



# **Sadeq Hedayat's *Pearl Cannon***

Introduction

and

## **Plot Summary**

by

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# Plot Summary

The story begins in about 1500 A.D. Dos Merdalinos, the King of Spain,<sup>1</sup> and a very patriotic man with anti-Arab tendencies, recalls the atrocities of the Arab conquest of his homeland. To him Arab commanders resemble the Roman senator whose decree "Delenda est Carthago" (Carthage must be destroyed!)<sup>2</sup> resulted in the sack of Carthage. Thinking of the past glories of Spain, Dos Merdalinos concludes that if Islam were meant for Spain, the language of its lawgiver, according to the *Qur'an*, would be Spanish. The more he searches his people's pre-Islamic beliefs and customs (the Christmas celebration, music, dance, etc.), the less Islam (smelly mosques, graveyards full of mourning hags, and a zeal to kill) appeals to him. Finally he decrees that "Spain belongs to the Spaniards" and, reviving the motto, which brought Arabs victory, he shouts "Delenda est Carthago." By Carthago, however, he means Arabia.

To be sure of his judgment, he consults the *Torah*. The holy book supports his decision. He thus attacks the Arab forces and routs them. Using air-filled goat-skins, the Arabs flee across the Strait of Gibraltar for the safety of the deserts of the Maghreb.

In North Africa, the Arab commander refuses to admit defeat. In his "victory" speech he argues that, although the Arabs no longer hold Spain physically, spiritually Spain belongs to them for ever. This lecture, the writing of which testifies to Hedayat's

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<sup>1</sup> A brief history of Spain is pertinent here. Explored by Phoenician seafarers, colonized by the Carthaginians, and occupied by the Romans and the Visigoths, Spain was conquered by Muslim invaders from Africa in 711 A. D.

The several centuries of Moorish dominion not only made medieval Spain a place of high culture, but it also produced a wide array of scientists, philosophers, writers, and engineers. Slowly, however, the Christian kingdoms in norther Spain, where Muslim power was weak, broke away from Muslim rule so that by the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, only granada was left to them. The Muslims were driven out in 1492, the same year Spain launched its worldwide colonial empire by sending Christopher Columbus on his first exploratory voyage.

<sup>2</sup> Carthage and Ctesiphon have much in common. The former, with its formidable navy, challenged Rome (mid-3rd to mid-2nd century B.C.) while the latter with its wealth and the sheer number of men-at-arms prevented the expansion of Islam into Central Asia and India (mid-6th to mid-7th century A.D.). Without a total dismemberment of these centers, the Roman and the Islamic Empires could not have been established and, thereby, could not have prospered as they did. The phrase "Delenda est Carthago," in *The Pearl Cannon* bespeaks the Iranians' dim view of the barbaric actions of the bedouin Arabs who destroyed Ctesiphon and with it the culture of ancient Iran. Furthermore, the invaders put a similar curse on Iranian culture that the Romans placed on the ruins of Carthage. This curse has worked so well that, after centuries, Iranians still fail to recognize Zoroastrians as Iranians who fought for their beliefs.

mastery of the Iranian and Arab idioms, enumerates the criticisms of Islam shared by Hedayat and many Iranians of his time. Negative Shi'ite attitudes towards music, books, dance, national festivals, and especially the Muslims' readiness to kill infidels are all recounted. The zeal for poverty and death are also criticized. "We have taught the Spanish," he says, "that prayer and martyrdom are the two surest paths to Paradise!"<sup>3</sup>

Copies of this speech are taken to both the Caliph Al-Musta'sal Min-allah and Dos Merdalinos.

Having studied their ways, Dos Merdalinos fears that the Arabs may return in full force and destroy his kingdom. He decides to take the upper hand and to capture and bring the Caliph to Spain. For this, he seeks the assistance of an Italian sailor with views peculiar enough for the Italian government to put a price on his head.

This man's name is Christopher Columbus; his motto is "If you do away with religion, you can reach India, sailing west! "

Dos Merdalinos proposes to dispatch this man (henceforth known as Captain Columb) to Arabia to capture the Caliph. Captain Columb accepts.

