Zādeh's motivations in writing the book. One should not forget, however, that many of the ideas expressed as axioms in this Introduction may be viewed as irrelevant to the literary standards of present day Persia.

Jamāl-Zādeh begins the Introduction by describing the backwardness of the literature in his country:

"The present day Persia is backward in its literary path compared to most of the countries of the world. In other countries literature has achieved variety during the course of time; it is the light of this variety which conquered the spirit of all the classes and inclined men and women, rich and poor, schoolboys and old men, towards reading and thus caused a spiritual advancement of the people. But unfortunately, in Persia, our country, any deviation from the methods of our past generations is usually considered to be destructive; the essence of the political despotism of Persia, which is renowned in the world, is also apparent in her literary heritage. This means that, when a writer begins writing, he considers only the learned people and scholars, without paying any attention to others. He even neglects many people who are literate but are only able to read simple texts. In short, the writer does not take into consideration a 'Literary Democracy'."³

³ Jamāl-Zādeh, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

It is very interesting to note in this paragraph the way in which Jamāl-Zādeh parallels the political and literary situation in his country. The existence of a "Political Despotism" and the absence of a "Literary Democracy" are, in his opinion, two ends of the same rope. In this paragraph he refers to the political regimes of Persia—those during ancient times and during the time of his writing—which did not allow a popular literature to be developed, the main consumers of which would have been the masses. Undoubtedly, the educational and cultural conditions of Persia led to a situation in which the literature was aimed at a minority of the population.

The reason the above mentioned situation was still existent at the time *Once Upon a Time* was written was, according to Jamāl-Zādeh, as follows:

"In short, the writers in our country neglect the common people and follow obscure and obtruse ways of writing, while in all the civilized countries . . . a simple way of writing overcomes the others. Even though the populations of these countries usually attend schools and are capable of understanding difficult writings, nonetheless the simple way of writing is preferred and the writers always attempt to employ the spoken language of the people, dressing it in a literary style. Even the great scholars try to write their books and other writings in as simple a language as possible . . ."⁴

More than anything else, Jamāl-Zādeh is intrigued with a simple style of writing understood by the masses. A certain amount of simplicity in writing will enable the masses to appreciate and enjoy literature. During the course of many centuries, a complicated prose containing a great number of Arabic words was created for the use of the learned people in Persia; in the social conditions of the twentieth century such a situation seemed to be impossible.

Here Jamāl-Zādeh points out the main problem dealt with in the Introduction being at the same time the main problem of the

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

Persian prose: lack of novels. In the following passage, Jamāl-Zādeh expresses his ideas about the importance of the novel and its characteristics:

"First, the novel serves in reality as a school for the working class who, because of their daily efforts to earn a living, are unable to attend school and thus increase their knowledge. In addition, they have neither the time nor the patience to read scientific and philosophical works at night and thus acquire some knowledge. On the other hand, the novel increases our knowledge in many fields by employing plain language and an attractive way of writing, which bring happiness and satisfaction . . .

"The novel acquaints the classes of a society with each other; the urban classes with the rural; the servants with the tradesmen; the Kurds with the Balūchīs; the Qashqa'is with the Gilakis; the orthodox with the Šūfīs; the Šūfīs with the Zoroastrians; the Zoroastrians with the Bābīs; the students with the workers of Zūr-Khāneh;⁶ the courtiers with the merchants . . .

"It is possible to say that the novel is the best mirror to reflect the mentalities and peculiarities of nations . . . For a stranger who wishes to know the Persians there is no better book than James Morier's *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*⁶ and Comte Gobineau's *The Story of Gambèr Aly* and *The War with the Turkomans*.⁷

⁶ A health club, Persian style. Literally: A House of Strength. In Zūr-Khāneh verses from Firdawsi's *Shāh-Nāme* are recited and accompanied by drums. The special slang of Zūr-Khāneh, both witty and vivid, no doubt did not escape Jamāl-Zādeh's attention.

⁶ (New York, 1937). This book, a minor classic of English literature, is probably the most important book ever written on Persian manners. Its amazing insight into Persian life in the 19th century has exercised a great influence upon many writers. Traces of this influence are easily depictable in the early writings of Jamāl-Zādeh.

⁷ In *Five Oriental Tales* (New York, 1925). The present author had no access to the original French edition. Although different in nature from Morier's book,

⁸ *Acta Orientalia*, XXXIII

"The language of a people derives its greatest benefit from the novel and the novelistic style, since this style, be it presented in book-form or as a play,⁸ or as a letter, etc. presents a variety of words, idioms, parables, difficult constructions and dialects. In reality it is an instrument which records the manners of speech of the different groups and classes of a nation, whereas, in contrast, the classical and scientific styles cannot undertake this task and can seldom find some words out of the realm of its special vocabulary, idioms, and similes . . . the limited scope of words and idioms results in the fact that those foreigners who wish to study Persian only by means of books, speak this simple language after a long period of study in a grotesque manner."⁹

The novel, encompassing the full life of the people it portrays, is therefore a show window for a nation, to be seen by many nations from various angles.

But more than any other component, Jamāl-Zādeh emphasizes language. A careful examination of this aspect in *Once Upon a Time*, and in his other works, will prove that Jamāl-Zādeh is very sensitive to the question of language, since to him it is the soul of a literary work. He also refers to the kind of language to be used which is, to his understanding, the narrative style. He says of this style:

"The present author has collected some of the popular words used especially by the lower classes and the inhabitants of the city of Maṣḥhad . . . and has included them at the end of this book. It is obvious that these words, with a solid, unalterable and precise meaning and a popularity among those who speak Persian, have to be recorded somewhere in order to increase the range of the language and so as not to be forgotten or lost in the course of time. The writers and

nevertheless this book also influenced *Once Upon a Time* and other early writings of Jamāl-Zādeh.

⁸ Here is an obvious confusion on Jamāl-Zādeh's part regarding epics and drama.

⁹ Jamāl-Zādeh, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-9.

scholars should use in their works the best of these words so that they might become part of the literary language . . ."¹⁰

In order to encourage the use of these words and idioms, which total a few thousand,¹¹ Jamāl-Zādeh incorporates them successfully into his stories. They also appear partly at the end of the book, three hundred and twenty eight in number. While reading the conversations of the heroes in *Once Upon a Time*, or the author's descriptions, one is amazed by the genuine, flowing and everyday conversations which characterize the heroes of this book as well as of the other books by Jamāl-Zādeh. The characters are part of the reality of life in the land in which they live, breathe and act.

II.

There are two main reasons for discussing Jamāl-Zādeh's Introduction in detail, the first of which being in regard to its great importance. In 1921, Jamāl-Zādeh's voice was that of a brave man, which led, together with other preliminary factors, to the above-mentioned change in modern Persian prose. Even though Jamāl-Zādeh was very young at the time, he was nonetheless a citizen of the world. The somewhat strict education he had received from the Jesuit Fathers in Lebanon, consisting basically of classical French literature, and his occupation mainly as a translator in the Persian Embassy in Berlin, sharpened in the young Jamāl-Zādeh, already a cultural addict of two of the most important languages at the beginning of the century, i.e. French and German, the sense for a literature which serves the people and is, at the same time, enjoyable.

