

## Letters to the Editor

### TO THE EDITOR:

Michael Beard, vaguely familiar with my study, reviews a work on structure as if it were a translation (*Iranian Studies*, Vol. IX, No. 1, p. 80). Disregarding the restrictions imposed (Bashiri, *Hedayat's Ivory Tower*, pp. 23, 170), he emphasizes irrelevant points, draws inaccurate conclusions and makes unsubstantiated accusations. He fails to review the structural description proposed and ignores the fact that for the first time both Hedayat's life, and the Rilkean, Khayyamian, Zoroastrian and Buddhist influences on the novella are put into proper perspective. "Old-fashioned allegorical criticism" (Beard, *ibid.*, p. 83) sums up his review of the chapters on analysis. Given his anti-linguistics, anti-analytical attitude, even in the light of the contributions of these techniques to the elucidation of world literatures, one could hardly expect a different reaction.

My translation is literal. It is a working translation with the major aim of providing the scholars unfamiliar with the original with all the data. It is an honest attempt at rendering a difficult book into colloquial American idiom intact. It retains the laconic, incoherent and even the incomprehensible sentences of the original as they are perceived by native Iranians. There is, of course, room for improvements, and they are being made as our understanding of Hedayat and his work increases. A final, annotated translation is possible only when the semantic matrices of the novella are worked out (Bashiri, *ibid.*, p. 170), and when a sound understanding of Hedayat's philosophy is achieved. It is towards this end that an interim translation and structural description were made

available. This being the case, will it not be foolhardy to even speculate on Arabic loan words such as *rajjaleha* and *jama'*, which obviously no longer retain their exact, original Arabic meaning? As a teacher of Beard who started Persian in 1968, and with two decades of involvement in English language, literature and linguistics, I should be able to distinguish borderline grammar in these languages. The question, however, is academic: Should the translator euphemize the abusive language of a very frustrated author (Bashiri, *ibid.*, pp. 41-47)? As is evident Costello euphemized, and Beard, who could have obliged us with his expertise, decided to assume the grandstand quarterback position.

Hedayat strove for documentation in the colloquial, a feature on which the tone, and the atmosphere, of the work draws heavily. I have suggested that Costello has failed to harmonize the vital elements that conspire to convey the atmosphere of the original (Bashiri, *ibid.*, pp. 18ff). My objection to the translation of the last sentence of the novella still holds. It is an objection based on practicality rather than on procedures as Beard infers. I have argued that the exclusion of the comma makes the realization of the deep structure philosophical ramifications of the sentence obscure. Without the comma, the work could not yield its *be, do, become* assessment of life, nor could it emphasize Hedayat's fine distinction between body and Self (Bashiri, *ibid.*, pp. 22ff). If Beard would like to consider these philosophical distinctions minimal, fine.

Let us turn to some of the tongue-in-cheek assertions on structure. Anyone knows that the recent use of binary feature analysis for character identification has little to do with Levi-Strauss, that etymology is not image correlation or sequence formation, and that although many features may remain a constant, a scene transformed is different from a scene repeated. Beard establishes his own premises, draws his own erroneous conclusions, and justly calls them naive and simple. He demonstrates a lack of erudition, and evinces ample proof for a dislike and ignorance of theoretical and analytical procedures.

For instance, correlating the appearance of the Naga-king serpent at the beginning and at the end of the *Buddha-carita*, with the appearance of *nag* in similar environments in the second part of the novella, I postulated the existence of a relation between the two works. Through the mechanism of step-by-step correlation, I showed that indeed a structural relation existed (Bashiri, *ibid.*, 161ff). Misinterpreting my logic for focusing on *nag*, Beard labors on the etymology of this word only to announce that *nag* is the Hindi word for serpent!!

As multi-level compositions, works of art can be examined by different specialists from different perspectives. I have suggested that no matter how enigmatic a work may seem on the surface, it draws on a coherent internal structure. Hedayat's work, which almost borders on hallucination, is an example. If Beard could fathom the structural and philosophical complexity of the work, and if he were familiar with the critical literature on it (Bashiri, *ibid.*, pp. 4-8), he would not assert that a generation of readers have found brilliance and proportion in *The Blind Owl* (*Iranian Studies, ibid.*, p. 83, Beard, *Books Abroad*, May 1975). Let me quote the Hedayat critic of the generation about whom Beard speculates:

He (the critic or the reader) starts reading (*The Blind Owl*) with a determined critical approach, but gradually an atmosphere of obscurity creeps in, and in the end an attitude of uncritical acceptance prevails. The critic of *buf-i kur* is like a surgeon who becomes affected by the anaesthetic every time he starts to operate (Kamshad, *Modern Persian Prose Literature*, 1966, p. 164).

There is, of course, proportion and brilliance in the work (Bashiri, *ibid.*, p. 50). But were they able to find the "key" to a systematic analysis of the network of Zoroastrian, Buddhistic, Khayyamian, and Rilkean themes and images which bring about this brilliance and proportion? I have isolated these elements structurally, and I have demonstrated that the same mechanism which gives *The Blind Owl*

its hallucinatory infra-structure can, when analyzed, dissipate the atmosphere of obscurity referred to by Kamshad. Beard methodically misinterprets some and systematically ignores my other assertions. His review is, at best, a "hatchet job."

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