On an auspicious day the Captain sets sail in the direction of Arabia, but soon the oceanic winds take over and blow his vessel off course. Days pass, food becomes scarce, and Columb almost gives up. Then the crew spots land. They think they have reached Arabia.

But Arabia it is not. They have arrived at the shore of the Kingdom of Costa Rica. The people of the region, "redskins," wear the feathers of the bald eagle around their face, smoke marijuana and dance around a large cannon. They worship the cannon.

Captain Columb knows nothing about these people. Their strange ways frighten him. But the "redskins" seem benevolent and encourage him and his crew to disembark. They do. And, as with similar trips in the known world, they carry some trinkets with them and distribute these among the natives, all the while feigning friendship and learning about the customs and beliefs of the "redskins."

They learn about the cannon, about the existence of abundant gold and, of course, about Aztec ruins.<sup>4</sup> The longer they stay in Costa Rica, the more they learn.

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<sup>3</sup> Shi'ism became the official religion of Iran under the Safavids. It remained forceful until the end of the Qajar period. Indeed some Qajar Shahs "did not drink water" without *afatwa* (formal opinion of a canon lawyer) from the *Mojtahed* (doctor of Islamic law). The Constitution resulting from the 1906 Revolution testifies to the power of the clergy at the time.

By the 1930's, however, the clergy had lost their clout. They were criticized harshly by Reza Shah whose propagandists portrayed the clergy as reactionary fanatics. The more the clergy tried to stem the tide of Westernization by opposing music, dancing, and the theater, the more credible the government's claim that the clergy intended to drag Iran back to the 13th century, became. This part of the book reflects the "tug of war" between the traditional views of some and modernist views of some other Iranians.

<sup>4</sup> A careful reading of Hedayat's account of Columb's arrival in the Americas informs the Persian reader that there is more to the story than meets the eye. For instance, it becomes evident that the "redskins" are indeed the Iranians of the late 1940s, that the riches enumerated are the mineral resources of Iran, and that the

When everything is on the table, Captain Columb turns on the "redskins." Several sleights of hand--which the "redskins" fail to follow, resolve or duplicate--allow Columb to prove that his race is superior to theirs. He demands that the "redskins" obey him and his men.

Before they realize their predicament, Captain Columb has confiscated the "redskins'" cannon and in its stead he assigns them two Christian missionaries. He also assigns every "redskin" institution an overseer. He takes over.<sup>5</sup>

Having lost everything, including their cannon, the "redskins" retire to their homes. And Captain Columb writes a letter informing Dos Merdalinos of his activities and future program.

In this letter, modeled on epic narratives and full of hyperbole, Columb tells of his "conquest" of Costa Rica, the potential of the land for development, and his newly acquired cannon. This awesome cannon, writes Columb, can be used in the conquest of the seven climes of India. Finally he asks the king to send all the undesirable of Spain to this newly found land. He further requests that this land be called Columville. He dispatches this letter to Spain. With it, on board the good ship "Spain," goes the cannon, wrapped in felt.

This cannon arouses women. And it so happens that the Spanish sailors have smuggled some women aboard ship. As the women cannot resist the cannon's temptations, they soon turn the ship into a love boat. After a crossing of many months, the ship puts into shore at Lisbon, Portugal, to take on supplies.

Amerigo Vespucci, a Portuguese admiral, goes aboard to inspect the ship for health and ethical transgression. There are none. Then he befriends the crew and invites them to a night of drinking.

After the sweet, dark-red port works its miracle, he reaches into the pocket of Columb's special envoy to Dos Merdalinos, takes out Columb's letter, breaks its seal and, with great difficulty, reads it. He reads about the cannon and about how, using the cannon, it is possible to capture the rest of the known world. Hoping to receive a commission further to discover the new world, he rides his horse to the court of His Majesty Desperatus, the King of Portugal. Not wishing to share the cannon's possibilities, Desperatus hears Vespucci out, then orders him beheaded. Only after he has the letter carefully read to him and thinks about Vespucci's loyalty to the throne does Desperatus feel remorse. He orders

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Aztec ruins are none but the illiterate masses who could, and still can, be exploited from every perceivable vantage point. Indeed, everything that the chief of the "redskins" says reflects some aspect of America's involvement in Iran after World War II. Thus viewed Hedayat's version of the Columb discovery unfolds Americas' efforts as it sought a firm foothold in the Middle East. Without a proper interpretation of the events in the book, phrases like "The Bridge of Victory," the hope-inspiring phrase that emerged from the Tehran Conference at the time of the writing of *The Pearl Cannon*, would have no import. Neither would Aztec ruins point to Persepolis and further to educational exploitation based on patriotic feelings.