Jamāl-Zādeh's point of view is the second reason for discussing the Introduction in detail. It is interesting to note the way in which Jamāl-Zādeh fulfills his own standards as presented in the Introduction. *Once Upon a Time* consists of six short stories, some of which being short sketches with a local color and others being

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹¹ Collected a few years ago by Jamāl-Zādeh, with the collaboration of Muḥammad Ja'far Maḥjūb, under the title *Farhang-e 'Iṣṭilāḥāt-e 'Āmiyāneh* (A Dictionary of Colloquial Terms) (Tehran, 1965).

well-constructed. At this point, the question arises as to whether or not there exists a paradox in Jamāl-Zādeh's ideas. The answer is no: first, the fact is that the novel, because it is a work of wide scope, cannot appear in the literature of a nation overnight. There is a need to develop and crystallize the social patterns represented in it. Furthermore, a tradition of writing represented by many writers in many works is needed to clear the path before the final form of the novel can be achieved.¹²

Second, Jamāl-Zādeh fulfills his demands in his later works. He turns from short stories to novels with a wider background and a greater number of characters. The limitations of his early works, therefore, are only those which every writer faces at the beginning of his career.

III.

PERSIAN IS SUGAR

On the surface, this tale of four innocent men who spend their time as temporary prisoners in a wretched customs room is an extreme example of lack of communication among speakers of the same official language. The story is told by one of the prisoners in the customs room who is being detained "till the appropriate investigations will take place"—only to satisfy the suspicions of the customs' officers.

The linguistic "Rashomon"¹³ of this story starts when the author meets two completely different individuals in a rancid room. One, a "Europeanized" young man with a stiff collar, totally wrapped in his top coat and engrossed in a novel, arouses some very sharp sarcastic remarks in the author. The other, a shaykh sitting cross-legged and wearing an 'Abā and an 'Am-

¹² The similarities regarding the trends of development of the novel in the literatures of the Middle East—Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and in different ways, Hebrew—are truly striking. A comparative study to this effect will prove to be a very valuable undertaking.

¹³ A powerful Japanese film recording the different testimonies of a number of witnesses to a murder, completely irrelevant to each other. Different in background and conception, "Rashomon", nonetheless, can perfectly be compared to this story as far as the lingual misunderstandings are concerned.

māmeḥ,¹⁴ also can not escape some of the author's sarcastic remarks.

Pushed by the guards, Ramaḍān joins this company. The young man tearfully studies his surroundings and decides the *ṣhaykh* is the only person who might be able to explain the mystery of his arrest.

The tensions of the story increase from this point on. The *ṣhaykh*'s language, far from resembling Persian, includes unlimited Arabic phrases, strange recitations from the Qur'ān, and obscure idioms. Ramaḍān is shocked and frightened, and, assuming the *ṣhaykh* has connections with Jinns¹⁵ and demons, he determines to flee from his presence.

In his distress, Ramaḍān turns to the "Europeanized" young man for help. Looking up from his book, the young man begins to answer Ramaḍān's question with an incessant and torrential rain of foreign words, in their French pronunciations. Ramaḍān is completely puzzled. "The student of the European culture", who tries to bring salvation to his country, so to speak, by incorporating foreign words, causes perplexity and helplessness instead. Poor Ramaḍān is at a total loss, and fearing that this young man is insane, he bursts into tears and cries loudly.

When the author moves to comfort Ramaḍān, speaking a simple language much like his own, Ramaḍān is overjoyed, kisses the author's hand and says:

"You are an angel. God has sent you to rescue my soul."¹⁶

The author answers:

"Look Ramaḍān, the language they speak is, of course, also Persian . . ."¹⁷

Meanwhile the prisoners are freed from the temporary detention.

The author shares a carriage with the *ṣhaykh* and the "Europeanized" man. As they are leaving, Ramaḍān approaches them,

¹⁴ Cloak and turban.

¹⁵ Airy or fiery bodies.

¹⁶ Jamāl-Zādeh, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

puts a handkerchief-ful of mixed nuts in the hand of the author, and whispers in his ear:

"Excuse me for saying so, but, by God, it seems to me that their insanity has influenced you. How do you dare travel together with these people?"

The author replies:

"Ramaḍān, I am not a "chicken" like you."

"May God protect you," answers Ramaḍān. "If you get bored because you are not able to speak to them, you may have some nuts. And please remember your servant."¹⁸

IV.

Going back for a moment to the introduction of this collection, one can understand the importance of this story. Since every character appearing in it is a representative of a main social stream in the Persian language of the time, it is no wonder that the author and the young man finally find a common language. On the other hand, the *shaykh* and the "Europeanized" man are characterized as persons detached from their society because of a lack of communication, when in actuality they ought to play an important role within it. The former, a representative of the clergy with great influence on molding the characters of his society, founders to a world of demoralization. He neither reaches the flock under his care nor can he offer it help and guidance in the hour of despair. He worries about his own affairs and concerns himself with his own interests; there is no attempt on his part to understand those who are in need of him.

The latter, a representative of the intelligensia, so to speak, is also detached from society. If he is to be considered as one who has absorbed European culture, it is only with respect to the superficial learning of a foreign language and to the showing-off of this knowledge. But what are the real meanings, for Ramaḍān and others, of those foreign words which make the language a

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

strange mixture of conjugations, declensions, and syntactical formations? Nothing, of course! It is the limited intellectual ability of the "Europeanized" man which impedes his thorough understanding of the problems. It is not enough for one to use bombastic words: one must understand them.

The comical overtones of the story from beginning to end prevent it from becoming a technical confrontation of the representatives of the different classes of the society. Despite its brevity, which hinders the desired development of the characters in the story, the heroes are nonetheless unusually lifelike and natural. This fact can be understood by the associations brought forth in the mind of the reader who is familiar with the problems. The *shaykh*, the "Europeanized" man and the young man are outstanding representatives of known, established social classes whose patterns of conversation and ways of expression are very familiar. It is the duty of the author in this case to bridge the differences among them and it is not surprising that when the author finds a common language with *Ramaḍān*, the *shaykh* and the "Europeanized" man are left out. Otherwise, the real aims of the author would not have been achieved. Thus, the social criticism manifests itself in this story.

V.