<sup>5</sup> This part of *The Pearl Cannon* reflects the helplessness of the "third world" nations of the time vis-a-vis the power of the industrial nations who, seeking raw material for their factories, imposed themselves on the predominantly illiterate, poverty stricken inhabitants of backward nations.

that, rather than Columville, the new continent should be called Amerigo Vespucciville. And in order not to expose his underhanded take-over of Columb's discovery, and in order to safeguard national security, he has his soldiers decapitate his secretary along with the crew of the "Spain." His future plans include the capture of the newly found lands as well as the colonization of the rest of the known world. The opening statement of his lecture to the nation, after his invocation, reads:

I shall send a devastating army to India to transform [it] from the abode of those unfamiliar with the new ethics, democracy, Western sciences, civilization, culture, religion, geographic materialism, and mercantilism into a paradise. This is because our Father, Who is in heaven, feels unhappy that we should enjoy the fruits of science, culture, civilization, ethics, liberalism, intellectualism, revolutionism, and propagandism while the rest of the world goes without. Our evidence is this weapon, the "cannon" law, which He has miraculously placed at our disposal. Long live freedom! Death to the reactionaries who refuse to pay us tribute and who refuse to recognize His Excellency the Pope!<sup>6</sup> Long live all Cardinals! May their skillful inquisitions remain eternal! Long live myself! Wine for all! Portugal (oranges) for all! The "cannon" law for all!"<sup>7</sup>

After a hasty meeting, the Portuguese decide to change the name of the "Spain" to "Portugal." Then they give the ship to Captain Vasco da Gama to travel to the newly found land, capture Columb and claim the Americas for Portugal. But, rather than in the Americas, da Gama's ship ends up in the Persian Gulf and anchors at the port of Hormuz. There, while his personal secretary, a Jew in the guise of a priest carrying a cross and speaking Aztec, diverts the attention of the Iranian governor of Hormuz, Vasco da Gama deploys the cannon and claims Hormuz for Portugal.<sup>8</sup> And following this "victory" he, too, like Columb, writes a letter to his King, Desperatus.

Hedayat's mastery of Iranian lore is again apparent in the exaggeration of this letter: Vasco da Gama writes about his "battles" with the ferocious natives of this enchanted island, battles that put all heroes' mythological wars with demons and dragons to shame. The gist of his letter, nevertheless, is that circumstances in the Persian Gulf do not allow

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<sup>6</sup> The Treaty of Tordesillas, signed on June 7, 1494, settled all conflicts arising from the distribution of lands explored by Columbus and other late 15th-century voyagers. According to this treaty, sanctioned by Pope Alexander VI, in 1493, Spain was given exclusive rights to the region west of the Cape Verde Islands, Portuguese expeditions were to keep to the east. Neither power was to occupy any territory already in the hands of a Christian ruler. No other European powers facing the Atlantic ever accepted this papal disposition or the subsequent agreement deriving from it.

<sup>7</sup> In Persian the word for Portugal is the same as the word for sweet orange: *portaqal*. Hedayat satirized Portugal's hegemonic attitude but, more so, the presumption that new Portugal, i.e., Portugal as a Jesuit worldnation, could dispense equality and justice for all. This is not to mention the more preposterous presumption that the people of the world would allow Portugal to proceed with its exploitative plans.

<sup>8</sup> Refers to the 1514 Portuguese takeover of the island of Hormuz (see note 10, below).

further pursuit of Columbus in the Americas. Vasco da Gama argues that Hormuz is the key to the seven climes of India and requests a commission to prepare for invading the subcontinent. His final request is that the port of Hormuz be renamed Vasco da Gamaville.