THE POLITICIAN

"The Politician" revolves around *Shaykh Ja'far*, a hard working but unsuccessful cotton-ginner who is encouraged by his wife to seek a new, more profitable profession. Pointing to the example of their neighbor *Hājj-ʿAlī*, a successful politician and "democrat", she convinces her husband to enter politics. *Shaykh Ja'far* takes advantage of an opportunity to enter the political arena when one day he hears the cries of a crowd to close the shops and to assemble at the gates of the *Majlis*.¹⁹ He joins the marchers, crying loudly and addressing the crowds emphatically:

"O Persians! O zealous Persians! The country has been lost. How long shall this shame endure? We need unity,

¹⁹ The Persian parliament.

unanimity and brotherhood. Let us finish the job. We will either die and have our names live after us, or we will live and be free from this shame and misery. By the name of God, we need enthusiasm and zeal!"²⁰

Upon arrival at the Majlis, accompanied by a huge crowd, *Shaykh* Ja'far is welcomed by the prime minister and his cabinet members who promise to take immediate action if he will "calm the people"; by dispersing the crowds, *Shaykh* Ja'far becomes a national hero. Praised as the new "politician" born overnight, one newspaperman goes as far as to compare him to Kāveh, the blacksmith:²¹

"Although cotton is a plant and iron is a mineral, nonetheless Ja'far the cotton-ginner and Kāveh the blacksmith are both jewels of the same origin and flowers of the same garden. Both are brave sons of Persia and defenders of its liberty and independence."²²

Puzzled by the drastic change in his neighbor's fortunes, Hājj-'Alī nevertheless visits *Shaykh* Ja'far to inform him of the basic rules and terminology of politics. They decide to go hand in hand along the crooked path of politics.

Entering the Bazar, *Shaykh* Ja'far meets many people interested in his opinion on current affairs; however, his answers remain totally ambiguous and Delphic. And, while wondering whether to open his shop or to leave it shut as in the last few days, an envoy of a politician interested in undermining and replacing the present prime minister approaches *Shaykh* Ja'far with a purse full of coins in return for the new politician's support.

When Hājj-'Alī visits later that day, *Shaykh* Ja'far, wanting to prove his prestige to his neighbor, tells him the whole story. Consequently, the two men launch into an interesting and revealing dialogue exemplifying many aspects of political life of that period.

²⁰ Jamāl-Zādeh, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

²¹ A Persian legendary and revolutionary hero whose name is associated with the oppressing king *Daḥḥāk*.

²² Jamāl-Zādeh, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

At the end Hājj-‘Alī reveals to his colleague the secret of being a good politician:

“At the beginning the key to a politician’s door is not to accept a bribe. If you do, politicians will not let you enter politics. It is like not having a pass at night when you want to pass the grand cross road of the town. But the moment you establish yourself you become part of the guard and it is obvious that the guard does not need a pass. Even then it would be much to your benefit if nobody knew that you accept a bribe, including your family. Only then will you become a big politician. However, remember that it is very difficult to be clever and tricky to such an extent unless you have had experience in a similar field, i.e. as ‘Ākhūnd, Mullā, Sayyid, etc.”²³

After a careful review of this lesson, Shāykh Ja‘far, publicly, at the gates of the Majlis, returns the purse of coins to his apprentice to return it to its owner. The crowds shout joyfully in appreciation of his patriotism. At home, however, he learns that his apprentice brought the money there, taking a sum of it as his long overdue salary. Shāykh Ja‘far reconciles himself with the fact and finds comfort in his fame, which later leads to his election as a representative of the “Democratic Party”. However, finding politics a dangerous occupation, he retires soon and becomes the mayor of a small town where he quietly spends the rest of his life.

VI.

The sharp criticism expressed in this story is offset to a great extent by the employment of the comic and the absurd. Nevertheless, the criticism is obvious throughout. The fact that Shāykh Ja‘far is able to take advantage of the crowd’s enthusiasm and thus become, after a short while, a representative in the Majlis is of course very unrealistic. But, taking into account the actual political situation in Persia of the period in question with its newly established constitutional system, the fantasy of Shāykh Ja‘far’s case does not lack in realistic implications.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 64–65. ‘Ākhūnd, Mullā and Sayyid—religious ministrants.

Undoubtedly, one has to consider fully the role of the middle class in the beginning of the Persian Revolution—especially that of the merchants and the clergy. It is disappointing, however, that after a short while the middle class lost both its interest and its influence in the stream of events. This story was written at a time of political chaos in Persia; therefore, it is no wonder that the affairs are described in such a ludicrous manner. Moreover, even the way in which Shaykh Ja'far enters political life is far different from the traditional and customary. Thus Shaykh Ja'far, who seems to have drawn popular support, has no support in reality, and his loneliness after the climax of his speeches is ample proof of that. As he reads further in the story, the reader feels more and more that he is confronted with an absurd case. Yet some characteristics of Shaykh Ja'far do not disturb the reader even though they would have been an obstacle to his political success under normal political conditions in any other country. Shaykh Ja'far's image is surprisingly very close to representatives of the common people who populated the Majlis at those days. The fact that he is illiterate and lacks political consciousness does not disturb the reader in this case—because of objective reasons. Moreover, even the acceptance of a bribe is not considered to be a strong deviation from the rules of the game—if only one is clever enough to follow them properly. To the reader familiar with the conditions described in this story, the advice given by Hājj-'Alī is penetrating and revealing.

Nevertheless, the feeling of unreality in this story is the result of rapidly-occurring conflicting events which clash with the reader's concepts. Moreover, in many paragraphs the manner of description makes it clear beyond doubt that the young writer uses the extreme and the impossible in order to bring to light and to criticize the social problems. For, how should one really regard this story after all? Should it be regarded as a requiem to democracy and constitutional regime in Persia, composed by a Persian with open eyes and keen senses, or as a farce, the subject of which happens to be the legislature of the country, or as an attempt to point out defects and illustrate general characteristics, or as an endeavor to describe a man who tries to improve his life by taking advantage of certain external circumstances, and of his

resulting good fortune? Actually, it is possible to find all these elements in this story. However, it is, above all, a clear social criticism, with special emphasis on the various aspects of political life. The hopes engendered at the birth of the Persian Revolution were dissipated when confronted with reality and much goodwill was wasted, for no important changes had taken place, in fact, in the political situation; it was only a superficial ornamentation which had been added here. For this reason even *Shaykh* Ja'far is allowed to play the game, and his qualifications, or better yet, his lack of qualifications are not considered an important factor.

VII.

THE BEAR HUG

Ḥabīb-'Allāh, the much-liked coffee house boy of the town of Malāyer, is travelling with four other passengers from his home town to Kangāwar. The discomfort of the cold winter on this journey is only surpassed by the presence of Russian soldiers in the area—for the story is set in 1334 A.H. close to Kirmānshāh where the Persian nationalists fought the Russians.

Ḥabīb-'Allāh, a handsome, cheerful, smiling and friendly young man, sets off on his journey for many reasons:

“Ḥabīb-'Allāh's motivation for his journey was so as to take care of his nephews. It was said that his brother, a gendarme who had displayed a great deal of bravery in the battles with the Russians, was shot and covered with snow. Also, Ḥabīb-'Allāh was authorized by his master to buy a few Mans²⁴ of good quality Kurdish tobacco which the master had discovered in Kangāwar previously and to bring it to Malāyer. It should also be noted discreetly that Ḥabīb-'Allāh was not unwilling to visit his birthplace and his old friends and to show off his improved appearance. And only God knows whether his heart was captured in Kangāwar or not; however, people told many stories about his engagement to the sister of one of his old friends.”²⁵

²⁴ A unit of weight, approximately an equivalent of 7 lbs.