On the Iranian side, the governor of Hormuz is now sure that he cannot cooperate with the Portuguese--they have put a price on his head--and sets about spying on the Portuguese. Stealing two oranges from the Portuguese commissary, he sets out for Soltaniyeh, the seat of the King of Kings of Iran. The Shi'ite King, immersed in religious ritual, welcomes his governor. Although strange names like Don Rascacuero, Don Quijote, Don Conquistador, Don Matamuros, and Don Decapitador somewhat distress the King, the sight of the governor's two oranges changes his thinking. He makes a statement in Turkish to this effect: the Portuguese are our guests. Allah has wanted them to capture our island. If He didn't want this to happen, He would commission Ja'far the Jinni to eliminate them! A little nation (Portugal) has transgressed; the big nation (Iran) must magnanimously forgive! The best course of action for us, he concludes, is to sow the seeds of these two oranges and produce food for them!

The Shi'ite Shah's lenient stance vis-a-vis the Portuguese has its reasons. He has received Iranian money minted in Portugal on a model provided by Marco Polo! To keep the governor from talking, the King promotes him to the governorship of Qishm island, replacing Mashdi Zulfaqr who had failed to send his New Year greetings in time. The promotion, however, is never realized.

Who were the Portuguese and what were their intentions? Hedayat explains:

Now, let us not underestimate the tiny country of Portugal. It was this country that acquainted the rest of the world with the unholy concepts of colonization and exploitation. Until she came along, colonization and exploitation were possible only under the auspices of religion.<sup>9</sup> They were not legal and internationally recognized; they were on a par with theft and highway robbery. But the Portuguese, since they had the pearl cannon (at the time merely referred to as "cannon" law), were under the impression that God, the Truth, and the Law were with them and that they could commit any vile act as long as it could be "cannonized!"

Soon after the conquest of Hormuz, Desperatus writes a letter to Vasco da Gama praising his actions. He orders him to use this "victory" as a springboard for the conquest of India. He urges Vasco da Gama to proceed immediately as he, the King, can no longer carry on as the "Lord of the Americas and India" without some concrete proof. To aid

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<sup>9</sup> The Age of Discovery was motivated by the search for gold and silver to pay for goods imported to Europe from the Middle and Far East. Building merchantmen as large as men-of-war, the Portuguese opened the sea route to India and established trading posts in India, South China, and East Africa. Defeating Arab trade in the area, the Portuguese created a century-long (1500 to 1600) monopoly of trade with the Orient. For instance, the Jesuits shipped large amounts of Japanese and Chinese goods, especially raw silk, to Portugal. To keep their hold on the trade routes, they created disputes among warring clans, disputes that they later mediated, acquiring concessions from both parties.

Vasco da Gama he sends him a pair of compasses and some saffron (which in those days was used for making maps).

Vasco da Gama's first order of action is to mobilize the Iranians under the banner of Portugal. To this end he delivers a lecture detailing the advantages of patriotism and of following the dictates of Islam. And he enumerates the misdeeds of the infidel Hindus.

But Vasco da Gama's efforts do not avail beyond the lecture. The Iranians, attracted to the cannon, listen neither to Vasco da Gama nor to their young King. To satisfy Desperatus, therefore, Vasco da Gama sends him a few bags of pearls.

Desperate for the conquest of India, Desperatus summons Vasco da Gama to Portugal and, accusing him of treason, has him beheaded. He then changes the name of Hormuz to Albuquerqueville, and gives it to Albuquerque (cf. Albuquerque), the commander of his Near, Middle, and Far Eastern forces. Albuquerque he now stations at Hormuz.<sup>10</sup>

But, unfortunately for Desperatus, neither Albuquerque nor his descendants succeed in capturing India.