²⁵ Jamāl-Zādeh, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

At one of the stops along the way, a wounded Russian soldier approaches the travellers and asks for mercy; and, of all of them, Ḥabīb-ʿAllāh is the only one who doesn't suspect the stranger and helps him into the carriage. After treating the soldier's wounds, to quiet the complaining carriage driver, Ḥabīb-ʿAllāh presents him with a coin taken from his purse which contains a handful of them.

While trying to put back his purse, he drops it, and the coins fall, scattering on his lap. The soldier's eyes glitter when he sees the money. Consequently, at one of the fortresses along the road, the Russian, wrapped securely and warmly in Ḥabīb-ʿAllāh's 'Abā, calls to a few of his comrades sitting by the fire. As they approach, the soldier utters a few Russian words to his countrymen. They respond to his remarks, pull Ḥabīb-ʿAllāh from the carriage, whip him and drag him towards the fortress where they order him to be shot.

The narrator walks towards the sound of the shot and finds the body of Ḥabīb-ʿAllāh on the ground:

"His two arms were stretched out on both sides on the snow; it was as though he was imploring help from the righteous God. The blood which trickled from his rib onto the snow reminded me of the blood of the wounded Russian [soldier] . . ."²⁶

Under the cover of darkness, a black figure approaches the corpse of Ḥabīb-ʿAllāh. He walks toward it, inserts his hand in Ḥabīb-ʿAllāh's scarf and pulls out his purse of coins. The black betraying figure is no-one but the wounded Russian soldier, who had been saved by the kind-heartedness and sacrifices of his victim.

VIII.

Above all, this story seems to be an expression of Ḥabīb-ʿAllāh's personal tragedy. He is a victim of his own naïveté and benevolence. Although character development is not demonstrated in this story through inner growth or deeds, for the writer mostly

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

describes the hero by the use of adjectives, nevertheless the results draw the reader's sympathy. Undoubtedly, the personal tragedy and the injustice done to Ḥabīb-'Allāh, leading to his death, intensify the feeling of sympathy in the reader. As payment for his cruel betrayal, the Russian soldier can only expect the reader's disgust and wrath. The fact that the murderer is a foreign soldier adds to the dramatic effect, and the drama reaches its climax during the two encounters of the narrator with Ḥabīb-'Allāh's corpse. The first time, he finds the corpse on the snow, with two arms outstretched on it as if begging the Lord's help. Nature also plays a role in this sad occasion:

"At this moment a dark cloud covered the moon—as though it intended to conceal the ill deeds of human beings behind a curtain. The lighted world became dark at once."²⁷

The second encounter takes place the next morning, after the corpse had been robbed by the soldier:

"I found that Ḥabīb-'Allāh's body was covered entirely by the snow. There were no traces left—neither of him nor of the footprints of the Cossack . . . Nor were there any traces of punishment . . .!"²⁸

Thus, Ḥabīb-'Allāh dies while still in his prime. His crime was his generosity and his punishment—death!

IX.

MULLĀ QURBĀN-'ALĪ'S CONFESSION

Upon the death of his employer, Mullā Qurbān-'Alī—who was forced to make Tehran his home and become an apprentice to a rawḍeh-khān²⁹—marries his master's widow; and, although illiterate, his memory brings him much success and satisfaction.

²⁷ *Idem.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

²⁹ Literally: A reader of Rawḍeh. Rawḍeh is a religious sermon based on events from the history of the Ṣhī'a sect in Islam and its heroes. Because of the tragic stamp of these events the Rawḍeh is mostly a sad sermon which, paradoxically,

This happiness, however, does not last long. In Mullā's neighborhood there lives a clothier by the name of Ḥājji. A quiet, God-fearing man, Ḥājji fulfills his religious duties meticulously. Understandably then, when Ḥājji's daughter becomes ill, he vows that when she recovers he will hold a weekly session of rawḍeh-khānī for five months; and, in his position, Mullā Qurbān-'Alī is most eligible to undertake the task. After the third week's session Mullā Qurbān-'Alī, upon leaving Ḥājji's house, hears a soft voice addressing him. It is the voice of a young veiled girl holding a coin in her stretched hand. Mullā's reaction is the following:

"I extended my trembling hand to take the coin. The coin dropped and rolled towards the courtyard and the flower-bed. The young girl stooped to pick up the coin and followed it, while in this stooping position. Suddenly, her veil caught on a thorn of a rose bush and came off. The young girl, unveiled and murmuring 'Shame on me', attempted constantly to cover her blushing and shameful face with her hands."³⁰

At this moment, the first buds of a hopeless love are sown; every moment of Mullā Qurbān-'Alī's time is now spent reflecting upon his new love and questioning his wife for information concerning Ḥājji's young daughter.

One night, unable to sleep, Mullā Qurbān-'Alī goes onto the roof. Having reflected on the enchanting panorama of the night, he suddenly finds himself looking at his neighbor's room:

"When I returned to my senses I found myself at a corner of Ḥājji's roof, hiding behind a broken gable roof and looking down through the hole of the spout into the house of a forbidden woman. Close to the threshold of the room, I could see a white bed and the loose hair of a sleeping girl upon its pillow . . ."³¹

is often preached at weddings and other gay happenings. Rawḍeh-Khānī (see below)—reading of Rawḍeh.

³⁰ Jamāl-Zādeh, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 101-102.

Amazed at his own caprice, Mullā Qurbān-‘Alī returns to his bedroom feeling guilty and miserable.

When his wife dies, Mullā is forced to pawn his house. Isolated from the world, he lives in loneliness and solitude in his home.

One midnight Hājji knocks on Mullā's door to invite him to another session, because of the eruption anew of his daughter's illness. Mullā accepts the invitation, but, when he locks the door and tries to re-enter his home, he finds he cannot control his steps. Facing the heavens, he utters these most insolent words:

“ . . . Why, whilst you are familiar with your servant's sensitiveness, he who keeps alive the memory of your Husayn, is it that you grant Hājji's daughter beautiful hair and cheeks, and later cause her delicate body to become ill? Is that my reward for thirty years of occupying myself with the disasters of your saints? Many thanks, O Lord! It is indeed an excellent remuneration! For no reason you cause the coin to drop from the innocent girl's hand and, following that, you desert her veil in the hands of the thorns and as a result you blacken my life. You take away from me my incomparable wife, and look what is ahead of me tonight by your hand! You want to turn my tears into blood, O Lord, by again making the poor girl ill. Earnestly, it is already too much . . .”³²

Again it is the voice of the bereaved Hājji, requesting Mullā to recite verses from the Qur'ān by his daughter's coffin, which brings Mullā back to reality. Because of his illiteracy, Mullā occupies himself reading some formulas of Du'ā;³³ and, after reciting a verse, he feels totally at a loss, gets up and cries:

“Why don't you get up, poor girl? You and death?”³⁴

Mullā's desire to see her face once again prompts him to unveil her, and unintentionally his lips fasten to the lips of the corpse—lips resembling a withered rose.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 105.

³³ A good wish, prayer or supplication.

³⁴ Jamāl-Zādeh, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

The officers who arrested him entered the mosque when they found its lights lit. That is how Mullā Qurbān-‘Alī concludes his life during the past seven years in prison:

“... I am still in prison, as you see. However, there is no one day during which I do not recall the rose bush, the dishevelled hair and the smiling mouth... I am sorry to have troubled you so long. Please, excuse me! But it has been seven years since I had an opportunity to talk to anybody.”³⁶

X.

At first glance *Mullā Qurbān-‘Alī’s Confession* is a story with a distinct imprint of social criticism. Its hero, Mullā Qurbān-‘Alī, is a religious leader and this title may lead the reader to assume that here also, like in many other places, Jamāl-Zādeh wishes to criticize the religious ministrants of his country. Actually, it is possible to state with certainty that *Mullā Qurbān-‘Alī’s Confession* is a naive love story whose hero accidentally becomes engaged in a “spiritual” profession of this sort. For although Jamāl-Zādeh slings some satirical arrows towards the hero, nonetheless, the story relates nothing but the tale of a disappointed love, not an impossible one, which never leaves the sphere of the hero’s thoughts to enter the world of reality.

Mullā Qurbān-‘Alī, a fifty year old man, struggles through his entire life to earn a modest living for his wife and himself. His profession is an unsteady one, although many Mullās engage in it; and, taking into account the fact that since his marriage to his master’s widow his life has been an unchangeable routine, it is possible to understand the suddenness by which the love for Hājji’s sixteen year old daughter takes hold of him.

The “beloved” could easily have been Mullā’s grand-daughter. But love never warns the lover when it intends to knock on his door. Thus, even if this love should be considered by all “rules” of love to be absurd, one has to admit that this absurdity diverts it from any possible compromise and subsequently gives it a

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

strong and distinct flavor. It is true, however, that this is a romantic love the traces of which can be found in different literatures over many centuries. As such, it does not exceed the stage of a Platonic love. Moreover, in our case, the love is dressed with a local cloak and adorned with a diversity of colors and manners of the country. No wonder, then, that the lover is a Mullā—a well known figure in his society and a representative of a certain class which very often is criticized because of its deeds.

What, then, makes the story a romantic love story?

First, there is the element of love at first sight. From the first moment that Mullā Qurbān-‘Alī sees Ḥājji’s daughter, he falls in love with her, and, from that moment, his life becomes a hell. Unheedingly, one recollects Don Quixote in this respect—much gallantry about nothing. The fact that this love does not develop and remains in its premature stage up to the very death of the “beloved” and the imprisonment of the lover only strengthens this feeling.

The unreality of this love also adds to making this a romantic love story. Again, it is possible for a love to be the wildest and the most imaginary from its very beginning. But, it cannot continue like this indefinitely. Mullā Qurbān-‘Alī does not even try to express his feelings; his responsibility to his wife, his profession, etc. prevent him from initiating any step to materializing this unfulfilled love. His first and only attempt to express his love is reflected in his kissing the lips of the dead girl. The tragic circle of this unfortunate love is closed. Also closed are Mullā Qurbān-‘Alī’s neck and feet in chains!

XI.

This delicate story does not lack some beautiful and poetic moments, adorning a well developed and logical plot, with a monologue as its basis. A man with a pleasant and charming personality, Mullā Qurbān-‘Alī, immediately draws the sympathy of the reader, and the many agonies of his love only draw more sympathy. The scene in which the veil is caught in the rose bush and the girl’s hair is flowing in the breeze is a romantic scene of the highest standard, coated with a substantial amount of local

manners and Persian imprints. The veil, on the other hand, more than everything else, represents the Persian woman, her backwardness and her place at the bottom of the social ladder during the time the story was written. However, essentially she is a delicate girl, presented here with her overwhelming beauty and hair, a girl who turns the situation into a fatal one for the story's hero. From that moment on his deterioration is unavoidable.

Later, Mullā Qurbān-ʿAlī is caught in another typical romantic situation, this time on the roof. Here, too, the components of the situation are very easily detectable; the moonlight, the drunken Dāsh³⁶ melancholically reciting love and drinking couplets, and the stolen glimpse into the room of the forbidden girl create a particularly beautiful situation in which Mullā Qurbān-ʿAlī reveals the many aspects of his personality. His flight from the roof and the following scene with his wife when he is questioned about the reasons for his leaving the room contain many tragi-comic elements, among others.

Finally, there is the scene in the mosque, when Mullā Qurbān-ʿAlī sits next to the dead body of Hājji's daughter and has to recite verses from the Qur'ān. The hidden love now becomes apparent. The dead body stirs up Mullā's anger and he furiously demands to know why this little beauty had to die so young. The kiss on the withered lips of the girl practically expresses all his unspoken love for her. Here lies the tragic beauty of this scene. An expression of a love in this form, while sufficiently cruel, reminds one of all the romantic loves which have led to a tragedy at their ends; the scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, with all its different setting and characterization, being only one tragic reminiscent. The burning fire in Mullā Qurbān-ʿAlī's bones brings the hero much suffering in the prison, where he spends his life. Perhaps he is like the candle that burns in its own fire, or like the butterfly that flies round the candle for many hours before burning in the fire.

³⁶ A local quasi-hero, possessing both positive and negative merits. In his intoxication a Dāsh would behave wildly and in his sobriety he would lend a hand. A typical product of the Persian society, his name would intrigue mixed feelings. Colloquially: brother.

XII.
EVERY MAN TO HIS DESERTS

The nostalgia for the familiar Turkish bath drives the narrator of the present story, a Persian residing in a European city, to a recommended bath there. During a friendly conversation, the Persian learns his masseur had been to Persia for a few years, as an "Advisor to the Ministry of Interior, Exterior, Finance, Justice, War, Education and Religious Endowments, Public Welfare, Post and Telegraph, Customs, Trade, etc."³⁷

The amazed client questions him concerning the validity of this story and, finding his client insistent, the masseur relates his past. Years ago, a dignitary, convinced that the magical powers of the masseur will cure him of his chronic illness, builds a private bath in his home and employs him as his private masseur. At this time, the government of Persia appoints the dignitary as Chief Advisor, entrusting him to select a number of additional advisors for the Persian Civil Service.

When the time comes for the dignitary to leave for Persia, he decides to take his masseur along as a member of his delegation. In Tehran, he is appointed advisor to the Ministry of Post and a few simple and trivial acts on his part bring him much respect and a soaring reputation. It is only his patron who secretly enjoys the masseur's original talents every morning and holds the key to his secret.

Promoted, honored by the King, and praised by the journalists and poets, the masseur at the same time makes a fortune by exercising his advisory talents, but he does not neglect to recollect the realities expressed in Morier's book, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*, regarding the "treachery, the habit of lie and the unfaithfulness of Persian people."³⁸

Cautiously, then, he changes his money into gold coins and informs the authorities of a sudden illness requiring recuperation outside the country. The day he leaves Tehran stands out in his

³⁷ Jamāl-Zādeh, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 119. In all likelihood, a passage freely translated, or copied from the Persian translation of the book. See also note 6.

memory: the entire city bids him farewell and bestows much honor and gratitude upon him.