Dos Merdalinos, the Spanish monarch whose foreign policy had been torpedoed by Desperatus' underhanded acts, no longer remains silent. While Desperatus' army is engaged in the East, hoping to conquer India with the Spanish ship and the Spanish cannon, Dos Merdalinos colludes with the leftist forces inside Portugal. And by exposing Desperatus' empty claims to the hegemony of India and the Americas, Dos Merdalinos forces him to abdicate. Desperatus takes all the money and gold in the treasury of Portugal, goes to sea and becomes a pirate. In hot pursuit of him is Albuquerque III who intends to collect the price that Captain Columb, now in prison, has placed on Desperatus' head.

In Hormuz, the Portuguese decide to expand into Mazandaran and Bahrain. Azar Josanf ibn Bivar Olaq, an old nephew of the Iranian Pope, is sent to Bahrain to bring the Bahrainis into the Portuguese fold. When the Bahrainis refuse to give up their Shi'ite beliefs, Azar Josanf threatens to use the cannon. The Bahrainis back off. Portuguese culture is introduced into the island. But as soon as Azar Josanf meets the Shah and becomes friendly with the Bahrainis, he is exiled to India, never to be heard from again.

The Shah of Iran, Sebil Ali (most probably Shah Abbas), recognizing the growing power of the Portuguese, calls a meeting and orders his general to attack the Portuguese and bring the head of Vasco da Gama to him! The general obeys the King's order and soon the two armies face each other.

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<sup>10</sup> Afonso de Albuquerque, also known as Afonso the Great is the Portuguese conqueror of Goa and Malacca, and the organizer of the Portuguese hegemony in the Orient. His early military career was spent in fighting Muslims in North Africa. He then was sent to the Orient. Among other places, he captured the island of Hormuz on the Strait of Hormuz between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman in 1514. Here he built a fortress that became one of the major posts for guarding the sea routes from Japan to Portugal. The century-long occupation was terminated by a joint AngloPersian assault on the island in 1622. It should be noted in passing that Hedayat uses Albuquerque's personality, definitely a decisive leader, to parody Reza Shah. This is true also of Hedayat's choice of other famous figures like Nader Shah and Shah Abbas.



The many feats of the Iranian dervish army, feats of chanting, smoking hashish, eating glass, and throwing their apprentices high into the air, confuse the Portuguese. But they do not submit. Rather, they take refuge in the power of the cannon. But the cannon is of little help; its "ammunition" is destroyed by the Shah's secret agent in the Portuguese camp. Unable to carry on the fight, the Portuguese accept defeat. The head of Albuquerque III is sent to Sebil Ali.

The Portuguese women in Hormuz, fearing they may fall into Muslim hands and end up as slaves, elect Albuquerque Dokht--the daughter of Albuquerque III--their Queen. Then they kidnap the cannon and, following Vasco da Gama's faded map, go to India.

And the Iranians, having recovered the island of Bahrain, rename the port of Gonbarun the port of Sebil Ali Shah.

The Portuguese women continue their trek until they reach Goa. There they are met by the exiled Azar Josanf who, having converted over ten thousand Hindus to Christianity, has become their chief priest. Ignorant of Albuquerque III's death, Azar Josanf brings many gifts to Albuquerque Dokht and requests that, since so much time and energy has been expended in proselytizing these people, they should not be persuaded to return to the worship of the cannon. Then, quoting the *Torah*, he tries to convince the Queen to follow tradition and discard the cannon.

Albuquerque Dokht is not impressed. In response to Azar Josanf's invitation to go to church and recite "Pater Noster," she delivers a fiery speech. This, one of *The Pearl Cannon's* best speeches, runs for many pages. In it she reminds Azar Josanf of the power of the cannon and, reciting appropriate passages from the *Torah*, makes it clear that she means business. Azar Josanf resists. And Albuquerque Dokht insists on the cannon as a means to her end--conquest of India. She says:

Let me tell you this: I am the esteemed representative of free Portugal and I have come here to pulverize the seven climes of India. Our many years of experience have taught us that the people of the world are naive, foolish and submissive, that their wisdom ends with their eyes and that the world is in a shambles. If we are using people's folly, it is not our fault; they have intelligence and they can, if they so wish, punish us. But since they are guilty of worshiping the powers that be, they must shut up. They should not act as though their rights are being infringed upon. They must not make a peep. Meanwhile we, too, will not sit idle. We shall persuade them to recognize the merits of tolerance, poverty, destitution, Sufism, worship of the dead, weeping, smoking opium, and humility. We will do this so well that they will abandon all activity and say: "A hand from the Unseen must intervene and do something for us." That hand will be our hand. We shall teach them to forsake the world so that we can reap its gold and corn. . . As a rule, in order for history to impose itself, there are certain requirements. The first is the need for an absolute reason. Such things as a mace, a bloody saber, a cannon, or the atomic bomb can serve as reason. As [Mohammad] the Seal of the Prophets has said: "I am Prophet by the sword!" Further, there is need for a rabble who, by invoking the names of God, King, and



Country, will impose themselves as the guardians of law and who will deceive the multitude by threats of Hell and promises of Paradise. The nameless masses, slaves to their belly and lower, are sure to obey blindly and to walk to the slaughter house...

She further examines the bases of history, myth, tradition, religion, politics, and social change. She tells the Indians that she does not intend to touch their existing political system or their religion; she merely intends to make their system subservient to Portuguese interests. She emphasizes that everything Indian is now Portuguese including the banks, mineral resources, even the military. "Let me conclude," she says, "by saying that I have come to milk you. It is my duty to export all Indian oranges for consumption by my beloved people! and I will do that."

She then orders people to return to their previously held beliefs and has Azar Josanf executed. Finally, since India does not produce oranges, she decides to halt the conquest of the rest of the subcontinent. Rather, she places the cannon on a pedestal at the Khyber Pass, waiting for the day when she can attack Isfahan and kill Sebil Ali Shah.<sup>11</sup>

Eventually the time comes for Albuquerque Dokht to forge ahead with her invasion of Iran. She consults an Indian juki for an auspicious time to attack. There is none. She is then advised by the footman at the embassy that, were she to convert to Islam, she would find prosperity. She agrees and is converted to Islam by Hojat al-Haqq wa al-Islam Shaykh Pashm al-Din Taftazani. Upon her conversion, all her sins are forgiven! And she changes from a hag of seventy-two into a young woman.<sup>12</sup>

To thank Allah for this miracle Albuquerque Dokht, now called Khoshqadam Baji (Sister Luck), makes a pilgrimage to Mecca. She remains in Arabia until she runs out of money. Then she returns to Goa and establishes a fundamentalist Islamic government: the Latin alphabet is banned, movie theaters and dancing halls are closed, books are burnt and statues are toppled. Music is to be heard no more. Mosques and shrines spring up everywhere and *mullahs* establish courses on dissimulation, the advantages of more than one wife, lavatory manners, and the like.

Khoshqadam Baji's fundamentalist beliefs rob the cannon of its old attraction. The cannon is destined for oblivion and all ceremonies related to it are banned. On the other hand, Khoshqadam Baji establishes her country's economy on goods available in neighboring Muslim nations and severs ties with all other nations of the world.

The people of Khoshqadamville, however, begin to feel the pinch. They realize that their situation is desperate, that their fate is sealed. And, since following the *mullahs'*

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<sup>11</sup> Character names are of particular importance in understanding Hedayat's use of symbols. Sebil (mustache) Ali Shah, Nazar (opinion) Qoli Shah, and Maharajah Kaput (condom) Wala are examples of his witty yet expressive approach in revealing a particular character's strength or frailty.

<sup>12</sup> Here Hedayat pooh-poohs the *mullahs'* empty promises of paradise from the pulpit, promises that the illiterate faithful believe and strive to realize. According to the *mullahs*, the Imams are capable of changing man's destiny. They claim, for instance, that on the Day of Judgment the Imams can intercede on behalf of the faithful. Hedayat's question is this: Why don't the all-powerful Imams perform a feat that would yield a tangible result; why don't they transform a hag into a young woman!

dictates has brought them nothing but weeping for Arabs long dead,<sup>13</sup> superstitions long obsolete, and the denial of rights to a good life, they revolt. In large numbers, they take refuge in the cannon and embrace their infidel rituals. They return to Lingaism.

The peoples' voice is also heard by Maharajah Kaput Wala. Supporting his countrymen, he rebels against Khoshqadam Baji. Khoshqadam Baji proclaims a holy war. In the battle between the two armies many are killed. And, in spite of her many ruses, Khoshqadam Baji loses the war. She is captured. But, fearing a Muslim uprising, the Maharajah does not execute Khoshqadam Baji; he imprisons her. This situation continues until the Maharajah becomes convinced that the Muslims will not react. Then, quietly, he eliminates her. Islam leaves the land and, once again, the cannon becomes the object of respect and attention. It becomes even more venerable when it impregnates the Maharajah's wife. Its entire body is covered with pearls.

Years pass. Nazar Qoli (most likely Nader Shah) becomes Shah and unifies Iran. Urged on by his three barren wives, Nazar invades India to return the pearl cannon to Iran. The cannon's potential for world conquest and the lure of Indian gold make this venture extremely attractive.

The Indian army, equipped with the cannon, faces the forces of Nazar Qoli. The Indians' hope for victory rests in the cannon. But they soon realize that the years in the Khyber have taken their toll. The cannon does not even fire. As soon as they realize this, the Indians take flight.

Nazar Qoli pursues the Indians as far as Sumanat. There, he fills his coffers with gold and continues his hot pursuit of the Maharajah Kaput Wala. The Maharajah, once seized, is split into two. Then he confiscates the Maharajah's property and makes the Maharajah's wife his concubine.

The pearl cannon is finally transferred to Iran. It, and its attendant, serve the king and country well. Soon all the king's wives are with child, a miracle that persuades the King to convert from Sunnism to Shi'ism.

Nazar Qoli, however, does not survive his first child. Upon seeing the child from whose cradle hangs a "see and burst!" bead, Nazar Qoli bursts into pieces. The cannon, however, adds so many to the population that a famine hits the land. To curb the increase of the population, it is later decreed that the cannon be placed at the disposal of the public only on the last Wednesday of the year.

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As mentioned, the pearl cannon is physical but haloed with superstitions. Some of these stem from Iran's long history reaching beyond the Aryan and into Indo-European times. From these, Hedayat derives a prologue to the "history" of the cannon and relates his version of history to the activities of Western colonialists who, since the fifteenth

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<sup>13</sup> Reference to the battle at Karbala (680 A.D.) in general and to Imam Hossein in particular. In the course of this battle Imam Hossein was killed and his family was taken captive.

century, have exploited not only Iran and the Middle East but also Africa, India, and the Americas.

Written after World War II, during the early years of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's reign, Hedayat concentrates on the rule of the Qajar kings and of Reza Shah. He talks about a simple time in Iran's history. During the reign of Shah Baba (Naser al-Din Shah) when commodities were cheap, Iran was still recognized as a power and Bahrain still belonged to it. At that time, says Hedayat, Iranians managed their affairs without any foreign intervention.

Then came the Atlantic Treaty and the Declaration of Human Rights. These Western concepts not only undermined the concept of ownership, but that they made it everyone's God-given right to meddle in the affairs of others. With this ruse, the Master (Hedayat's term for the British) divested Iran not only of its oil resources, but also of its southern island--indeed of its southern regions.

How did this happen? Hedayat explains it in this way. One night the Iranians slept and the next morning they found themselves saddled with a new shah (Reza Shah). Brought to power by the Master, Reza Shah had to be subservient to Him and felt obliged to do His bidding in the area. Reza Shah's humble beginning, allegedly that of an errand boy at the stables of the British embassy, further crippled him. Meekly he undertook programs that humiliated the Iranians.

Often Reza Shah felt that he should do something for Iran, but his plans had a drawback. They infringed on the regional interests of the Master. For instance, Reza Shah had hopes that one day Iran would again become an Empire. Not knowing that Iraq and Arabia, once a part of the Persian Empire, were now as much a bead in the Master's rosary as were Iran and India, he took this proposal to the Master. The Master became angry and shouted, "You hold firmly to the saddle; we shall guide the donkey!"