Unfortunately, before he even reaches the first stop of his return trip, he becomes victim to a group of robbers who steal his money, leaving him penniless. Reaching Europe with much trouble, the masseur is forced to resume his previous profession.

Having completed his story, the masseur falls deep in thought as the hero remembers having heard the story in his childhood. Thus, his reaction to the situation in Persia, his country, and to its inhabitants is this:

“ . . . People of this capacity, no doubt deserve the services of such an advisor . . . ”

And, he smiles adding:

“Every man to his deserts.”³⁹

When the narrator leaves the bath, the masseur hands him his diary based on his experiences in Persia. The satiric nature of the diary coupled with the sharp criticism of Persia and its inhabitants is, to the narrator, both joyful and entertaining reading for many hours to come, rather than a mere critical document, particularly because of its humorous nature.

XIII.

In *Every Man to His Deserts*, much more than in other stories of the collection, the author's criticism is sharp and direct. It is anchored in two far and separated geographical spheres—Jamāl-Zādeh's homeland, Persia, on the one hand, and Europe on the other. Due to his life experiences, which even in those early years encompassed his country, some Middle-Eastern and some European lands, it is not very difficult to see and recognize the roots of the present satire.

When he visits Europe and finds, to his deep astonishment, the

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

open abyss between the realities of those countries and his own country, it is easier for the reader to understand, in light of this background, the reaction of the aware and alert young man who bears deep in his heart the stamps of a youth's disillusionments, partly personal and partly those in connection with the political situation of his country.

However, this is only one side of the picture. Like all his contemporary young Persians who visited Europe at the beginning of this century, the encounter had certain fatal consequences: They were shaken and transformed from one extreme situation to another. Everything was so different in Europe; the impression was so overwhelming that they found comfort in aiming the arrows of their satire towards their homeland, with no little justification.

It is not difficult to comprehend this satirical approach. After all, its justification lies not only in the didactic aim—since it is very easy to detect the author's didactic consciousness—but also in its freeing element. The psychological tension created as a result of the encounter with Europe is partially relieved the moment the satire takes command. There is a sense of uncertainty and unreality in satire which affects equally the writer and his readers. The tragic aspect in this story is that the exaggerated and unreal conditions described are not very far from the authentic situation. The foreign advisors were not always capable of handling their positions, did not always have the fulfilling qualifications, and certainly, did not always care to improve the administrative conditions which were their responsibility. However, it is obvious that the situation described is not to be taken literally. The distance between the real advisors and the ones in question is somehow like the distance between realism and satire. And, there is an old literary device, namely the masseur's diary, which helps the author, to a certain extent, to color his writing with authenticity. However, the exaggerated manner of description in this diary paradoxically reduces the effects of the negative descriptions. The reader soon discovers that even the author is not entirely serious here, although this story, more than any other one in this collection, stirred the wrath of the officials towards Jamāl-Zādeh when the collection appeared for the first time.

The story has a fantastic plot. The author demonstrates a great deal of inventive ability and the masseur certainly does not lack vitality. On the contrary, he enjoys life intensively for a short period of time, when a tragic touch of the life of the country in which he was operating becomes also his. In his many-sided experiences and in the extreme ups and downs of his life he still maintains his optimism. His tone after his fall, when he massages the author's body in the Turkish bath, is more pathetic in essence than tragic. He observes life more philosophically than angrily. There was a stroke of luck in his life, a flash of light, but he enjoyed it for only a short period of time before returning to his previous status.

What is more important in this story from a literary point of view? The social criticism or the characterization, including the author as the narrator? Quantitatively, of course, there is more criticism here than characterization. However, each additional reading suggests emphatically that there exists in the story a delicate balance between the two elements. The social criticism exposes the conditions which allowed the hero to act the way he did. And, any increase in the degree of social criticism is an opportunity to widen the range of criticism, which reaches its peak in the deeds of the hero while performing his advisory duties. The very similitude of his deeds, one must observe, decreases in proportion to his involvement. The diary is the culmination of all these.

From the technical point of view, the story is not homogeneous. That is, given the various elements of story and narrative in it, one reaches the conclusion that it bears the seeds of an exhaustive novel, when, at the very same time, the author confines himself to a minimum range, which does not enable him to maneuver. The conclusion, therefore, is that in this story one faces not only social criticism, but also a character of genuine literary values, though on a limited scale. The story, thus, is not merely a historical document but also an artistic enterprise—a clever idea combined with a number of well-known techniques of the art of story telling.

XIV.

VEYLÂN AL-DAWLEH

"Veylân al-Dawleh⁴⁰ belongs to that family of plants which grow exclusively on Persian soil, the fruits of which are called 'one who has a finger in every pie'."⁴¹

That is how Veylân al-Dawleh, a homeless, busy and friendless wanderer with no time to rest, is described by the author. Spending his nights in strangers' homes, lacking a shelter of his own, he usually awakens to find out that his host has left the house because of an "unexpected engagement". In order to avoid the trouble of lunches he always eats a substantial number of buttercakes with his breakfast tea, since he does not know where he will be at lunch time. Even his clothes are not his own. One morning, for example, he borrowed a pair of stockings and a shirt from his host's wardrobe, as he told the servant that he expected to meet the Minister of Interior.

Having a fever, Veylân al-Dawleh manages to pawn his cigarette box in exchange for quinine pills from a druggist. At the last minute, however, he asks the druggist to give him opium instead.

Heading towards a mosque, Veylân al-Dawleh asks for a pen and a sheet of paper from the clerk awaiting his clientele, writes a few words, swallows the opium and enters the mosque.

Early the next morning the mosque's attendant finds Veylân al-Dawleh breathing his last. His friends assemble by his corpse and read his will, written the day before, on the borrowed paper with the clerk's ink:

"After fifty years of homelessness and wandering, I leave this transient world uncertain as to whether anybody will recognize my corpse. During my entire life, I only gave people headaches and troubles. And if I were not certain that the pity with which people generally dealt with me exceeded manyfolds my shame, I would have taken this

⁴⁰ A compound name. Veylân—wanderer, wandering, vagabond; Dawleh—government.

⁴¹ Jamâl-Zâdeh, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

opportunity, at the last moment of my life, to apologize. But they were human in their behavior and need not my apologies. I request from them now that after my death they treat me as they did during my lifetime, when they did not want me to be wandering and homeless; and if my tomb ever has a tombstone, they engrave upon it this couplet from my spiritual guide Bābā Ṭahīr-e 'Uryān⁴² in remembrance of my bitter life, wanderings and constant homelessness in this world: "The serpents have caverns and the ants formicaries. And, I, a poor man, have not even a ruined house'."⁴³

XV.

Veylān al-Dawleh is a sad sketch, a picture of life, by which the author attempts to illustrate certain social phenomena in a negative light. The hero is a literary embryo. Here and there the characteristics are typical and often real; but, unfortunately, they are not sufficiently developed. The generalizations supersede all the other aspects in the story which can turn a literary hero into a real representative of a certain society. Certainly, it is not enough to declare what the author did at the beginning of the story regarding the hero. Truly enough, Veylān al-Dawleh is a homeless and wandering person. However, one question to be asked in this respect is, namely, how he finds his way to all the houses in which he spends his nights? He is jobless. But, what is the background which leads him to this situation? Who are his friends? We know only a little about them, and that only in a very obscure way. Only in one place is the name of one of his friends mentioned, a name having a symbolic application. He is called Veylān al-'Ulamā. The two friends have two things in common. First, the first part of both their names is Veylān. There is no doubt about the satiric and sarcastic approach of the author by compounding these names and by giving them a common element.

The second similarity is the friend's way of life, although only up to a certain point. After Veylān al-'Ulamā has attained a certain

⁴² A Persian poet of the 12th century, known for his mystical poetry and for a special kind of quatrain he wrote in colloquial language.

⁴³ Jamāl-Zādeh, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-142.

state of security, he manages to forget his friend completely. It is therefore evident that this kind of life is, above all, a question of social conditions and social class. When the reasons for wandering are eliminated, the wanderer himself disappears from the scene and settles down.

It seems clear from the beginning that the author did not intend to portray a hero of flesh and blood, for one is clearly aware of the sketchy character of the story. There is an attempt to portray a comic character who, like every comic character, is fused with many tragic elements. And the tragic elements are apparent in Veylān al-Dawleh's entire figure and appearance. His clothes and the manner in which he borrows them are indicators of his tragic life. It seems, however, that, more than anybody else, the hero is unaware of the tragic path of his own life. He is moved by a certain inertia which enables him to jump over the barriers along his way, like a car which rolls down a slope, and the fact that it runs out of gas does not prevent it from continuing its rolling. One way or the other, the life of Veylān al-Dawleh, as life in general, has to come to an end. There is no climax in this story since there is no plot development leading towards such a climax. However, the question remains whether, despite the absence of a climax in the story, one cannot expect, though paradoxically, a catharsis on the part of the hero. The fact that the hero had spent the last night of his life in the sleeping room⁴⁴ of a mosque could have been an excellent opportunity for the author to materialize it. Some indication of possible salvation of the hero's body and soul alike, would have tremendously helped the molding of his character. But, contrary to this, the sick, tired and embittered hero follows a path which will necessarily lead him towards death. The mosque in which the hero finds refuge is nothing but a lodging for the night, and later a scene of suicide. No spiritual virtue is evident in this mosque. There are no expectations on the part of the hero for either mercy or catharsis while he walks towards the mosque; it is as though he walks towards an ordinary house. Thus, it is also impossible to expect a catharsis for the reader since no "Purgatorio" is in sight. What is certain in this case is that the

⁴⁴ In Persian, *Shabistān*—a lodging for the night.

author did not intend to bring forth a solution of this sort. Above all, this last conviction is based upon Jamāl-Zādeh's negative attitude towards all the outward manifestations and pomp of the religious life. It is very difficult to attribute some thoughts leading towards a solution of this form to a writer who constantly criticized in his writings the official institutions related to religion, namely religious ministrants such as 'Ākhūnds, Mullās, etc., although one has to bear in mind that this criticism was never directed towards religion as such and bore no manifestations of atheism. Thus, it seems that the hero's march towards the mosque is not at all symbolic; the mosque is a shelter, a lodging for the night and no more.⁴⁵

XVI.

Excluding two of the stories of the present collection for which no date is given by the author, i.e., *Persian is Sugar* and *The Bear Hug*, *Veylān al-Dawleh* stands as the last story with a date given by the author. One can suppose for a moment that in the course of writing the stories of *Once Upon a Time*—some seven years in total, Jamāl-Zādeh did not have enough breathing spell to make *Veylān al-Dawleh* a longer and more complete short story. However, the main point here is that Jamāl-Zādeh is absolutely

⁴⁵ A close study of O. Henry's *The Cop and the Anthem* would reveal many similarities between O. Henry's hero, Soapy, and Veylān al-Dawleh. Actually, up to the turning point of their life, they share the very same miserable lot, wandering being the essence of it. Soapy, after having failed in all the other enterprises of his life, directs himself towards a church, seeking spiritual catharsis and possible salvation:

"The conjunction of Soapy's receptive state of mind and the influences about the old church wrought a sudden and wonderful change in his soul. He viewed with swift horror the pit into which he had tumbled, the degraded days, unworthy desires, dead hopes, wrecked faculties and base motives that made up his existence." (O. Henry, *The Four Million* (New York, 1906), pp. 99-100).

Only an unfortunate happening, the appearance of the policeman, turns the wheels of his life back; and, thus, he sinks again into his miseries. But what the church symbolizes for Soapy in a moment of despair, the mosque is not able to do for Veylān al-Dawleh. In the church there is some hope and life for Soapy. The mosque, on the other hand, is only the death scene of Veylān al-Dawleh.

at home in narrating comic situations which give birth to heroes anchored steadily in the milieu and manners of their country as representatives of low social classes. In a direct confrontation with the diseases of Persian society, Jamāl-Zādeh does not always succeed in creating representative characters who can also have any sort of positive message. How authentic, for instance, are the popular characters in the story *Persian is Sugar*? Ramaḍān and the *shaykh* are real and true characters. The same is the case with the apprentice of the coffee house in *The Bear Hug*. And to this group also belongs Mullā Qurbān 'Alī—a juicy and extremely authentic character, which, despite its limitations, fully captures the heart of the reader. On the other hand, if one tries to evaluate the *shaykh* in *Persian is Sugar* and Mullā Qurbān 'Alī, one finds that the criticism for the diseases of the Persian society directed towards them does not emerge from a point of view for which they bear responsibility. They are not portrayed as representatives of a clerical class of society who try to suck the blood of the poor inhabitants of the country and, further, to rule them with the weapon of religion. In the case of the *shaykh* in *Persian is Sugar*, the criticism is "lingual", if one may so call it. The *shaykh* is not attacked because he represents the clergy, which for years prevented the masses from learning and a proper education; what the author dislikes—and subsequently is criticizing—is the language used by the *shaykh* which the poor young man, Ramaḍān, is unable to understand. It is possible to attribute that to Jamāl-Zādeh's particular interest in the language of that period and that of his entire career as a writer. However, this fact is not in contradiction with the truth about the character of the *shaykh*.

As for Mullā Qurbān 'Alī, although officially he belongs to the clergy, nevertheless he is a man of flesh and blood who has few weaknesses and few joys and who is engaged in a constant struggle to provide his family with a slice of bread. More than projecting a spiritual and religious authority, he is rather a lover from the Romantic school who finally becomes a victim of this Platonic love. By no means can he be regarded as a villainous clergyman who considers the flock under his care only as a source of income or influence. It is interesting enough that his

profession, Rawḍeh-Khānī, also has to do with the romantic character of the Shī'a in Islam, the official religion of Persia, often bearing a tragic imprint through the entire history of the sect. The truth is, of course, that this is not an unusual profession. Even at present, Persia has many Rawḍeh-Khāns. The important fact about Mullā Qurbān-'Alī is that he vitally becomes part of the atmosphere that Jamāl-Zādeh successfully portrays.