In his prologue, Hedayat indirectly criticizes many of Reza Shah's reforms. These include Reza Shah's introduction of a Western educational system and bureaucracy, a paid army, and Western clothes and manners. Reza Shah's installation of statues of himself in all major intersections, his decree that Iran should be called "Iran" in foreign correspondence rather than Persia, and his appropriation of the title "Great"--all these draw Hedayat's special attention.

And these reforms, as is well-known, were harshly criticized in Iran. The prologue's open letter, a portion of which was produced earlier, reflects this criticism.

Reza Shah's supposedly progressive modernization plans are in direct conflict with the interests of the conservative Iranian clergy. This conflict, however, is what keeps the cannon popular and makes the Western investments in Iran, especially those of the Master, profitable. The Western powers, therefore, stoke the conflict. The more resistance by the clergy, the more crippled a government and the freer a hand for them.

Once the scene is set, the actual "history" of the emergence of the pearl cannon--religious superstition fueled by political intrigue leading to backwardness and loss of national identity--is revealed. But this revelation is not overt. For instance, unless the

reader discerns parallels between the arrival of Captain Columb in the Americas and the arrival of Americans in post-World-War II Iran, the analogy is lost on her or him. Here Hedayat insinuates that the Americans feigned friendship with Iranians, showered them with trinkets such as movies, fashions, and canned foods and gradually secured their confidence. They went so far as to call Iran "The Bridge of Victory," As a result of this mutual understanding among "brothers," Hedayat says, Iranians accepted American aid, modeled their schools on the American educational system, and invited many archaeologists to study ancient Iranian sites.

It was not Iran's ancient past, however, that interested the Americans; it was Iran's Aztec gold--oil. And to exploit Iran for oil, Hedayat insinuates, the Americans were ready to use all available means, even the atomic bomb. When patriotic Iranians like Hedayat and Mosaddeq resisted this takeover, they were subjected to the kind and degree of threat and abuse to which the "redskins" in Costa Rica were subjected, To them Captain Columb said:

You are a wild and misguided people who know nothing about the vestiges of civilization. To sum up, you must pay us tribute for ever and ever... We shall appoint several experienced missionaries to you... You are a conquered people and as such will have to be our slaves and bondsmen.

This was the beginning of a takeover that went beyond Hedayat's time and lasted until the latter part of the 1970s.

A similar analogy is drawn between Dos Merdalinos' nostalgic look at old Spain and the Arab takeover of Sassanian Iran. Hedayat holds Islam, and Islamic sympathizers, responsible for Iran's plunge into Shi'ite fanaticism. He blames the Safavids the most.

Altogether the book offers three speeches worth mention. Each speech delves into one of Iran's clashes with foreign powers and describes the harm that arose from that clash. Each speech is a mine of information about Hedayat's contemporaries' understanding, attitude and reaction towards current and past socio-political events. For lack of space these speeches are not discussed here.

Often repeated in the book is this sentence: History repeats itself. Another running theme is that politicians are like chameleons. They take on the character of the environment most conducive to their interests. These themes Hedayat fuses into a formidable character called Albuquerque Dokht. As the daughter of Albuquerque III, she advocates Christianity; as the Queen of the Portuguese she advocates Lingaism, quickened by forays into Judaism; and as an individual destitute of throne and country, she advocates fundamentalist Islam. The accuracy with which Hedayat paints her character and the picture of a fundamentalist Islamic society is mind boggling. Characteristics like these allow Sebil Ali Shah, Albuquerque Dokht, and Azar Josanf ibn Bivar Olaq to take the center stage, while others like Captain Columb, Vasco da Gama, and Nazar Qoli lurk in the background.

These, however, are overt characters. The real characters of *The Pearl Cannon*, i.e., those whom we can infer from the assertions of these characters and the assertions of the

author, people the story's implication. Two such real characters are implied: Reza Shah and his son Mohammad Reza.

As is his normal approach, Hedayat pits the "progressive" plans of these two characters against the superstitious beliefs propagated by the clergy and symbolized by the imported pearl cannon. The Shahs lose and, in both cases, the Iranians lose as well. Reza Shah rises against the clergy (bans the pearl cannon) and loses. His son allows the clergy a considerable degree of freedom (he brings the pearl cannon back) and still loses.