An unprejudiced look at the other characters of *Once Upon a Time* will prove the above supposition about Jamāl-Zādeh's ability to mold them. The "Europeanized" man in *Persian is Sugar* is, after all, a very artificial hero despite his graceful manner of speech and movement. At the time the story was written, he could—and actually does—represent a certain number of people similar to himself, in a distinct caricaturable way. But, the reader would never consider him an authentic hero. He is an unaccomplished hero lacking solid roots in the soil of his society, and no doubt lacking the magnificent popular and folkloric backing which the other mentioned heroes enjoy. Above all, his characterization in an exaggerated and hyperbolic way does not help the author achieve the needed authenticity.

The hero of *The Politician*, as well, cannot be regarded as a representative hero due to the idiosyncratic exaggeration by Jamāl-Zādeh in this collection. The difference in his case, however, is due to manifold authentic elements of milieu, local color and folklore, which do not place the hero far from the reader's consciousness. One can possibly accept *The Politician* as a typical character, although one cannot take his deeds seriously. Had the reader met him accidentally on the street, he would not have doubted his being a Persian. But, had he seen the politician meeting with the crowds at the Majlis, he would not have believed that it was led by the present hero.

Finally, there are Veylān al-Dawleh and Ḥabīb 'Allāh. In his struggle with the given social circumstances of his country, Veylān al-Dawleh collapses and commits suicide. His death is not similar to that of Ḥabīb 'Allāh, the hero in *The Bear Hug*. The latter is a victim of his sublime dispositions. The tragedy of his death is primarily a personal tragedy. Otherwise, the path of his life was a successful one. He was a pleasant, happy person

—at least within the limited range of his everyday life. In contrast to him, Veylān al-Dawleh reaches a deadlock in his life, as direct consequence of the social situation within which he was obliged to spend his life.

XVII.

One of the reasons which prevent some of Jamāl-Zādeh's heroes from becoming real persons of flesh and blood may be, that this type of hero was developed, and subsequently secured a permanent place for himself—first, to a certain degree in the future writings of Jamāl-Zādeh, and later on, decisively, in the writings of his followers—among them, above all, Ṣadiq Hidāyat. In Jamāl-Zādeh's hero one can only find a few traces of the characterizations to come. Hidāyat's heroes, on the other hand, are almost all challenged by the social conditions of their life, thus becoming victims of these conditions. One can say without hesitation that Hidāyat is the real creator of these heroes in modern Persian prose; they represent his outlook as well as the outlook of the Persian intellectual generation in the thirties and forties of this century, the totality of which being pessimistic. The dictatorial regime of Riqā-Šāh certainly could not make any contribution as to bring about changes in this outlook; the opposite is the truth.

In a second introduction to the fifth edition of *Once Upon a Time*, written in 1954, thirty-three years after the book was first published, Jamāl-Zādeh attempts to examine and re-evaluate his approach to Persian prose. Naturally, he examines the developments which took place in the past three decades and summarizes them.

First, he indicates the great development in Persian prose during the period in question, if not from the point of view of quality, then at least as to quantity. Persian prose, he asserts, has made many advances stylistically. Syntactical constructions are now generally Persian. Less foreign words and expressions are apparent in the language—that is, those usually borrowed from European languages, Arabic and Turkish. There also is a growing interest towards realism, a result of the desire to keep in line with the truths of life.

An additional achievement, according to his opinion, is the

increase in the number of writers. But, he indicates the sad fact that Persian writers do not enjoy proper conditions with regard to work and life so that they may devote themselves to writing and developing their talents. In connection to this he names two writers, both already dead, whose talents are superior to the others. The two are Šādiq Hidāyat and Muḥammad Mas'ūd (M. Dihāti).⁴⁶ As far as Hidāyat is concerned, he laments his great talents which were not developed to their utmost because he committed suicide in Paris in 1951, at the age of forty eight, and he praises his work, *The Blind Owl*, which was translated into French.⁴⁷ On the other hand, Jamāl-Zādeh sums up his appreciation of Muḥammad Mas'ūd thus:

“His most outstanding contribution to letters was through his unyielding and rebellious soul which found its expression in his bold style—the style of his journalistic writing which keeps his memory alive . . .”⁴⁸

Jamāl-Zādeh expresses the idea that the Persian reader expects to read literary works which will reflect, above all, the spirit of Persian people and the social situation in Persia. He is, however, optimistic as to the possibilities for creating such literary works in the future, since, he contends, the writers are potentially available. Then, in the remainder of this second introduction, he draws some guidelines regarding the responsibilities which he thinks a Persian author faces. It is impossible here, due to the reasons connected with the structure of the forthcoming chapters of this study, to expose these ideas and to analyze them. It needs to be mentioned, however, that these ideas were later expanded and printed in an independent book.⁴⁹ They are strictly tied in with the literary and to some extent even the political “credo” of Jamāl-Zādeh, along with his didactic aim which is apparent, both on and under the surface, in the introduction and in the

⁴⁶ Also a bold and daring journalist, Mas'ūd was assassinated in 1948 in Tehran, his assassin escaping the law's punishment.

⁴⁷ See note 2. The French critics received this book very enthusiastically.

⁴⁸ Jamāl-Zādeh, *op. cit.*, p. b.

⁴⁹ *Tarīqeh-Ye Nuwīsandeḡi Wa Dāstānsarā'i (Method/s of Writing and Story Telling)* (Shiraz, 1967).

above mentioned book. Therefore, they will be studied in the last chapter of this biography.

Sixteen years have elapsed since the day that the second introduction was written. *Once Upon a Time* is now forty-nine years old. But, despite all its weaknesses and deficiencies, the fact that it is incomplete and the imperfect first fruit of Jamāl-Zādeh's writing and, above all, taking into account the strong lingual emphasis throughout—an emphasis which no doubt serves as a stimulant to his writing—the book is not an historical monument or an exhibit's feature. The characters of the stories—the highly praised as well as the weak ones—are still alive and their existence is not by any means challenged; they are as vivid as they were at the time of their creation. Certainly, the background has changed since then; changed are also the conditions of life in Persia. But the heroes are not affected by these changes. They belong to the gallery of characters which is comprised of the sons of Persia in our century. The fact that they are placed in the last row of the literary heroes' national pantheon is only a chronological one. This is a steep pantheon. And, although these characters belong to the lower classes in their society, nevertheless, they are capable of overlooking and overshadowing the characters created after them—by Jamāl-Zādeh and by other authors—and of smiling their hearty, happy, sad and often mischievous smile. It will be demonstrated in the coming chapters that on many occasions the future heroes of Jamāl-Zādeh also become victims of these mischievous smiles. Here lies the vitality of *Once Upon a Time*.